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Understanding Induction and K-12 Black Women Educators

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Abstract

In this case study, a sample of six Black women educators (BWEs) in Connecticut's K-12 public urban schools were surveyed using semi-structured interviews, demographic surveys and Clance's Impostor Phenomenon Scales to illuminate their lived experiences. Using a seven step data analysis model six major themes were elicited from the participants. One significant finding is that diamonds are born under extreme pressure, despite the unique challenges BWEs in this sample have endured that have triggered their career movement; all of the BWEs in this sample have demonstrated how they have persisted past adversity to remain the field.

Key words: Black woman educator, teacher induction, impostor phenomenon, critical race theory, and Black feminist theory

Understanding induction experiences and K-12 Black women educators

Introduction

“As a powerful institution of social reproduction, schools are locations in which racial inequalities and anti-Black racism play out in ways that contribute to the larger racial disparities that many Black communities experience” (Nash & Allen, 2021). In 2019, 53 percent of students enrolled nationally were students of color, and 19 percent of students enrolled nationally were noted to live in poverty (Irwin et al., 2021). This Intersectionality of race, gender, socio economic status and education has presented a call to action for educators in the nation whom have found themselves “teaching at the crossroads of resistance and responsiveness” to evolve their pedagogy and expand their critical consciousness to the address the evolving needs of our students (Nash & Allen, 2021). Black women educators (BWE) make up less than 7 percent of the national educator workforce and less than 4.1percent of the Connecticut educator workforce (CSDE, 2021; Irwin et al., 2021).

Research Problem

According to Farinde-Wu and Griffen (2019), “Black female educators played a vital role in segregated schools prior to the 1954 landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Despite their notable and historic presence in the field of public education, presently they are disproportionately underrepresented in the U.S. teacher workforce” (p. 247). While it appears that the battle in the Supreme Court reduced social injustices in the classroom, the residual affect is that the case has also compounded social injustices through the reduction of over 38,000 educators and leaders of color from the workforce (Goldman et al., 2004; Hunter & Donahoo, 2004; Lawrence, 2021; LaVan, 2018; Linehan, 2001; Memory et al.,

2003; Oakley et al., 2009). This mass reduction in force of educators and leaders of color was the beginning of the void of educators and leaders of color that remains unfilled (Lawrence, 2021).

Table 1 illustrates the stratification of race as it relates to educators and learners using national data.

Table 1

National Percentage of Students and Teachers, by Race-Ethnicity (2011–2012)

	Non-Minority Total	Minority Total	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Multiple Races
Students	55.9	44.1	14.4	21.2	5.1	1.2	2.3
Teachers	82.7	17.3	6.4	7.5	1.9	0.4	1

Note. This table illustrates the national prevalence rates of student and teacher populations. Adapted from “Recruitment, Employment, Retention and the Minority Teacher Shortage,” by R. Ingersoll, H. May, and G. Collins, 2019, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27(37) <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3714>.

In a recent report the distribution of public elementary and secondary school students enrolled nationally highlighted that the racial stratification to include: 47% White; 15% Black; 27% Hispanic; 5% Asian; 1% Pacific Islander; 1% Alaskan Native/American Indian; 4% of students that identified as having two or more races (Irwin et al, 2021). Over the past decade the gradual shift away from a majority white student population nationally is unparalleled to the diminutive shifts in the teaching workforce (Ingersoll et al., 2019; Irwin et al, 2021).

In Connecticut, classrooms are becoming more ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse; however, the opportunity gap between white students and students of color persists, and talent development practices such as the Connecticut Teacher Educator And Mentoring program remain stagnant (de Brey et al., 2019; Gais et al., 2019; Hanita et al., 2020; Lawrence, 2021).

The lack of educator workforce diversity in Connecticut is an unintentional barrier in achieving

educational diversity, equity, and inclusion (Lawrence, 2021). Table 2 illustrates the stratification of race as it relates to educators and learners in Connecticut prior to the pandemic.

