We Teach Too: What are the Lived Experiences and Pedagogical Practices of Gay Men of Color Teachers

Cleveland Hayes[1]

1) University of La Verne, United States

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University of La Verne, United States

Abstract

This paper speaks to the lived experiences of gay male teachers working in K-12 settings of color as I as an individual researcher and as we as allies to begin to address the pervasive and loud silences of our attenuated presence in education. This study addresses the experiences of gay (one Black male and two Latinos) teachers of color and will identify and analyze characteristics, how the intersections of race and sexuality impact the principles and themes within the teaching strengths of three gay teachers of color and examine how the successful teaching of gay teachers of color can be used to inform social justice-oriented matters.

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Nosotros Enseñamos también: Cuales son las Experiencias Vividas y Prácticas Pedagógicas de Profesores Hombres, Homosexuales y de Color

Cleveland Hayes

University of La Verne,United States

Resumen

Este artículo habla de las experiencias que han vivido los maestros varones gays de color que trabajan en el nivel K-12 desde mi perspectiva de investigador individual y desde una perspectiva colectva, con el objetivo de empezar a abordar los silencios penetrantes y fuertes de nuestra presencia en educación. Así este estudio aborda las experiencias de maestros gays de color (un hombre negro y dos latinos) e identificará y analizará las características, la intersección y el impacto de los principios y los valores de la sexualidad en la enseñanza de tres profesores homosexuales de color para poder examinar el éxito que esta enseñanza puede tener de cara a informar en asuntos orientados a la justicia social.

Palabras clave: teoría crítica de la raza, corelatos, maestros gay de color, enseñar y aprendizaje

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Over the past decade, increased attention to the marginalization of queers of color across educational context in North America has forced urgent reevaluations of the legal, political, and pedagogical implications of exclusionary politics (Brockenbrough, 2012, 2013; McCready, 2013). The research done by Brockenbrough (2013) cites the absences of queer of color perspectives in the educational literature and more specifically for this research their perspectives on teaching and learning. An experience that requires the participants to cross-epistemological boundaries and examine their experiences within the intersections of race and gender and in some instances class; which will become evident in the narratives of Malcolm, Carlos and Victor. Following the work of Brockenbrough (2013), McCready (2013) and others this article centers the pedagogical practices of three gay men of color. It is my intent with this line of research to bring to the forefront the lived and pedagogical experiences of gay teachers of color.

We teach too! This research brings together gay teachers of color in education and aligns with the work of Valdez and Elsbree (2005) in which they use the term "queer border crossings." This paper speaks to the lived experiences of three gay male teachers of color who work or worked in K-12 education and begin to address the pervasive and loud silences of their (gay male teachers of color) attenuated presence in education (DeJean, 2010; Valdez & Elsbree, 2005). Similar to Anzaldua (1987), Valdez and Elsbree (2005), and Tate (1997) crossing borders and epistemological boundaries is accomplished by connecting with individuals within different cultural contexts to develop allies and break their silences.

Already largely absent from the existing body of research is that of the lived experiences and teaching practices of Black men and Latinos, but what is even largely absent are the lived experiences and teaching practices of gay teachers of color (Black men and Latinos in particular). Drawing from the teaching strengths of gay teachers of color, and drawing on Crenshaw's (1995) research on intersectionality, this study will identify and analyze the lived experiences of three gay teachers of color and how the intersections of race and sexuality impact the principles and themes within their teaching strengths and lived struggles (Brockenbrough, 2012; King, 2005; Knaus, 2007). The narratives of Malcolm, Carlos and Victor begin to

answer the unanswered questions about the participation of Black and Latino queer/gay teachers.

Theoretical Framework

As theoretical framework in the field of law, Critical Race Theory, LatCrit and QueerCrit theories have some basic assumptions. Briefly, LatCrit and QueerCrit like other CRT related frameworks emerged partially as a result of what some scholars felt was a CRT White/Black binary that did not allow for the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, language and immigration. LatCrit and QueerCrit, how I use it and understand these two frameworks, is usually viewed as compatible, supplementary and complementary to CRT and not as something to replace CRT. Therefore, I follow other CRT, LatCrit, and QueerCrit scholars and utilize all three to form the theoretical framework.

