

# Discomfort, Resistance, and Othering: A Poetic Inquiry into Urban Teacher Preparation Program Redesign

SHANEEKA FAVORS WELCH\*

*Georgia State University*

ADRIAN N. NEELY

*Georgia State University*

GLENDA MASON CHISHOLM

*Georgia State University*

STEPHANIE BEHM CROSS

*Georgia State University*

*This article explores the experiences of three Black female doctoral students and one White female professor as they engaged in a doctoral seminar course on the redesign of an undergraduate urban teacher preparation program at their university. Borne out of a promise to one another to write about our experiences navigating increasingly complex and politicized dynamics within the college, we explore how we, as current and future teacher educators, make sense of reform in teacher preparation. We drew from the literature on neoliberalism, whiteness as a wicked problem in teacher education, colonialism, and teacher educators' work in the "swamp" throughout our course, for our proposals, and this article. We utilized poetic inquiry methodology to explore the real, everyday implications of program redesign in our lives and our careers. Equally important is our use of critical race theory to examine and make sense of our experiences as we engaged in this work. We discuss differences across our program redesigns, our reflections on why those differences might exist, and a reflection on the process of engaging in this way in a doctoral program. Our findings revealed feelings of discomfort with and resistance to a teacher education program redesign that centers racialized contexts in the spirit of social justice. We concluded with implications for research, policy, and the practice of teacher education as we write to understand, write to resist, and write to survive.*

**Keywords:** Black women, Black girls, Black women undergraduates, predominantly white institutions (PWI), identity, critical race feminism, phenomenology

“Excellence must prepare a student for *self-knowledge* and to become a contributing problem-solving member of his or her own community and in the wider world as well.”

-Asa G. Hilliard

### Introduction

This paper outlines the experiences of three Black female doctoral students and one White female professor. We engaged in a special topics doctoral course focused on the redesign of the Middle-Level Teacher Preparation Program at an urban, minority-serving research university located in the southeastern United States. Our designation as a minority serving institution suggests that our education programs strive to provide students the "social and educational skills needed to overcome racial discrimination and limited economic opportunities" (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017). And yet, the Janus-faced dilemma is our teacher education program predominately prepares students of Color to teach racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students through a lens of whiteness that erases and makes invisible the experiences and perspectives of our teacher candidates. In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson (1933) states that Black educators are taught from biased books, receive education from Whites that contain the same prejudices or by other Blacks who have "enslaved minds" (p. 19); and that "one generation of Negro teachers after another have served for no higher purpose than to do what they are told to do" (p. 19). In short, the presence of whiteness in teacher education perpetuates deficit paradigms and facilitates uncritical habits of minds, complicating opportunities to overcome discrimination and oppression in public schools. Feelings of frustration, guilt, and obligation were the impetus for this collaborative course that (we hoped) would precipitate a change in the way the college prepared teacher candidates to teach students in urban settings. The three doctoral students observed a gap in the leadership of teacher educators. Specifically, the mission of the college of education is to develop transformational educators grounded in a social justice framework. However, the teacher educators that are engaged in the critical work have varying views on culturally relevant pedagogy and notions of social justice (Galman et al., 2010). While superficially covering topics such as deficit perspectives (Delpit, 2006), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), the program is void of an African, Diasporan, Indigenous worldview and historical consciousness that enables inclusive and responsive learning spaces in our teacher education classrooms *and* K12 school communities (Swartz, 2009). There is widespread agreement on the need to center the histories and epistemologies to construct learning in the classroom (González et al., 2006). Yet without a comprehensive teacher education program that draws on emancipatory pedagogies to resist dominant norms, our social justice mission is fractured. Through the lens of critical race theory and poetic inquiry, we explore the journey, discomfort, and resistance we encountered throughout the course and the program redesign process. We also share portions of our program redesigns as we re-imagined what urban teacher preparation programs could and should be.

In what follows, we explored the *mélange* of ideas that come together under the unifying

theme of equity and praxis that resists dominant societal structures. First, we present literature on teacher education programs and reform. Next, we critically reflect on what it means to take part in this process as a reminder that the work of teacher education is an arduous task, always complex, and never complete.

### **Relevant Literature**

Initial teacher preparation is top of mind for those within education: teacher educators, educational researchers, pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as community members. Most often, critics of teacher education and those pushing for reform movements are those on the outside, such as politicians, parents, and conservative advocacy groups (Zeichner et al., 2015). As Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power (2013) suggest, “amid many contentious debates about teacher education policy in the United States, a single consensus resounds among its critics: Teacher education is broken and needs to be fixed” (p. 7). Conversations on *urban* teacher education are even more contentious. Many in and outside the field of education use deficit language to describe students, families, teachers, and administrators associated with urban schools that are overwhelmingly populated with minoritized students and do not consider the broader sociopolitical context within which these schools operate or the sociohistorical backdrop.

### **Whiteness and Urban Teacher Education**

Many critical scholars agree that teacher preparation is insufficient in preparing teachers for work in urban schools and suggest that the overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher preparation is to blame (Matias, 2016). According to a recent National Center for Education Statistics (2015) report on the characteristics of postsecondary faculty, full-time faculty at degree-granting institutions racial composition comprised 78% White, 10% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% Black, 4% Hispanic, and less than 1% American Indian/Alaska Native and people of two or more races. Similarly, in 2012 the U.S. K-12 teaching workforce and prospective teachers enrolled in a teacher preparation program were 82% and 74% White, respectively (U.S. DOE, 2016). This data suggests an abundance of White teacher educators prepare an overwhelmingly White teacher candidate pool to work with a growing number of non-White students in public schools (Madkins, 2011). Additionally, the majority of White teacher candidates enrolled in social justice-oriented teacher education programs (TEPs) are not prepared to provide a culturally responsive education to diverse students (Sleeter, 2016).