Table 2

Connecticut Percentage of Students and Teachers, by Race-Ethnicity (2019–2020)

	Non-Minority Total	Minority Total	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Multiple Races
Students	51.11	48.89	12.71	26.90	5.18	0.25	3.75
Teachers	82.7	9.6	4.0	4.1	1.2	0.1	0.1

Note. This illustrates the Connecticut prevalence rates based on race in student and teacher population. Adapted from *Educator Race/Ethnicity Trend Report – State of Connecticut*, CSDE, 2020a, <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do> and *Public School Enrollment Report – State of Connecticut*, CSDE, 2020b, <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

Research Goals

Purpose of the study

In this study, BWEs in Connecticut’s public urban schools were surveyed to illuminate their lived experiences. The goal was to understand their perceived pushes and pulls in the industry, either to leave it or persist in k-12 education settings. The research questions explored: how do BWEs describe their teacher induction process in Connecticut; how do BWEs describe their teacher identities; and how, if at all, do BWEs describe the presence of the impostor phenomenon in their teacher induction process? Prior to this study, there was an absence of literature that explored the individual induction experiences of Pre-K–12 Black women educators in Connecticut (Lawrence, 2021). The author coined the term individual induction experiences to understand individual induction program perspectives as opposed to a programmatic evaluation.

Target Audience

School building administrators, talent officers, and policy makers of k-12 education settings will find this study and its implications useful. Principals and supervisors will gain

insight as to how their roles directly influence teacher retention. Talent officers will have insight as to which induction activities (e.g., formal induction programs and mentorship centered on educators of color) support or hinder the success of educators of colors. Policy makers will gain the necessary insight to revise existing policies that relate to teacher induction, tenure, and professional learning.

Conceptual Framework

Additionally, a new conceptual framework was engineered and entitled *mosaic of thought*, which triangulated three theories and five concepts to understand the complexities of the lived experiences of BWEs (Lawrence, 2021). Within the literature reviewed, the researcher was unable to locate an existing conceptual framework that fit the study. Within the literature, the researcher noticed that studies have explored the experiences of BWEs in terms of building community through sisterhood and mothering, and explored impostorship as it occurs with White women; and few studies have explored impostorship among BWEs in higher education (Acosta, 2019; Baylor, 2014). There was a clear gap in the literature that included all of the critical concepts of interest within Black feminist theory, Critical Race Theory, and Impostor Phenomenon (IP) (Clance & Imes, 1978). Therefore, the researcher engineered a new conceptual framework, mosaic of thought, which explored just that. As detailed in Figure 1, key components of the three theories coalesce to form mosaic of thought, the conceptual framework in this case study.

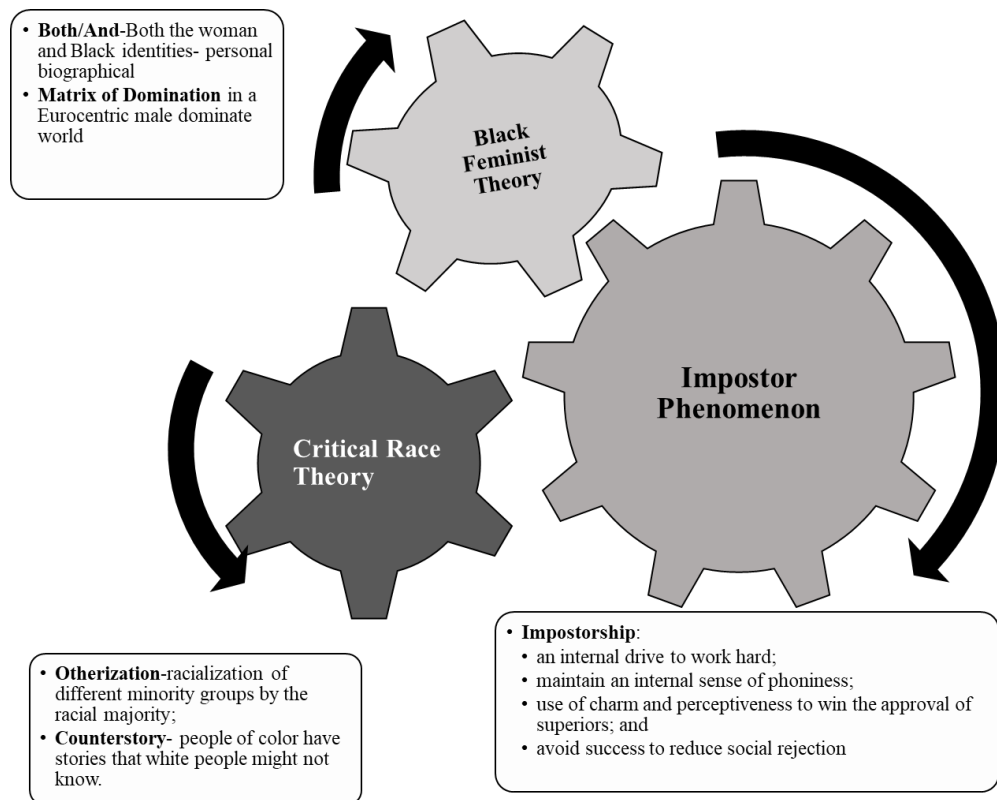
Figure 1*Conceptual Framework: Mosaic of Thought*