Like Knaus (2009), I apply Critical Race Theory for the purpose of developing the voices and narratives that challenge racism and the structures of oppression. Tate (1997) asks the question, "Pivotal in understanding CRT as a methodology, what role should experiential knowledge of race, class and gender play in educational discourse?" (p. 235). Ladson-Billings (1998) states that CRT focuses on the role of "voice in bringing additional power and experiential knowledge that people of color speak regarding the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism" (p. 13).

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) define CRT as "an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation and are important for educators to understand that CRT is different from any other theoretical framework because it centers race" (p. 471–472).

CRT scholars have developed the following tenets to guide CRT research; all of these tenets are utilized within the design and analysis of this study (Kohli, 2009):

1. *Centrality of race and racism*. All CRT research within education must centralize race and racism, as well as acknowledge the intersection of race with other forms of subordination and because of the marginalization

of Black and Latino queerness, little is known about the predicaments of queer educators of color (Brockenbrough, 2012; Kohli, 2009; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2002).

During the interview almost in unison, all three of the guys talked about the racism in the schools, assumptions of Black and Brown Inferiority as well as the racism in the gay community. Through out the entire interview process Malcolm hated the use of gay and community in the same sentence.

> I feel that gay White men in particular could careless about what is going on in the Black community and within the gay Black man community in general. When some Black person makes a homophobic comment then all hell breaks loose but in my mind where are these same folk when someone makes a racist statement. The gay movement epitomizes Whiteness and the privileging of Whiteness.

Malcolm also shared," when I was teaching in a school district in a really conservative state, I was often mistaken for the custodian. It is the reason why I dress a certain way when I teach. I don't want to leave any doubt." Carlos and Victor share stories of combating racism within the gay community, they shared, "we have this group of people we know and they happen to be teachers, and they ask us all of these racism questions, like how many people have we slept with because aren't all Hispanics promiscuous? We are constantly dealing with these negative stereotypes about Latinos. We are always asked why aren't more Latinos like us. Malcolm stated, "many of these folk are anti anything that isn't White and definitely do not like their privilege challenged and because of this I don't support their agendas."

Victor shared this about his experiences with racism is the community in which he teaches. He shared,

> I think that when I did come out, it was nice to know that oh my god I'm valued for being at least a man and someone can finally be attracted to me. But then to learn that there was magnified racism in the gay community was hard for me to handle for a little while.
>
> I feel it at work; I feel it when I come to the University, when I moved into town. Its there and sometimes I think that racism can eat a person alive

when you don't know how to manage it. It's even tougher for those who are actually upwardly mobile. It's easy to avoid racism and stay in a community that is homogenous, that looks exactly like you, stays at the same level and you can forget all about the rest of the word. But I think it is magnified tenfold for the people who want to do something.

2. *Valuing experiential knowledge*. Solórzano & Yosso (2001) argue that CRT in educational research recognizes that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. Life stories tend to be accurate according to the perceived realities of subjects' lives. They are used to elicit structured stories and detailed lives of the individuals involved (Delgado, 1989; McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore, & Neal, 2002).

At the heart of CRT is an appreciation for storytelling. Following hooks (1992), the stories of these three men are important because they counter the institutionalized ignorance of Black and Latino history, culture, and their very existence. This article using CRT and Queer CRT presents a critical analysis of these men lived experiences not only as teachers of color but as gay teachers of color. How do their stories provide counter spaces to the White dominated queer spaces (Brockenbrough, 2012; Ross, 2005)? Lastly, these narratives also counter who is teaching and who can be a successful teacher (Hayes, Juarez, & Cross, 2012). They are not all White and female.