Additionally, Matias and Zembylas (2014) argued that the overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher education is a form of institutional abuse manifested in feelings such as disgust for non-white individuals. Too often, TEPs also fail to recruit teachers of Color into the profession, further perpetuating Eurocentric ideologies (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). To add, TEPs subscribe to White norms such as language and culture as the dominant lens in both their programming and research endeavors (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). Whiteness in higher education drives educational research and contemporary paradigms, thereby preserving Eurocentric epistemologies while simultaneously precluding others (Fylkesnes, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Swartz, 2009).

## **Core Practices in Teacher Education Programs**

Current research has focused on developing a set of novice teacher practices that support the development of skills and professional knowledge (Grossman et al., 2009; McDonald et al., 2013). McDonald, Kazemi, and Kavanagh (2013) suggest that core practices are tools that support teachers in split-second decision making. Similarly, Grossman et al. (2009) suggested core practices are tools pre-service teachers develop and refine to support pedagogical shifts in education and urged the field to adopt language and structures that support the development of core practices across programs.

However, core practices taught within a White-centered pedagogy in classrooms of diverse students do not value the plurality of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds. The frameworks and theoretical perspectives offered on core practices lack constructive ideas of equity in TEPs resting on a social justice framework. McDonald et al. (2013) stated,

“equity is not visible simply in what teachers do but also in the meanings and principles that guide how they view children, the relationships they build with children, how they draw on children’s cultural knowledge, and the stance they take on the work of teaching” (p. 383).

We agree, that this reference to equity does not explicitly address how this framework will push the saliency of equity beyond acknowledging teacher dispositions, values, and beliefs that guide their actions. The idea that core practices in a TEP based on White-centered praxis and pedagogies will enable the evolution of equity is a productive flaw of whiteness and is an example of the conservation of hegemonic practices within teacher education curricula. Teacher educators who make equity the focus of their practice must attempt to make changes to their programs. As Cole and Knowles (1996) suggested, there is a mismatch between what faculty members are hired to do and how they are judged and promoted. Cole and Knowles (1996) states, “perhaps the most pervasive change efforts are those silently undertaken by individuals and small groups of faculty. This reflects small group and individual efforts to “change the system” (p. 117). Yet colleges of education and the university structures they work within are not set up to reward this work. They also suggested,

the further one’s work is removed from the field (or the swamp) and located on the high ground, the more highly regarded and valued it is.... Those who are most interested in programmatic and systemic reform can’t afford to invest their time or energy in that work—the risks are too great. So, what does that say about the possibilities for sustained, informed reform measures in teacher education and beyond? (p. 117)

While many scholars write about what could and should be in teacher preparation, written reports are often void of the process involved in the teacher educators’ work, and if mentioned, the details are obscured in a context or methods section. In the following sections, our theoretical framing and methodology offer both a method to critically analyze and subsequently honor the voices of the students and communities TEPs wish to serve.

## **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

For this study, we used poetic inquiry (Prendergast, 2009; Rath 2001), an arts-based

methodology focused on crafting data into poetry, to investigate the process of designing a transformative pre-service TEP. More specifically, we wrote poems in the form of *vox autoethnographia*, or researchers' personal voices. Crafting of our experiences in poetic form represents an attempt to "do something with the data, rather than saying something about it" (Rath, 2001, p. 117). According to Butler-Kisber (2002), "these non-traditional forms help disrupt the hegemony inherent in traditional texts and evoke emotional responses that bring the reader/viewer closer to the work, permitting otherwise silenced voices to be heard" (p. 230). We explored three research questions in this study:

1. How can teacher educators be accountable in their role of transforming teacher education?
2. What must be considered before redesigning a teacher education program for culturally diverse students?
3. What role do doctoral students play in transformative teacher education?

### **Critical Race Theory**

Complimenting our arts-based research paradigm, and in alignment with our research questions, we drew on critical race theory (CRT) to make sense of our experiences. Critical race theory illuminated the pervasiveness of whiteness and provided a framework for naming the racial bias and inequity we encountered during this study. The following CRT tenets frame our thinking:

- Racism is endemic and governs all structures of society (Bell, 1992).
- Whiteness as property describes how the values, traditions, beliefs, and social and political capital of Whites dominate teacher education (Harris, 1993).
- Interest convergence is the juncture of White interests for Black needs (Bell, 1980).
- Counter-storytelling privileges historically marginalized voices where traditionally the voices of those affected are not included, and instead, the dominant narrative prevails (Delgado, 1989).

Drawing on these tenants, we analyzed our poems (shared below) to bring us to a collective understanding, which in turn revealed subthemes that captured the essence of our experiences as women of Color in higher education. These tenets helped us expand the conversation of what it meant [or did not mean] to center equity and social justice in a pre-service TEP and critique our experiences. This discourse, in turn, deepened our understanding of what we encountered throughout our journey.

In the next sections, we describe the setting in which our study was conducted, data sources we utilized, and the systematic process we employed to make sense of data collected.