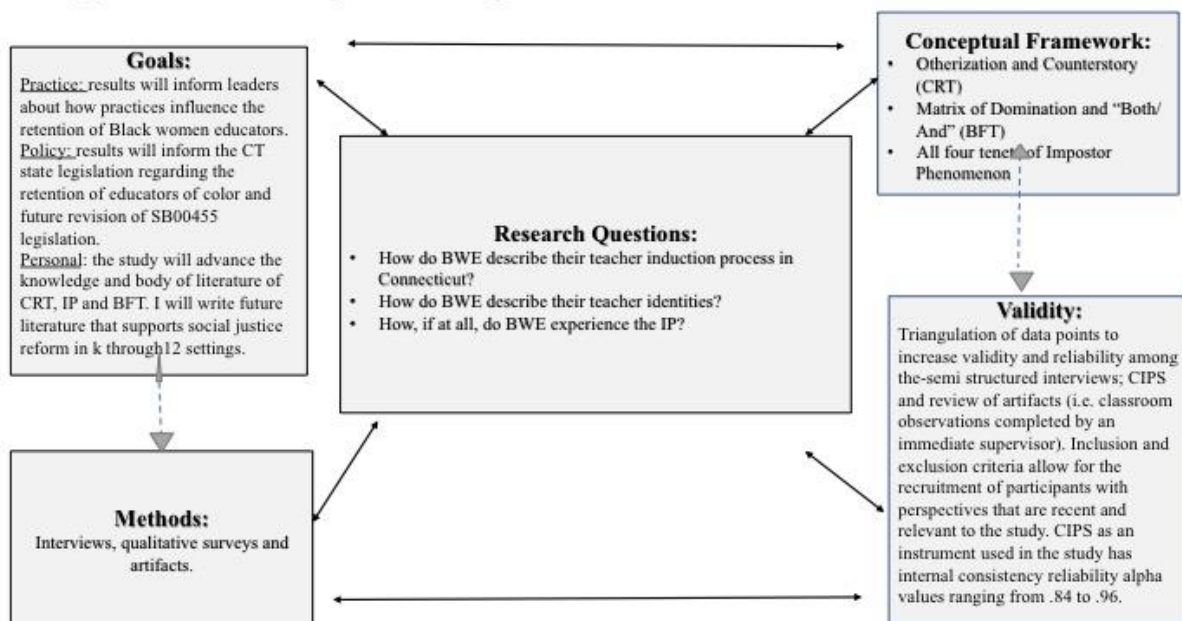
Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study using the orientation of BWEs' identities through counter-storytelling of their teaching experiences within the Eurocentric, male-dominated industry of education. Tenets four and six of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), otherization and counterstory, helped the researcher to understand the oppressive educational contexts that BWEs have experienced. Critical BFT concepts applied to this study are the matrix of domination as well as the concept of "both/and" (Collins, 1996). All four aspects of impostor phenomenon (Clance, 1985) were included in order to explore their relevance to the experiences of BWEs. The network of concepts helped the researcher to understand the BWEs' experiences and deepen connections to what is already known about the experiences of BWEs.

Method

Research Design Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore individual induction experiences of Black women educators in Connecticut urban public schools. This study sought an opportunity to understand the racialized experiences of BWEs in Connecticut urban public schools. Using a layered worldview that comprises of the constructivist and transformative schools of thought, the research conducted a study to learn more about the individual induction experiences of BWEs. In this case study, a sample of six Black women educators in Connecticut's public urban schools were surveyed using semi-structured interviews, demographic surveys and Clance's Impostor Phenomenon Scales to illuminate their individual lived experiences. Figure 2 further illustrates the interactive study design.