3. *Challenging dominant perspective*. CRT research works to challenge dominant narratives, often referred to as majoritarian stories. CRT scholar Harris (1995) describes the "valorization of Whiteness as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste" (p. 277). Harris also argues that Whiteness confers tangible and economically valuable benefits, and it is jealously guarded as a valued possession. This thematic strand of Whiteness as property in the United States is not confined to the nation's early history (Frankenberg, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

4. *Commitment to social justice*. Social justice must always be a motivation behind CRT research. Part of this social justice commitment must include a critique of liberalism, claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as a camouflage for the self-interest of powerful entities of society (Tate, 1997). Only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to

change the way things are done will do much to ameliorate misery (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tate, 1997).

5. *Being Interdisciplinary*. According to Tate (1997), CRT crosses epistemological boundaries. It borrows from several traditions, including liberalism, feminism, and Marxism to include a more complete analysis of "raced" people.

Ladson-Billings (1998) has already put forth the argument that CRT has a place within education. In this paper, I apply a CRT lens to help present the narratives of Malcolm, Carlos and Victor. The richness, utility, and the power of this framework is that the knowledge and experiences of the participants in this study are deemed valid and both worth listening to and learning from. I use CRT to recognize the experiential knowledge of these three queer educators of color and apply this knowledge as a means to unpack racial oppression both within schools and within the gay community (Brockenbrough, 2012; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Methods

In keeping with the tradition of the work by Ladson-Billings (1994), this article is not written in the dominant scholarly traditions in which I was trained. However, I marry those "scholarly" tools with my own cultural and personal experiences, as gay Black male educator and because of my work with the Black and Latino communities. Moving away from "traditional" methods allows me to use storytelling and personal narratives to help advance larger concerns (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Drawing on in-depth interviews and applying notions of culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) to guide understandings of successful teaching and the selection of participants, in this study I examine Victor and Carlos's narratives. Malcolm's counter-narrative is a composite story. Malcolm's counter-narrative is a composite story made up of characters and events based on actual individuals and situations cobbled together to represent a particular kind of experience common to and recognized by many scholars of color within higher education. In this article, I juxtapose his composite story with the narratives of Carlos and Victor.

Following the CRT tradition of storytelling, it is my hope that these narratives will begin to normalize the practices and experiences of gays of color not just in teaching but also in general. If we are to end the oppressive nature of American education, then as an education community we need to expand and open up spaces for gay teachers of color to share their experiences with oppression both in mainstream American as well as gay America.

This study is qualitative in design and draws on "a methodology based primarily on acquiring, analyzing, and interpreting narrative data" (Lynn & Jennings, 2009, p. 181). I conducted five in-depth, semiformal interviews with Carlos and Victor. Carlos and Victor are also part of a larger study that I am doing on successful Latino teachers.

All interviews conducted for this study lasted between 60 and 180 minutes and were audiotaped and then transcribed to comprise approximately 15 to 30 pages per interview. Victor and Carlos were provided with transcripts of their interviews to review for accuracy; this also provided an opportunity for further informal conversation and feedback.

The Teachers: Teaching While Gay Black and Brown

Malcolm

Malcolm's narrative looks at issues around identity, resistance, and what it meant to grow up as a Black man in Mississippi. For him the gay piece is an-add on and is not a very important part of his identity. He could not stress that enough. Malcolm who is much older than Victor and Carlos was not out when he taught K-12 education because of where he was teaching. His narrative will share some of the challenges of being a Black man minus the gay identity. He shares:

The internalization of Whiteness framed my philosophy when I first started to teach. I first started teaching in Mississippi right after I graduated from Mississippi State. Because of this Whiteness internalization, I felt that in order for students of color to be successful, they are going to have to learn how to play the game, which meant in my mind basically not acting Black (Fordham, 1988, 1996; Foster 1995, 1997). I was looking at the