### **Research Context**

A special topics course offered in Fall 2016 engaged doctoral students in readings and discussions on urban teacher preparation. In particular, the readings focused on core practices (McDonald et al., 2013; Forzani, 2014; Grossman, 2009); social justice (Ritchie et al., 2013; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Strom, 2003; Conklin, & Hughes, 2016; Zeichner et al., 2015); neoliberalism (Bullough, 2016; Zeichner, 2010; Richmond et al., 2016; Lipman, 2011),

whiteness (Milner, & Laughter, 2015; Matias, 2015); political relevance (Gutierrez, 2013; Heineke et al., 2015; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999), accountability measures (Cochran-Smith, Stern, Sánchez et al., 2016; Tuck, & Gorlewski, 2016; Sato, 2014) and community teaching (Zeichner et al., 2016; Capone, & Divenere, 1996; Zygmunt, & Clark, 2016; Murrell, 2001; Philip et al., 2013; Hackett et al., 2015). There were two significant assignments for the course, a *Concept Paper* and a *BSE Middle-Level Education (BSEMLE) Program Redesign Proposal*. The concept paper required students to address the current state of teacher education and suggest changes that center equity-focused programming. The BSEMLE program redesign required students to create a detailed course sequence and a description of the course using literature around current dilemmas/practices/suggestions/pitfalls in teacher education.

### Data Sources

Consistent with poetic inquiry methods that Pendergrast (2009) describes, we relied on multiple data sources for this project. The first source was a reflective journal, written in the first person highlighting how the Authors conceptualized the course over time. Our second data source included programmatic documents (academic catalog, institution's mission, and vision statements). These resources offered insight into the priorities of the undergraduate TEP, more specifically, the centering of equity in course offerings. The final data source included coursework artifacts (articles, concept papers, and program redesign proposals).

### Analytic Strategy

To apply the poetic inquiry methodology, we followed several steps to analyze the data in this study. First, we used NVivo 11 software to code individual reflections, in which four themes appeared. Second, we established the credibility of themes through member checking (Harvey, 2015). Next, each Author selected one theme in which they created *found poems*, an established practice in literature where writers borrow passages, words, or phrases from various sources. In this instance, the sources were our individual reflections. The sampled words remain grouped as they were found in the reflections, and the authors modified, juxtaposed, adapted, and adjusted the rhythm, phrasing, and breaks of the sample. The authors then added context through the use of various literary devices and poetic creativity (Butler-Kisber, 2002; McCullis, 2013; Prendergrast, 2009).

After creating the poems and titles, we continued our analytic process to capture the essence of our data. We explored four themes that emerged from our discussions and document analysis: (1) *The Journey* - our journey to and through the course (2) *Discomfort* - feelings of and moves made to invoke discomfort (3) *Program Redesign* - whiteness and othering within the program proposals; and finally, (4) *Resistance* - forms of resistance experienced. Each theme reflected our experiences approaching, interacting within, and completing the semester course.

### Findings

In this section, we present our findings of the study in poetic form. As stated earlier, each poem is made up of a mix of data from all four researchers. Portions of each poem where data are used verbatim are italicized. Also, each poem is preceded by an italicized title enclosed by quotation marks. A brief narrative is included after each poem that expands upon the presented

data in the poems and connects to the literature that provides theoretical framing.

**Figure 1.** The Journey Poem

**“Apprehensions, insecurities, and the unknown”**

The stakes are high, the *time is short*. *The Bachelor of Science in Education program redesign? The plurality of politics* - I’m out of my mind!  
The drudgery of complacency, the lack of criticality.  
Oh the *guilt* I feel, harboring these feelings and mustering up the will.  
*We do need to blow up the program*. Dismissing the warnings to stay out of the swamp; I jumped in - anticipating the unknown.  
*I think I am better when I collaborate, when I am pushed, when I am forced to continue to better articulate my thinking...*

What is this course about? Is this course designed with me in mind?  
*Tired of the redundancy* - *drowning in words and frameworks!*  
*Hammerness, Cochran-Smith, Zeichner* the usuals in the band; the genealogies of colonialism always have the upper hand.

Some are apprehensive; others have *no expectations* - *the course was chosen for them*. I’m over taking courses that:  
*Do not help me narrow my focus* and is not an “appropriate” fit.  
Does not *recognize their privilege* and does not *honor other narratives different than their own*.  
The Power at play is unapologetic - and *does not want to act*.

This poem (see Figure 1.) focuses on our journey in this course. As we reflected on our journey, we all wrote about what brought us to enroll in the course. Shaneeka, for example, wrote about her advisor highly suggesting she enroll in the course, “sort of insisted.” Nonetheless, she registered because she saw it as a good opportunity to bring her experiences abroad into conversations with others about initial teacher preparation. Adrian joined the course, hoping to align some of the readings with her research interests and program of study. Adrian stayed despite her overwhelming disappointment at the overwhelming presence of the usual “big names in teacher education— Zeichner, Hammerness, Cochran-Smith, to name a few.” She wondered why “articles written by prominent Black scholars” researching Black students were missing, and started thinking about how she could make the class work for her. Glenda came to the course wanting to “understand” and “be heard.” She often wondered if the changes she proposed would be implemented or even considered. Stephanie was unsure how the program redesign course would work, especially as her tenure was close. Stephanie needed the course and interested doctoral students to make a change. She could no longer afford “not to think about how to shift” the teacher education program she had taught in for the past five years to be more responsive to students with diverse backgrounds.

**Discomfort**

The poem below also came out of our written reflections on the course and our two major assignments (see Figure 2.). *Discomfort* surfaced as a central theme throughout this experience.

**Figure 2.** The Discomfort Poem

***"Entered and Stayed" Poem***

*Discomfort* was sitting at our table, present like another member of the class.  
Daring us to watch for *facial expressions, body language, responses or lack thereof*  
Earning extra points when *White women turned red or were silent. When race or social injustices against historically oppressed people of Color were raised.*  
Hovering when *deficit language* floats; and invited back again when we *expect the professor to address the deficits in the thinking, but didn't.*

*Mortified*, we write. *Discomfort* also acted as we pulled...pushed...shoved one another to remember that this *work is complicated.*  
That we need to dis-comfort one another, fellow students, *and program faculty.*  
To become awake to *injustices* and deeper understandings of *the level of disservice to the students of these urban schools.*  
Reminded us again, and again, and again how *embedded inequality is in our society.*  
Followed us out the door, *upset that some readings and conversations proved that there is much more work to be done*

*Discomfort* stood beside us as we *presented our work* when we shook our heads slightly; we are in our *theory bubble*, after all.  
Filled our lungs during the *push-back, nerve-wracking*; but we didn't push back on the *push back*, did we?  
Who should have, who could have said something?  
Who could have, who should have said more?