Figure 2 *Study Design*



Note. Adapted from Maxwell, J. A. (2005). A model for qualitative research design. *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*, 214–253.

Study Participants

In the State of Connecticut, there are 52,135.8 certified educators currently employed in educational settings, of which White educators account for 90%, and educators of color account for 10% (CSDE, 2021). Based on literature reviewed from Hanita et al 2020, this population of teachers in urban school settings was perceived to be transient in nature, making it more challenging to capture a large and random sample. The researcher used a purposive sample, based on the non-probability sampling criteria, the participants were gatekeepers to potential participants using a snowball sampling method.

Participant Recruitment

Subjects were located using public directories on school district websites. Subjects were invited to a recruitment zoom meeting where they learned more about the study. Once subjects were included in the study, they sent an email referral to other BWEs that potentially could expand the sample and perspective. The recruitment cycle ended once the participants reached a maximum of ten potential subjects during the data collection window.

The final snowball sample yielded six BWEs as participants, which was in full compliance of the University of Bridgeport's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. During the recruitment process four subjects were removed from the sample one the following reasons either they did not meet the inclusion criteria, or they were removed due to unforeseen circumstances in which they were referred to community resources for support.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval was acquired and participants provided consent to participate the collection window lasted for three and one half weeks. This allowed the researcher to interact

with participants using secured emails, vide/audio recorded conferences and online surveys.

Based on the spring break schedules educators were more readily available than expected.

During the study the researcher used semi-structured interviews, CIPS, demographic surveys and artifacts to engage participants to speak their truths through counter-storytelling.

A demographic survey was used to confirm whether the full sample met the goals of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The CIPS is a 20-item instrument to measure the presence of the Impostor Phenomenon, with a promising internal consistency the alpha values range of .84 to .96 (Chrisman et al., 1995). Permission was received from Clance to use the scales for electronic transmission via Google forms to a small and finite group of participants included in the study. Using the semi-structured interviews as an additional data point coincides to high expectations for data collection, as the results from the semi-structured interviews were triangulated with the responses from the CIPS. The semi-structured qualitative interviews included open-ended questions as adapted from Robinson's (2018) study that explored the presence of the Impostor Phenomenon among Black women community college faculty. In terms of artifacts, participants discussed formal observations and referenced them during their semi-structured interviews.

Analysis

In this study, a seven-step data analysis process was used to yield descriptive and In Vivo codes. A hybrid model of qualitative data analytical approaches which incorporated Creswell & Creswell (2013) and Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to analyze data. Once the semi-structured interviews were recorded, a transcript was shared with each participant for member checking within 48 hours of the semi-structured interview. Once member checking was completed, the coding process was completed by the researcher. Descriptive codes were used for the CIPS and the demographic survey. In Vivo coding was used for the transcripts.

Findings

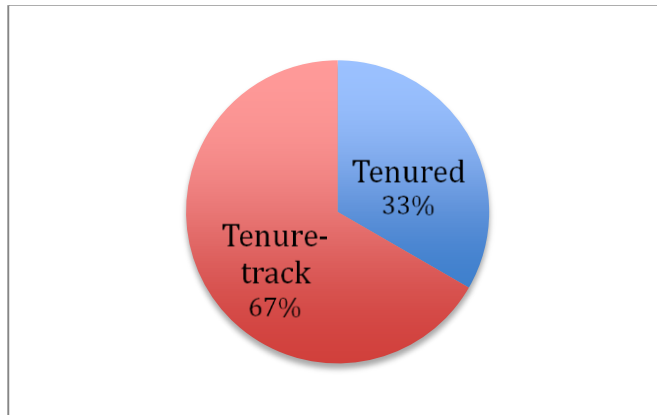
The seven step coding process yielded six themes. From the demographic survey we have highly qualified and resilience. From the CIPs we have greater and lesser IP influence. From the researcher memos and semi-structured interviews we have placeholder effect and black girl magicians at work. In this section the findings are organized by research question and will have supporting data as appropriate. The participants have been assigned pseudonyms and their statements will be associated with their assigned pseudonyms.