students in a deficit mode, that the reason why the students of color in my classes were not successful was their fault: assumptions of inferiority based on class and race (O'Connor, 2006). When I moved to Utah and started teaching in Salt Lake City, I still went into my classroom with the deficit mindset toward students. I still believe that students have to be the best that they can be, and that the reason why they may or may not be is not necessarily something they are doing or not doing. I still believe that too many students of color are becoming victims of a school system that really does not believe that students of color, especially those who live on the wrong side of the street, can learn at a level comparable to that of White students: assumptions of Black and Brown inferiority (Hayes, 2006; Hayes, Juarez, & Cross, 2011; O'Connor, 2006). In addition, I had to include poor Whites in my quest for change through education. In Salt Lake City, there is clearly a division along class lines. Students who live on the east side of Salt Lake are faring much better academically than their counterparts on the west side of Salt Lake. This division required me to cross-epistemological boundaries to look at class and race. My philosophy is still grounded in the belief that students of color's, regardless of classes, chances of success are still less than a White student from a lower socio-economic class.

My approach changed after I enrolled in the master's program at the University of Utah. It was the professors in the department who provided me with a framework where I began criticizing the system and how it was problematic for me to be critical of the students. If I am going to truly be an advocate for students, students of color in particular, I am going to have to critique liberalism and recognize the experiences that my students bring to classroom. It was through this framework where my pedagogy changed. I began teaching students how to fight within the system (transformative resistance) and be critical of their oppression, even if it is hidden behind equality and universality. Recognizing the difficulty in the task, my belief is grounding firmly in "if a person does not stand for something then the person will fall for anything."

My demand for excellence comes from my father. In a lot of ways, the experiential knowledge he brought to the classroom can be seen in mine. This is what Daddy had to say about what he expects in his classroom,

> I just explain that, for example, when the second bell rings if your butt has not come in contact with the seat, you're tardy. I don't care if you were standing up talking about the Bible or the Koran. I don't care what you're

> talking about, or who you're talking about, if you're not seated, you're tardy. And that's it. And I punish. So I don't have any problems.

I have always liked his no-nonsense approach to teaching. I believe there are some things that are cut and dry. This is my biggest frustration with the system. I think the system is giving students too many excuses as to why they cannot succeed and all the reasons and tools to fail rather than taking what was good from the past and using it as a frame to build the future.

Carlos

At the onset of the interview Carlos talked about his coming out process, which was completely different from Malcolm who wanted to focus more on his teaching and how he working against assumptions of Black and Brown inferiority, as an example, the school the prison pipeline and its impact on Black and Brown kids in school. While these things were important to both Carlos and Victor, they seem to embrace their gay identities more at the forefront that Malcolm. In this next section Carlos and Victor both share their narratives. I place their narratives together to signify their union as a couple. They have been together 13 years and they do everything together. They came to the interview together which I thought was powerful because again it breaks those assumptions about who is and who is not in relationships within the gay community. This does deviate from the way I presented Malcolm's narrative but the power of the narrative is still present. Carlos shares,

> I do believe that teaching is for me and teaching is very important. I take a lot of pride in teaching. I believe that I'm a professional and in my classroom I provide that. In the area of learning, I believe that all students can learn. For me, it's a passion. I teach a literature class and I can't believe I get paid to do this. I really enjoy that and my kids tell me, "Mr. Reynoso, I can see you really like this subject. And they tell me, 'we didn't like it, but we know you like this subject, so we decided to give it a shot."
> Teaching for me is about developing a relationship. Understanding where the kids come from. And even if I didn't have a story like theirs, I listen to it. We all struggle one way or another. Relate to them. That's just the way I see it. It has happened several times. Many teachers send me their kids,

because they can't control them in their classroom. They ask, "Can you please talk to this kid?" "Sure. No problem." But once I talk to them, I want to go into your classroom to see if we can talk about this kid, how is it going, and they do. It comes down to our relationship. I believe personally as a teacher that the relationships can develop with the kids I can reach most of them. I try to make them feel like they can become something. The something that an API score or a CST score does not measure. Yes, it's impossible to make sure that every single kid does well in class. You don't give up and when they are not doing my work, well it's not okay for them not to do it.