The discomfort in our space was constant. Appearing vibrant and useful when we dis-comforted one another; when we moved someone at our table to a different, better, terrifying space.

At least that's our story now. But discomfort in our space also silenced and was silent. What more could we say? Much more, so much more.

As we analyzed our reflections, we all felt discomfort before, during, and now, even after completing the course. For example, Stephanie often wrote about the guilt she felt around the state of the BSEMLE at her university. Shaneeka, Adrian, and Glenda all spoke about their discomfort when White doctoral students in the class engaged in deficit thinking about people and communities of Color. Their ideologies went unchallenged, untouched, and ignored by the instructor. They expected the professor to interrupt whiteness by being a co-conspirator, standing up against racist ideology, and modeling anti-racist pedagogy (Galman et al., 2010; Love, 2019).

**Program Redesigns**

The poem below captured the core of each doctoral student's individual proposal for an



overhaul of the BSEMLE program. The poem illustrates differences yet striking similarities between their redesign (see Figure 3.).

**Figure 3.** The Program Redesign Poem

***“A Window into Design”***

We sat in a windowless room all semester, discussing *the work of White scholars*  
*White teacher educators*, and a few scholars of Color, of course. But fewer!  
The *White teacher educator* in the room *got to pick* after all.

We argue in our proposals that teacher education has been corrupted and co-opted  
Taken over by, *content-driven practices* and *accountability conversations*. *It's the*  
*commodification of the teaching profession*, we say.

But we think we are here to make a difference, to resist and move within and around the  
discomfort.

Excited about a chance to design something new, relevant, and important in a doc seminar. In a  
room with no access to the outside world.

One proposal was all about teacher educators; she said we must *engage teacher educators in*  
*meaningful professional development*. Train teacher educators to *face history and themselves*.  
Ask, always, *where are the teacher educators of Color?*

The next proposal started, *“I finally woke up,” to the disservice that I had done to the hundreds*  
*of lives which I had been entrusted for 9 years*.

Awakened to past acts of *assimilation and reproduction* while *immersed in doctoral studies*.  
*Coming into consciousness*, because we cannot unsee. There is no way to unlearn.

Is it a gift? And if so, how do we help our fellow teachers to see?

Like the history of this term *“at-risk”*? *Derived from schools that were literally falling apart,*  
*but today “at-risk” is synonymous with inner-city youth in public schools*.

We wonder, who tells that history in a teacher prep program?

She says, I see it now, a *sociocultural view of education*.

It's the gift of *historical knowledge of education that situates changes within the social context*  
*of that time in history*.

Understanding education as *a tool to assimilate people of marginal groups for advancement of*  
*the dominant culture*.

The gift of her-story.

Teacher preparation programs can either *assimilate or challenge*. *Teachers and teacher*  
*educators have a crucial role in the future of society*.

And a final proposal on *whiteness as a wicked problem* in teacher education.

*A social construct that reifies white enterprise. A form of institutional abuse.*

*She says that the existence of the wicked problem in teacher education is the research and practices that permeate within the exclusivity of whiteness.*

*She argues that whiteness as a formidable construct, is a limiting factor in vetting the current status of teacher education programs.*

*Our room with no windows seems smaller now. Like the walls are moving in and we have just finally scratched the surface.*

*Doing our work, our writing, our thinking; across the hall from three White faculty.*

*As a program that trains a large number of African American teacher candidates*

*We can no longer perpetuate dysconsciousness by not identifying and confronting curricular practices that denigrate and erase the African experience.*

*We need critical core values. A fusion of critical pedagogy, critical race theory, emotionality and critical whiteness studies.*

*A push toward inclusiveness of other practices of indigenous and emancipatory pedagogies that confront deficit ideology.*

*She reminds us, again, that minoritized teacher candidates are overlooked in the curriculum.*

*The continuous exposure of dominant pedagogies grounded in whiteness for Black teacher candidates, impedes the possibility for knowledge generation of praxis that centers the African worldview and perspectives.*

*We wonder what has happened in this room without windows and what conversations and writings are yet to come.*

*We wonder. We worry. We wait, though we should not.*

*Waiting for the windowless room to inspire. Wondering what we still cannot see.*

As we organized the data for this poem, we found many similarities across our proposals. For example, we all felt it was essential to engage in critical self-reflection related to issues of race and culture at some point during the BSEMLE program. Similarly, all of our proposals focused, in some way, on issues of equity and social justice.

Though we read the same articles and chapters across the semester, the core of each of our proposals was different. For example, Adrian's program redesign looked broadly at where we have been in the field of teacher education, critiquing heavily the idea of core practices and proposing her own "critical core values. She pushed us in her writings to stop perpetuating dysconsciousness (King, 1991) in our teachings in initial teacher prep. She instead boldly called for emancipatory pedagogies both for and with pre-service teachers. On the other hand, Stephanie's proposal ideas are not highlighted in the poem because it was not written in the rationale for and purposes of using various core practices with diverse children in inner-city settings.

Glenda and Adrian's proposals drew on established theoretical frameworks to analyze the current state of teacher preparation and as tools for redesigning the program. Glenda drew on sociohistorical theories to argue for deep dives into not only history but histories and

historiographies of *education in context*. Shaneeka also wrote about the importance of diving deep into history by investigating the violence towards and oppression of people of Color. Unlike the other proposals, Shaneeka argued that *teacher educators* who plan to teach future teachers must first critically examine the history of racism and oppression. Especially White teacher educators who have limited lived experiences with diverse populations.