How do BWEs describe their teacher induction process in Connecticut?

Henry (2018) and Lawrence (2021) noted that racism in educational institutions could produce environmental manifestations. Lola Yolo stated, “I have definitely had a lack of sleep and stress just from feeling overwhelmed at work, too much to do, not enough time. Yes.” Aretha Benfrank “I had to hit the ground running, there was no induction process... there still isn’t one.” Both Maya Angel Love and Aretha Benfrank were told by their white peers that they were hired because they were Black. Furthermore, BWEs in this study affirmed that they perceived their work environments to be unwelcoming spaces, and their work expectations to be higher than their peers; this was often coupled with an overwhelming concern for being replaceable at any time, despite their value, worth, and expertise. The perception of otherization from participants is described as one of the major themes entitled as *the placeholder effect*. Tenure is the hallmark of successfully completing an induction program in the field of education; however, tenure has disproportionately eluded BWEs in Connecticut. Figure 3 notes the emergence of the 66:14 discovery a perceived manifestation of the placeholder effect among participants in the study.

Figure 3

Percentage of tenured and tenure track participants



Note. Pie chart from demographic questionnaire. It should be noted that a large portion of the sample population is untenured, despite the collective 66 years of experience in the group. Within the 66 years of experience, only 49 of those years are in Connecticut, which means that some BWEs have moved between states in their teaching careers. Without continuous employment at the same institution, educators are unable to complete the tenure-track. Though tenure is a hallmark of successfully completing the teacher induction process in a school district, it has not been achieved by the majority of BWEs in this study.

BWEs under the placeholder effect illuminated a daily fear of devaluation from peers or a supervisor as they worried about adverse outcomes such as office gossip, hypercritical feedback, and in some cases job loss. One example of the placeholder effect in this study was the counterstory, subversive testimony, from one participant, pseudonymously called Maya Angelove:

Though Maya Angelove made ripples of success at Emma Obama School, she had a real fear that she had checked the boxes for cleaning up the building so that her district leaders could hand her building and position over to another hypothetical candidate the supervisor may have had in mind. This sense of being a placeholder is affirmed in the literature, as Sprull (2016) recognized that despite the master's level expertise of BWEs,

they quite often had to work harder to prove they were intelligent and worthy of their positions (Lawrence, 2021, p. 197).

Despite adverse environmental conditions, researchers have concluded that BWEs maintain an internal appreciation for their own worth, value, and expertise and demonstrate pedagogy of excellence (Acosta, 2019; Lawrence, 2021).

How do BWEs describe their teacher identities?

Another finding on the placeholder effect is that five of the six BWEs experiences their identities being both “visible and hypervisible” (Lander and Santoro, 2017). Aretha BenFrank noted she could not dress as her peers or showcase her cultural identity at work as she stated “so I’m never in a place where I feel like I can just be me. Because that’s not the job though, right.” Lola Yolo recalled feeling on the outside of an inside conversation amongst two white women. Lola Yolo remembered a moment where her work supervisor had given her only performance evaluation feedback to an observer from her university, while they stood in the same room together. Nina Simmer stated, “I don’t feel as if I have any power at all. No one comes to me for any information, no one comes to me for any advice or . . . I’m just there in a way, which is tough.”

How, if at all, do BWEs describe the presence of the Impostor Phenomenon in their teacher induction process?

Four of six BWEs in this study described the influence of the impostor phenomenon (IP) in their teacher induction process, having their decisions frequently challenged by supervisors and peers and their work devalued; and having to cope with hidden rules and unclear expectations. Aretha BenFrank noted that she wanted to be invisible when she said, “I just tried to stay under the radar because I knew I wasn’t enough because this administrator told me I

wasn't enough. Their actions demonstrated I wasn't enough." Alice Woker recalled her perceptions of her peers as she noted "when I am challenging them to do something, instead of taking the suggestion or recommendation or an advice, they try to flip the switch to say that I am being aggressive, when I'm not."