So, my philosophy of education is to reach all of the students through relationships. It's so interesting, once they know that you care about them, they go the extra mile for you: by keeping your classroom clean, by making sure that if you forget to put your objective on the board then you know the principal comes in and they point at it. And you're like, "oh damn. They are looking out for me, from doing well on a test all the way from the smallest thing to the highest. People think that developing a relationship means, "Oh tell me how is your family?" It doesn't necessarily have to be that. When I come to work and you see a kid that comes different -- their hairdo or something. Just say, "Oh your hairdo looks real nice." That takes you miles with that kid. Or, "that shirt looks really good on you." "Oh you look really good today." You know, little things like that they create a big impact. So, my philosophy of education is that I reach every single one of them in one way or another. I do believe that each student, in different forms, they have the potential to do well in different ways. Some of them are very artistic; you just have to find ways where you mold your lesson in order for them to appreciate your lesson. They can go to that artistic, to that kinesthetic, to that critical thinker.

Victor

For me at my school right now I have one on one conversations with young Latino students and I encourage them and tell them this is our community, you're doing a great job right now, stand up, follow what I have done, I can be your example. Look at what I did resent ... there is something about them that drives them to me instantly. I do feel that advocacy is a big part

of who I am, because that's where all of my work has been about from working with migrant farmer families to interventionist specialist.

I think the school to prison pipeline...the charter school thing is another way of feeding more kids through that pipeline, because the charter schools now are; pulling in the best and the brightest, and the others get left at these schools where there's less support, less structure. That's the only path left they have to go. That's how I feel about the school to prison pipeline.

The day I went to observe Victor teach I got to see first hand how he interacts with students rather than sending them to the office. I describe this experience because it shows his willingness to work with a young student who happens to be Latino rather than sending him to the office and the school to prison pipeline is started. Carlos describes the instance with the young Latino Brother.

I went out there and I first asked him, so I noticed today is different. I asked is there anything that you noticed that is different. He said, no. I say... (And usually I had this conversation more with him today and that's where I got to the real meat of things because I knew that he was charged off but maybe being embarrassed and being called out). So you understand that I have to follow through with my consequences, right? He said, yeah I get it.

When he came back today he asked my permission do I go back. So I said no wait outside for me again. So, as I went out there I said lets pick up where I left off yesterday. So what were you feeling when I asked you to wait outside. He said, I was feeling a little mad and I was feeling disappointed that you sent me outside, but I was having a really bad day. My mom was yelling at me in the morning and I didn't have lot to eat. And he said I was just having a bad day after that after school, the whole entire day. And that's when I said I know, I have you in my class everyday. I know what your behavior and attitude is like. So I sensed it. So I said what could we do when you feel that way...when you feel your day is off. He said well maybe I can ask to take a break outside or maybe I can tell you more about it. I said because you know that I'm here to support you. I like having you in class and I want you to succeed. And I always throw in there if it's a Latino student I say, you know we have to work together on this because were a community. I tell them this. I say I want to help you and they always smile because they know when I say in that genuine way and I

make it short and brief; I don't lecture them too long. They always come back to talk or whatever or get advice.

I tell the students is that even if there is no push at home; I tell them that they have to work hard regardless because I am asking them to work hard. Because I tell them that once they're in my classroom, I have a certain expectation and that expectation is very high. I have to fulfill it regardless of what they feel their ability is. And there are students that I know that don't have the ability to let's say get straight A's in every subject; but I don't try to create a double standard for every student. So, I aim high and I push them towards that end and I'm satisfied as long as I see the effort towards that goal. And I think a lot of students for the most part, they know that I care and because they see that I care and I'm on them constantly they end up realizing that even if their parents don't care they know when they come to school that I'm still going to push them and in the end they have to push themselves.

Carlos and Victor value what students bring to the classroom in terms of their cultural backgrounds and experiences. The teaching philosophy of "expand, expand, expand" presumes that what students begin with is of positive value and has worth in the classroom—he has to help students expand from something of value, and students bring with them into the classroom that something of value to be expanded. Accordingly, like they do not draw on assumptions of cultural or moral inferiority in their teaching. Just like the long tradition of Black educators, for example, (DuBois, 1924, 1935, 1973; Hilliard, 1997; Horsford, 2009), they accept where their students are when they enter their classrooms, even if it is the narrowest of attitudes, and helps them to build from that point toward their goals. They sees their role as one of helping students resist that dominant, business-as-usual expectation in public schools that they be pushed out of classrooms.