These proposals are exciting because they present unique ways forward, authored by doctoral students of Color who were recently in the field and who are digging deeply into critical literature on the state of urban teacher education. These proposals are also terrifying, as we realized the work needed to move ideas from doctoral students who have little say in a largely politicized department. With this in mind, we move to our last theme, resistance.

## Resistance

The construction of the final poem utilized data from all four authors. Throughout our time together, coming to the course with varying experiences and perspectives, spending time in the literature, writing our program proposals, and to where we are now, presenting our work to small and large audiences, we found that resistance often mounted. We share those ideas below (see Figure 4.).

**Figure 4.** The Resistance Poem

### ***"Pushing Back to Move Forward"***

*We refused to be silent about injustice.  
Each week we engaged in sensitive discussions  
We resisted the oppressive way of thinking;  
dominant practices, teaching methods and pedagogies  
to break the vicious cycle of false empathy and invalidation.  
We read the "Wicked Problem" in teacher education.  
We called for clarity in how the terms "equity" and "social justice" were used  
the call that impelled faculty and students to evaluate all that they read, see, and do  
We advocated for community teacher frameworks; in and outside of classroom spaces  
Sentiments met with push back during our presentations.  
We defined ourselves as oppressed people of Color (not minorities)  
We wanted to blow up the program, even if some faculty in the room that night would  
rather move slowly.  
...for the root word in minority is minor and by definition indicates of lesser importance or  
significance.  
we felt the frustration of not being honored in the literature and feeling a sense of  
hopelessness.  
As a trajectory in Teacher Education, we chose to advocate consciousness  
deconstructing whiteness in teacher educators themselves complexities of whiteness in  
education that must be confronted and addressed.  
maybe students needed to have an in-depth understanding of the history of education and  
policies that affected communities of the oppressed.  
Sociohistorical ways of knowing, pedagogical beliefs and intersectionality. The discussions  
were endless.  
We found that there was no easy solution for how to prepare teachers. Resisting the status  
quo caused friction  
Our syllabus was subject to weekly changes to read scholars students insisted  
Until the last moment of our presentation our argument persisted  
We resisted.*

This poem is about the different forms of resistance felt across our time together in this course, and through our program redesign processes. As highlighted here and in our first poem, “The Journey,” resistance for Stephanie began as a delay of work that she knew was needed for the teacher candidates in the BSEMLE program at the university. For Shaneeka, resistance came in the form of reminders to us all that it is not only teacher candidates who need to [de]construct their identities as urban educators. Adrian resisted the work of scholars who did not thoroughly examine the meaning of social justice in their work; when authors use social justice as a “buzzword” she was critical of their work and pushed us all to do the same. She found it important to understand these “big name” scholars who she deemed gatekeepers. None of them were the driving force behind, or centered their work around, themes involving social justice and equity.

And finally, Glenda resisted professors who were critical of what she proposed. Though we engaged in acts of resistance, we did not anticipate our ideas being met with resistance at the end of the semester during our presentation to college-wide faculty. Glenda, fearing how professors would view her ideas, was apprehensive in sharing her thoughts, and her instincts could not have been more correct. Some White faculty members questioned and argued against ideas that she and other students proposed during their end-of-the-semester presentations to university faculty. Galman, Pica-Smith, and Rosenberger’s (2010) findings illustrated that White teacher educators eluded talking about race and failed to provide pre-service teachers opportunities to engage in ways that would disrupt racism. Teacher educators of Color report internalizing racism, which leads them to uphold dominant ways of acting and thinking (Shim, 2018). Teacher educators must be willing to move past personal fears and factors limiting their participation in discussions centered on race and equity. Doing so will help strengthen all educators’ service to minoritized students.

### Discussion

In addition to detailing our program design process, we hope readers understand the challenges when taking part in work that seeks to be transformative. We demonstrate that the actions and words of liberal educators may be misaligned. An analysis of our experiences as shared above through poetic inquiry through a CRT lens brings to light five prevailing themes; invisibility, privilege, forward progression, advocacy in teacher education, and proceed with caution (see Table 1.). Rather than discuss each tenet, we use these five themes to critically interpret our findings reported in the previous section. In the following sections, we explain each of these themes and their relationship to our experiences, as illustrated within each poem.

**Table 1.** CRT Analysis of poems by CRT tenet and analytic subtheme.

Tenet	Thematic Example from Poem	CRT Analytic Subtheme
Racism is	<i>The Journey</i>	Invisibility