All six findings from this study are the following:

- Finding 1 – Five of six BWEs in this study indicated that they experienced racism and discrimination in the workplace, and this can be both emotionally and physically draining to encounter, resulting in *racial battle fatigue*.
- Finding 2 – Five of the six BWEs in this study described being inadequately supported by their supervisors and peers.
- Finding 3 – Five of six BWEs in this study indicated their identities were both invisible and hyper-visible within the work environment.
- Finding 4 – All six BWEs in this study described themselves as valuable, worthy, experts in the field.
- Finding 5 – Four of six BWEs in this study described the influence of the impostor phenomenon (IP) in their teacher induction process, having their decisions frequently challenged by supervisors and peers and their work devalued; and having to cope with hidden rules and unclear expectations.
- Finding 6 – Five of six BWEs in this study described the strategies they used to mitigate the influence of IP in their teacher induction process.

The BWEs in this study affirmed their pedagogy of excellence as they "ignite the torch and light the path toward effectively meeting the needs of all students" despite the trials and tribulations they have endured (Acosta, 2019, p. 26).

Discussion

While the professional journeys and personal truths of BWEs are multi-dimensional, “their Intersectionality also informs the empathy with which they work to remedy the same challenges their students traverse” (Nash & Allen 2021, p. 58). The “kitchen table” is a metaphoric and political stance where marginalized groups such as women of color create spaces in which their thoughts, voices and actions are both visible and accepted (Navarro et al., 2013). A tradition of sisterhood grows at the “kitchen table,” and this radiated from the participants’ responses as they yearned for the connection to a fellow BWE in the absence of intentional and effective mentoring experiences provided by their leaders (Lawrence, 2021; Navarro et al., 2013).

Leaders can intentionally develop spaces that are ready and supportive of the growth and development of BWEs through the following recommendations:

- Make room for BWEs at the table through policy that encourages sustainable Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) engagement;
- Make spaces for BWEs that are supportive of intersectional and interracial dialogue; and
- Amplify the voices of diverse cultural perspectives.

School leaders tend to have the closest pulse to what occurs on a daily basis in our schools, however, leaders may not always be aware of the diverse cultural perspectives, challenges and racial biographies that exist in their learning organizations. “BWEs in this study have frequently reflected on the disparate treatment they have endured from their peers and supervisors as well as what they have witnessed students endure” (Lawrence, 2021, p. 196). To remedy this policy makers need to consider revising the language of what it means to be a highly

qualified educator using the lens of the BWE pedagogy of excellence (Acosta, 2019; Lawrence 2021). The term “highly qualified” educator needs to be redefined using qualities of an effective educator and not just their educational credit attainment or college transcripts. Next legislators are encouraged to revisit minority teacher recruitment that extends beyond checking the box for teacher diversity and instead supports the inclusion of educators of color through legislation that supports the retention of BWEs and other educators of color. The final policy recommendation is to support sustainable engagement in DEI work. “Local and regional boards of education must develop equity policies and establish equity coalitions... Policy makers could draw on the concept of the placeholder effect from this study in their efforts to dismantle systemic barriers” (Lawrence, 2021, p. 197). Which in short, means to move beyond external consultations that hire trainers to a school community to provide a couple sessions on race or racism concepts, yet instead provide a program autopsy on the contextually defined school day. Critically and consciously dissecting the interactive and interdependent roles of staff, educators and families in the learning organization.

The findings of this study support the urgency that school leaders need to provide balanced and routine feedback to support the retention, persistence, and the positive teacher identity development of BWEs (Lawrence, 2021). Leaders can accomplish this by intentionally developing spaces within their learning organizations that are prepared for intersectional and interracial dialogue. “Students and families need to feel accepted, respected, supported, and protected by the educators and leaders in their lives, just as much as Black women educators and leaders need the same reciprocal balance of acceptance, respect, support, and protection by their peers” (Lawrence, 2021, p. 198). Faculty and administrators need to respectfully lean into their

discomfort in talking about race in order to build learning communities that are respectful and supportive of educators and families of color.

As noted in this study, BWEs noted a frequent questioning of their intelligence, decisions and performance ability by not only their supervisors but their co-workers as well. Such environmental transactions were noted to cause BWEs to feel a desire to vacate their positions for better jobs and professions (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Some BWEs in this study described their discomfort as wanting to leave to take on more leadership responsibilities to help ameliorate their educational contexts. “As teachers aspire to and secure school and district leadership positions, they disproportionately face challenges because of their limited access to professional development and opportunities, in addition to those challenges due to their race and gender identities” (Nash & Allen, 2021, p. 58). Talent officers and school leaders can develop culturally responsive profession learning opportunities for BWEs through culture-specific mentoring models such as the Blossom model (Lawrence, 2021).