Pointedly, they know they have to help their students to expand toward fulfillment of their dreams and goals. They use teaching as a way to help their students to take the appropriate steps between articulating a life dream and making that life dream a reality. Positive relationships between them and their students are a priority (Delpit, 1986, 1988, 1995, 2006; Horsford, 2009).

Carlos and Victor are teaching much more than the delivery of academic facts in a content area. Recognizing and affirming the challenges that their students, particularly Black males and Latinos students face in classrooms, they attempt to break the cycle of Black and Brown youth being funneled out of school and into the streets and into prisons by talking with them and helping them to develop strategies for the disrespect he recognizes as legitimate in the lives of these young students. As Hayes, Juarez and Cross (2012) put it, they are not, Carlos and Victor, interested in not only academic content and test scores but also in "the souls of kids."

Discussion: What Can We Learn from Malcolm, Victor and Carlos

For the purposes of this paper, I draw upon the works of Paulo Freire (1973), Gloria Ladson Billings (1994), Lisa Delpit (1996), Audre Lorde (1984) and others to develop my working definition of transformative pedagogy. Transformative pedagogy refers to an approach or philosophy of teaching accompanied by practices that enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to navigate within, provide socio-political critique of, and foster democratic change within conditions of historical White supremacy. I follow Leonardo (2005) in defining White supremacy as "a racialized social system that upholds, reifies, and reinforces the superiority of Whites" (p. 127).

As I define it, transformative pedagogy has three major components. First, there is equity. Equity is equal access to the most challenging and nourishing educational experience. We can learn from these three guys that, equity is more than equal representation or physical presence within an educational program for example. Educational equity refers to full participation as a recognized member of a community. The students at these three respective schools had educational inequities; however, we can learn that those inequities did not stop them from providing a rigorous educational experience, one that was not necessarily banking in nature, to their students (Delgado Bernal & Solorzano, 2001; Hayes, 2006; Hayes, Juarez & Cross, 2012).

Second, there is activism. Activism is a part of transformative pedagogy because it entails preparing students to actively reinsert themselves into public spaces and dialogues to help them gain access to the valued

resources and opportunities they have been either excluded from or denied. This activism demands that students have an understanding of the inequities in society and the "how to," in terms of beginning to fix those inequities if necessary.

Lastly, transformative pedagogy as I define it is about social literacy. Social literacy is preparing students to acquire the discourse or language necessary to resist the fattening effects of materialism, consumerism, and the power of the abiding evils of White supremacy-nourishing an awareness of one's identity (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; hooks, 1995; Quijada Cercer et. al, 2010).

If we are to bridge the Black-White performance disparities in education that plague our public schools, we must find a different way, a new path, an alternative journey (Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2008). Theorizing our lessons and the experiences we draw from allows us to begin imagining and creating a different path and approach to education not grounded in assumptions of Black inferiority and White superiority. The lessons from these three men thus provide the understandings that policymakers need to make sense of why traditionally dominant ways of teaching those students on the margins continue to fail (Knaus, 2009; O'Connor, 2006; Ware, 2006).

There is no magical potion or recipe that pre-service teachers can take or use that will tell them how to change failing schools. I use the term "warm demanders" to describe the three of them. What we can learn from these three teachers through their pedagogy is a no-nonsense approach to education for those who are expected to fail in school.

Unfortunately, high expectations, no-nonsensical approaches, and culturally familiar communication patterns to education have largely been replaced with "at-risk," "low performing," and "poverty" and other deficit-oriented adjectives used to describe African American learners. Teacher education programs likewise turn to scripted programs, for example, Ruby Payne framed in the apparently multicultural discourse of "if we could all just get along approach" presented as solutions to the tenacious gap in achievement and school performance evidenced between white students and students of color (Bonner, 2010).