pervasive	<p>-Does not <i>recognize their privilege</i> and does not <i>honor other narratives different than their own.</i></p> <p><b>Discomfort</b></p> <p>-we <i>expect the professor to address the deficits in the thinking, but didn't.</i></p> <p><b>Resistance</b></p> <p>-we felt <i>the frustration of not being honored in the literature and feeling a sense of hopelessness. as a trajectory in Teacher Education, we chose to advocate consciousness</i></p> <p>-We <i>refused to be silent about injustice.</i></p> <p><b>The Journey</b></p> <p>-Tired of the <i>redundancy - drowning in words and frameworks!</i></p> <p><i>Hammerness, Cochran-Smith, Zeichner</i> the usual's in the band; the genealogies of colonialism always have the upper hand.</p> <p><b>Discomfort</b></p> <p>- Hovering when <i>deficit language</i> floats; and invited back again when we <i>expect the professor to address the deficits in the thinking, but didn't.</i></p>	
Whiteness as property	<p>-Earning extra points when <i>White women turned red or were silent. When race or social injustices against historically oppressed people of Color were raised.</i></p> <p><b>Program Redesign</b></p> <p>-We sat in a windowless room all semester, discussing <i>the work of White scholars</i></p> <p><b>Resistance</b></p> <p>-We advocated for <i>community teacher frameworks; in and outside of classroom spaces, Sentiments met with push back</i> during our presentations.</p> <p><b>The Journey</b></p> <p>-The stakes are high, the <i>time is short.</i> The <i>Bachelor of Science in Education program redesign?</i> The plurality of politics - I'm out of my mind!</p> <p>-<i>I think I am better when I collaborate, when I am pushed, when I am forced to continue to better articulate my thinking....</i></p>	White Privilege
Interest Convergence	<p>-The stakes are high, the <i>time is short.</i> The <i>Bachelor of Science in Education program redesign?</i> The plurality of politics - I'm out of my mind!</p> <p>-<i>I think I am better when I collaborate, when I am pushed, when I am forced to continue to better articulate my thinking....</i></p>	Forward progression
Counter-storytelling	<p><b>Program Redesign</b></p> <p>-Excited about a chance to design something new, relevant,</p>	Advocacy in teacher

and important in a doc seminar. In a room with no access to education the outside world.

-One proposal was all about teacher educators; she said we must *engage teacher educators in meaningful professional development*. Train teacher educators to *face history and themselves*.

-She says, I see it now, a *sociocultural view of education*. It's the gift of *historical knowledge of education that situates changes within the social context of that time in history*.

-A push toward *inclusiveness of other practices of indigenous and emancipatory pedagogies that confront deficit ideology*.

### ***Resistance***

-We advocated for *community teacher frameworks; in and outside of classroom spaces*

Critique of liberalism	<b><i>Resistance</i></b> -We wanted to <i>blow up the program</i> , even if <i>some faculty in the room that night would rather move slowly</i> .	Proceed with caution
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**Invisibility and White privilege.** According to Harris (1993), whiteness as a construct serves two purposes: exclusion and racial subjugation. The pervasiveness of racism explains the systematic allocation of resources governed by a racist social hierarchy that privileges Whites and the subsequent *Othering* of people of Color (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Horsford, 2011). We experienced Black invisibility from the onset of our *Journey* to this course. For example, a flyer soliciting the course listed topics along with related readings and their respective authors. Excluded from the list were Black educational researchers. Although the course topics were diverse, the scholars we studied were not. Further, White doctoral students use of deficit language to discuss Black youth went unaddressed. The Black students in the course were invisible.

Related to invisibility, the subtheme, ***White privilege***, emerged across four poems to signify instances of whiteness operating as a form of property in higher education that privileges White identity and dominance while at the same time subjugating people of Color (Patel, 2014). For instance, across the poems, we discovered an overwhelming presence of whiteness in the curriculum and a negation of Black education researchers. The White teacher educator designed the course to center social justice and equity. Yet, the research content widely reflected White educational researchers—suggesting and reinforcing white ownership of knowledge and research. Moreover, the presentation of our TEP redesigns was met with critique and push-back from the White teacher educators in the room. The presentation morphed into a debate where we, the three Black female doctoral students, felt our rationales and push for teacher educators to assess their own dispositions were not heard nor valued. Notably, when we raised issues of racism, social

injustices, and white superiority, the White women in the course reacted with silence. From the course design to the rebuttal of a proposed new TEP, these actions systematically conferred White dominance (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009).

**Forward progression.** Surfacing in one poem, the subtheme, *forward progression*, demonstrates the desire held by the authors to improve the BSEMLE program. The Black doctoral students needed to address the lack of equity in their institution's urban teacher preparation program. The professor's need to revamp the TEP was three-fold. First, she expressed feelings of guilt for knowingly overlooking the program's lack of criticality and effectiveness. Secondly, she was seeking tenure and did not have the time to engage in activities that would reduce her ability to prioritize publishing. Lastly, she needed to collaborate with doctoral students to push her thinking about designing an effective TEP. The professor's needs reveal how Blacks' interests to redesign the program moved forward when their interests converged with the interests of the White professor (Lapayese et al., 2014).

**Advocacy in teacher education.** The subtheme, *advocacy in teacher education*, was noted in two poems. We visualized our TEP redesign proposals as our "counter-story" to the traditional ways TEPs reify White dominance. Our proposals were meant to erode complacency, challenge the status quo, and illuminate possibilities for teacher education that centers on equity and social justice (Delgado, 1989). The concept papers and program proposals emerged as a critique of current teacher education practices. Further, the program proposals centered on the experiences and lives of African American students. These artifacts also serve as a form of *resistance* to racial subjugation by respecting, honoring, and valuing students' lived experiences in urban classrooms.

**Proceed with Caution.** The final subtheme, *proceed with caution*, represents the skepticism of teacher educators to make systemic changes to the current TEP. We previously discussed the confrontation with White teacher educators during the presentation of our proposals. The proposals were characterized as "radical," with one teacher educator suggesting that we make small, incremental changes instead of "dropping the frog in a pot of boiling water." Our presentations promoted a programmatic overhaul that focused on developing culturally responsive curricula that resist dominant norms and reflect a coherent and cohesive social justice platform. Our attention to addressing and then countering racism and whiteness in teacher education required a systemic and cultural change (Sleeter, 2016). The resistance of faculty teacher educators to make "radical" changes to a program that caters to White sensibilities was undoubtedly apparent.