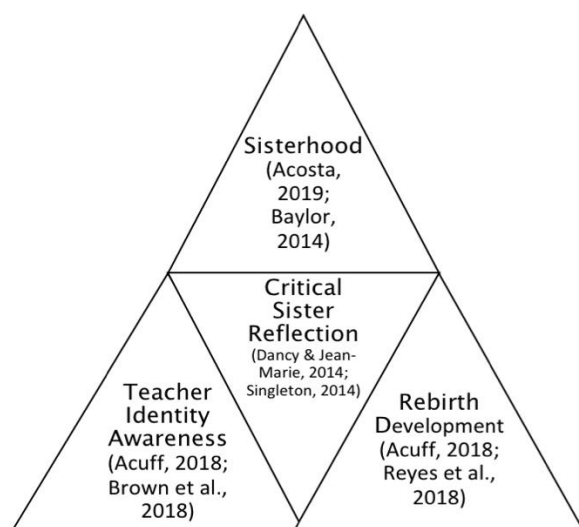
Baylor (2014) visited the concept of culture specific mentoring of BWEs using the Sankofa model in her study, which leveraged a kitchen table structure to further develop BWEs. Sprull (2016) defined the sense of sisterhood and motherhood that grows from the innate sense of “othermothering” in the Black community. Singleton (2014) encouraged critical self-reflection in as a radical act to expand critical consciousness across the different contexts. This study recommends Blossom model as a political act of resistance to promote the retention and persistence of BWEs:

Blossom model is a culturally responsive induction program, a multi-dimensional framework for BWEs that builds on the key concepts of culture-specific mentoring; however, it adds a component of a critical sister self-reflective journaling of the racialized

incidents that occur in their work lives. Within the Blossom model (Figure 6), the mentee selects their network of mentors using their cultural identity characteristics of choice, just as the BWEs in this study sought their own mentors using varied identity characteristics. This differs from traditional induction models in which a mentor is assigned to the mentee. Using the critical sister reflective journaling, BWEs will intentionally make room for self-care and racial identity development. (Lawrence, 2021, pp. 199-200)

Leaders can provide time and space for BWEs to engage in the radical self-care experience so they can raise their awareness of racialized experiences and the ways in which they have responded to challenges at work.

Sisterhood in Blossom Model leverages a metaphorical “kitchen table” experience as BWEs are encourage to seek and build relationships with their own mentor(s). Critical sister reflection creates the opportunity for BWEs to practice mindfulness of their actions, words, thoughts and the isolation of racial trauma they may have endured. A constant comparative effort to reflect on their journey through education as they go through it. Through intentional and culturally responsive professional learning opportunities such as teacher identity awareness, BWEs can respond to their Intersectionality and reflect on how it influences who they are and how they show up in the learning environment. Rebirth comes from the realization that racial identity development is not linear, therefor the identity development and evolution of the BWE as a person is a cyclical, reinvigorating and rejuvenating process. The Blossom model is a triangular prism offering choice in entry points for the multiple dimensions to access. Figure 3 illustrates the interconnected concepts of the Blossom model using a flattened two-dimensional design.

Figure 3*Blossom Model*

Note. This figure illustrates the interlocking concepts that BWEs are encouraged to interact with in this culturally responsive approach to teacher induction. Adapted from Lawrence (2021) *Mosaic of thought: A qualitative case study on the individual induction experiences of Black women educators in Connecticut urban public schools*

Based on the implications of the Blossom model to promote resilience and retention among BWEs, School leaders need to make space for the intersectional and interracial dialogues. This will hopefully occur in tandem with the policy recommendations that will support sustainable DEI engagement. Lastly, a final recommendation is for leaders and researchers to consider replication of this study using the Mosaic of Thought conceptual framework while including perspectives of educators who are White, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color within suburban and/or rural educational settings (Lawrence, 2021, p. 206). The findings could yield other perspectives and gaps in the teacher induction process.

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