 If there is one take-away from this section, according to Ware (2006), culturally and politically responsive teachers teach with authority, a form of

teaching that includes teaching to the whole child as a member of a particular social group situated within a particular context and history. However, being a warm demander is more than coming into the classroom and demanding a checklist of certain behaviors from students. Effective teaching of African American students is not about implementing a particular step-by-step remedy plan. Black and Latino kids, for example, see White teachers arrive in their communities, stand up before them attempting to teach them a curriculum that is already pre-determined and defined in terms of what they need to know. Consequently, the students can in turn answer questions on a standardized test that are likely to have little to no bearing on their actual lived experiences and realities. The teachers, in turn, do not have any connection to their students and neither does the curriculum they are attempting to teach (Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2008).

Teachers cannot be warm demanders by doing drive-by teaching. Teachers must be invested in, deeply familiar with, and able to find and draw on the richness and beauty of the communities they teach in. Teachers must not go into communities with the mentality to save the students from themselves, their parents, their culture, or their history and thus miss the resiliency, richness, and beauty of the ways groups and individuals have learned to cope and thrive within a historical context of near constant race-based hostility and forms of micro-aggressions, sabotage, and assault perpetrated by dominant society.

Conclusion

Black and Latino Gay educators of color have been successfully educating students and leaders for generations now! In today's educational parlance, we are always talking about these "hard to teach" kids as if it is so very impossible. The education community needs to look to the source of information—those who have accomplished this apparently impossible feat, for wisdom and knowledge about how we too might do this thing that previously seemed an impossible task and when I spend time with these three men, I clearly see their dedication to improving the lived experiences of their students. Malcolm states, " while many gay folk are on this marriage band-wagon, there are Black and Brown kids headed to prison, the

school to prison pipeline, teachers coming into schools not prepared to educate "my kids," the gay agenda is not my agenda."

Lastly, I suggest that there is much more to be learned from the lived experiences and teaching practices of these three gay men of color and the intersections they navigate as they are committed to social justice both in the classrooms they teach in as well as their "gay" lives. Malcolm shared "I am glad that DOMA was repealed but I can not help by mourn the ruling on the Civil Rights Act, Affirmative Action, and Policies on Immigration that impact my community. I can get married by I can't vote or the undocumented student in my class cannot go to college."

The three participants discussed in detail that racism is an endemic part of American society and that they have to contend and combat assumptions of Black and Brown inferiority not only in their teaching but also within the gay community. A recurring conversation that emerged was the absences of men of color in the teaching profession in general and gay men of color in particular as well in the larger gay community (Dejean, 2010; Gillborn, 2005).

All three participants shared their frustrations with the assumptions that we live in a meritocracy. Malcolm, Carlos and Victor share how they try to get their students of color to understand that working hard is not enough and Malcolm stated that he is in constant battle with colleagues who say that it is. For example, students of color on a continuous basis are systematically excluded from education and the opportunities it provides. Merit operates under the burden of racism, which limits its applicability to people of color (Bergerson, 2003).

The three men in the study, all described the importance of drawing on their experiential knowledge and that of their students. They shared that it was important for others in both the teaching profession and the gay community to recognize their knowledge is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to them as they navigate in a society grounded in racial subordination and sexual subordination.

It is my hope that this research will assist educators, policy makers, and vested others in comprehending the social justice-oriented teaching approaches that these three teachers have historically employed to foster the academic success of all students and to offer a vision of a more socially just society and oh they happen to be gay. Until we, as an education community

begin viewing the world through a lens that is grounded in anti-racist struggle, this includes the anti-racist struggle in the gay community and does not affirm assumptions of Black inferiority and White superiority, to include the gay community, not only will we continue to fail in our public schools and the dream of an equal education for all students will remain yet elusive (Blanchett, 2006; Cross, 2003; Delpit, 2006; Horsford, 2009).

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Cleveland Hayes is an Associate Professor in the College of Education and Organizational Leadership at University of La Verne.

Contact Address: Direct correspondence to Cleveland Hayes, College of Education and Organizational Leadership, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street La Verne, 91750, Canada, email: chayes@laverne.edu