Our concept papers reflected a semester-long exercise in examining "why" and "how" racialized contexts impact achievement in urban schools. Our program redesign proposals were the infusion of theory and application to redress the shortfalls of our university's TEP to center "social justice." This critical examination of our experiences during the semester elucidated the complex work, specifically for teacher educators of Color, of creating safe, equitable, and socially just education spaces for urban students. In the following pages, we outline principles that should be considered prior to approaching program redesign, the ways teacher educators can

support this work, and the role of future teacher educators dedicated to transforming teacher education.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

As we examined our discussions and revelations, our proposals for teacher education shared commonalities. First, teacher education for social justice needs meaning and understanding by teacher educators and candidates. Teacher candidates need to develop a conceptual understanding of intersectionality to identify, confront, and resist whiteness, racism, sexism, classism, and oppression while seeking solutions to redress inequalities. Second, initial courses in the TEP should allow for the deconstruction and construction of self. We envision students and teachers grappling with ideas, beliefs, and values about themselves and “Others,” while using inner-city schools and communities as educational contexts as they begin developing teacher identities and teaching philosophies. Third, TEPs should have critical core values that center teacher candidates and their future students. Fourth, we must enable criticality among teacher candidates by modeling critical and emancipatory pedagogies. In addition, criticality in teacher education should meet at the intersection of critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and transformative learning theory. Lastly, we found it necessary for teacher candidates to develop relationships with community members and partners at the beginning of the program and provide the space and multiple opportunities to place theory into action.

As African American females, we share the experiences of yearning for *Others*— and by this, we mean *White Others*—to listen and understand our joys, desires, and frustrations in a society that mercilessly mutes us. We found that taking up this work required the disposition of our professor. She listened. She asked. She shared. She reflected. While very few in the college, we knew other African American professors understood the perilous roads we travel. However, this was our first encounter with a White teacher in our program who purposely and thoughtfully engaged in discourse that had been overlooked in other courses. Often, Stephanie encountered uncomfortable conversations about how she and other White professors might be more racially conscious in their work. Through this course, she was confronted with her dysconsciousness. Stephanie continues to engage in self-work. The three of us, Shaneeka, Adrian, and Glenda have purposefully moved through our teacher education courses as a cohort. We have discussed the possible outcomes of this course if other White teacher educators in our program were at the helm. We speculate very different, non-supportive outcomes.

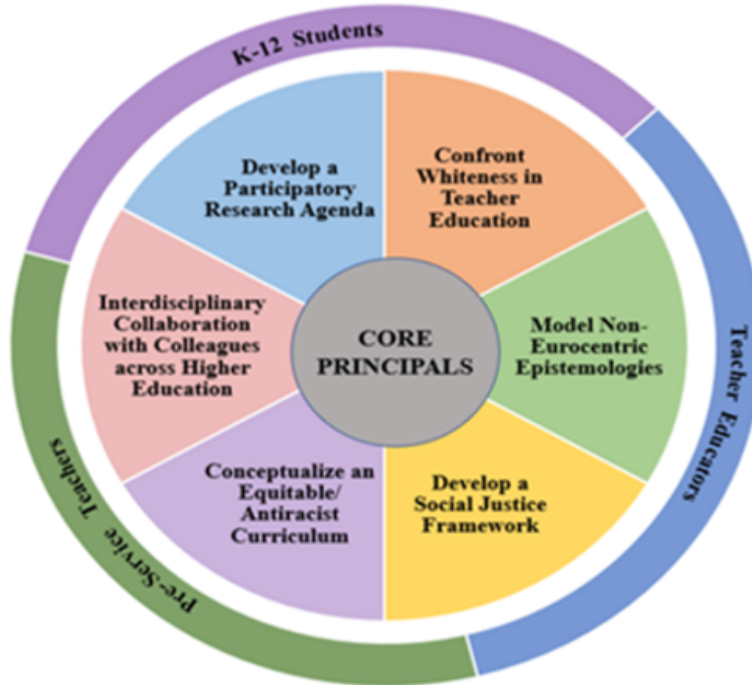
As a collective, we interrogated our normative ways of being and knowing. Doing this work together allowed us to acknowledge our discomfort and contemplate our resistance to these norms. As such, we conclude with implications for research, policy, and practice within the field of teacher education as we write to understand, write to resist, and write to survive.

As we finalize this writing, we are still conversing with the BSE faculty about moving our program forward. Our first self-imposed task was to develop a list of principles that would guide our work, aiming in many ways to answer the invitation from Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) for “differing paradigmatic and epistemological perspectives” (p.2) in teacher education programs. These principles, articulated in a framework (see figure 5.), address the development



of a TEP focusing on proximal recipients of knowledge (ie. K-12 students, Teacher Candidates, and Teacher Educators), and grew out of our work together and our collective thinking around teacher preparation program redesign.

**Figure 5.** Core Principles in Teacher Education



*Note.* Descriptions of core values can be found in appendix A.

However, a set of principles was not enough, and we forced ourselves to engage in collective conversation around the next steps. How do we take these theoretical ideas and move to program-specific suggestions? Armed now with readings, concept papers, literature reviews, and our program redesign proposals, we came together to hash out the overall mission of our program and others like it: “to engage in interdisciplinary research working alongside our local communities, creating meaningful partnerships with people of varying backgrounds, talents, and skills in order to understand and generate knowledge for the advancement of humankind.” This mission, a program of study, has prompted us, for now, to start with three core courses we feel all pre-service teachers must have when enrolled in urban teacher preparation programs: sociocultural and contemporary issues in education, deconstruction of self, and intersectionality (see figure 6.).

**Figure 6.** Re-Imagined Foundation Courses in Teacher

<b>Course 1: <i>Sociohistorical and Contemporary Issues in Education</i></b>	<b>Course 2: <i>[De]Construction of self</i></b>	<b>Course 3: <i>Issues of intersectionality in Education</i></b>
<p>In this course, students will explore the roles of schooling and education within the wider framework of society and understand the implications of each. Beginning this work with a sociohistorical frame allows us to better understand ourselves, the contexts in which we operate, and the history that informs our practices. The absence of this foundation conversely informs teacher educators and teachers to be social reproductionist. These individuals [lack of] knowledge makes it likely that they will reproduce students who have not had the opportunity to engage in thought that is critical of our current [educational] system and the policies responsible for the creation of modern society.</p>	<p>A second required prerequisite course for teachers is centered on the [De]construction of self. The course is designed to assist teacher candidates as they deconstruct/construct their ideas, beliefs, and values about themselves and others -- specifically students in urban classrooms. The course would present worldviews (Afrocentric and Eurocentric) as context to introduce how values and belief systems are inherently different and why differences must be honored. The goal of the course is to expand students' knowledge and awareness of self and how that knowledge can impact classrooms, schools, districts, and communities. Enabling students to acknowledge, understand, and critique their privileges and biases creates a space for teacher candidates to honor and validate the unique perspectives and cultural backgrounds of their future students.</p>	<p>We proposed a final prerequisite course on intersectionality. It is a necessity that future teachers be able to critique how these constructs are socially constructed and contribute to the reproduction of whiteness in postcolonial cultures. Secondly, to understand equity in education students must be able to extend, connect, and integrate learned theories into the everyday practices of themselves and others. This course was designed for students and teacher educators to take the journey together by being able to share and move beyond their fears and shame related to the content (Hooks, 2004). It is our hope that students in this course will walk away, not professing to be all-knowing but instead with the willingness to explore, investigate, reflect, and de[construct] the intersection of class, race, and gender and it how it operates in promoting social inequality in education.</p>

However, as we learned throughout our work together, program redesign is not just about reconceptualized syllabi. We also need to consider who is (and should be) teaching these courses and supporting pre-service teachers to confront their dysconscious ways of being in the classroom. We need faculty of Color teaching these courses. But more importantly, we need *woke* – critically conscious to intersecting systems of oppression – teachers of Color in higher education (Ashlee et al., 2017).

At the time of this study, we were doctoral students entering our second year. This course pushed our thoughts and minds to reflect on our journeys to consciousness and, in many ways, shaped and sharpened our research focuses on Black education and teacher preparation. We became intimately aware of our own internalized racist ideologies and culpability in perpetuating notions of White superiority. We acknowledged our *Mis-Education* that Carter G. Woodson (1933) eluded to, the phenomena of Black teachers instructing Black students is in many respects, the White teacher teaching the same class. We continue our journey, confronting racism and whiteness, provoking discomfort, when necessary, to disentangle the resistance.

We need White faculty engaging in this work, but only if they commit to continued growth and movement towards critically conscious ways of being in teacher preparation spaces. Stephanie, for example, has committed to a second summer of engagement in Facing History and Ourselves workshops alongside colleagues at DePaul University. She also continues to write about her positionality as a White teacher educator working in a program claiming to support teachers in teaching for social justice (see, for example, her writing about the dangers of White

female faculty silence in higher education spaces (Stephanie, 2018)). As we think about conceptualizing the curriculum, acknowledging and addressing internalized biases, teacher educators must be intentional about the information pre-service teachers receive. Likewise, teacher educators entering the academy must be supported in understanding the overall mission and vision of programs and work to consider how their expertise fits into this vision. Teacher educators also need to conceptualize their role as a guide and encourage students to face and move beyond the surface-promoting reflection as a form of decompression as they deal with the difficult and often complexities of a topic. In short, we believe teacher educators must become models and design their courses in such ways that pre-service teachers begin to fundamentally understand how to integrate transformative teaching practices into their work.

Syllabi redesign and faculty development (as outlined here) are just two of many necessary steps forward in this work. You may see other ways forward in your own teacher preparation spaces. We invite you to join us in this work and share with us and others the outcomes. Let us continue to understand and resist in order to survive.

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## Appendix

### Description of Critical Core Principles

1. Confronting whiteness in teacher education at every step in the process of program redesign. Whiteness must be conceptualized as a traumatizing instructional barrier for non-dominant racial groups. The responsibility lies with the White, dominant racial group to utilize their power to disrupt and enact change (Matias, 2015).
2. Teacher educator programs must drive the need to acknowledge, address, and challenge internalized biases and model non-Eurocentric epistemologies in the program for teacher candidates.
3. Develop an anti-racist and equitable curriculum that supports and empowers non-White teacher candidates on how to use their heritage knowledge (King, 2015) to culturally appropriate their classroom instruction through various pedagogies (e.g. emancipatory, indigenous, etc.). TEP redesign should include faculty and doctoral students of Color in the process, which in turn, may lead to reflective and conscious discourse illuminating and confronting internalized racism and biases. which is the impetus to recruit more people of Color in Teacher Education.
4. Interdisciplinary efforts with colleagues across higher education (e.g., Indigenous Studies, Feminist Studies, African American Studies, etc.) to support teacher educators and students on how to make cultural connections that centers and locates students in the curriculum to support critical thinking and knowledge attainment that manifest in creating belonging and community-well being (King, 2015).
5. In addition, to develop a program with a social justice framework, teacher candidates need multiple opportunities to conceptualize the oppressive functions of intersectionalities (race, class, gender, sex, poverty). Developing a teacher induction program that is married to the community through forms of active engagement that includes interviews, on-site reflections,

and discussions among teacher candidates, mentors, and supervisors is paramount.

6. Develop of a comprehensive, participatory action research agenda around our TEP that privileges the voices of the students and communities that accept our teacher candidates is needed. Students, parents, and community members are the “experts” that guide and inform critiques on the evaluation of TEPs (for example, community-based participatory action research).