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Teaching for Black Girls: What Every Graduate Student Instructor Can Learn from Black Girlhood Studies

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CHAPTER 6.

TEACHING FOR BLACK GIRLS: WHAT EVERY GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTOR CAN LEARN FROM BLACK GIRLHOOD STUDIES

THERESA HICE-FROMILLE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The neoliberal university undervalues teaching and upholds standardization practices that reproduce harm towards marginalized students. Black Studies approaches to education challenge these education standards.
- Teaching for Black girls is a pedagogical approach derived from Black Girlhood Studies in which the instructor commits to engage students as their co-creator, co-witness, and co-conspirator.
- All graduate student instructors can implement curricular tools and instill pedagogical values, such as instructor responsibility, student agency, collaboration, and reflexivity, to engage a practice of teaching for Black girls. In so doing, instructors model behaviors that promote Black girl thriving within and beyond the classroom.
- Instructors in STEM can recognize their power within scientific production and engage teaching for Black girls to empower marginalized students and address the harms that have been inflicted on communities and the environment in the name of science.

INTRODUCTION

I don't remember many details from my first teaching experience, but I do recall the feeling of dread as I entered a small classroom one winter evening. As I was new to the research university setting, I did not have any personal experience with teaching assistants (TAs) from which to draw, and I doubted my ability to effectively facilitate the learning of sixty students. By the time I began my teaching

assistantship in January of my first year in graduate school, the two-day teaching assistant training required of graduate students in my department was months behind me. The training included a mix of information about administrative regulations and practical teaching strategies, but very little information had stuck with me through the hectic first quarter of graduate coursework.

I know that I was woefully underprepared for my first quarter of teaching and that I did not facilitate student learning in the ways that I advocate for now; however, the experience motivated me to seek out additional resources through which to cultivate my teaching skills. Despite a rough introduction, I have developed a true love for teaching in higher education and enjoy learning from, and with, equally-motivated peers. Through my enrollment and leadership in campus programs that prepare novice educators for the demands of teaching and help them deepen their commitments to undergraduate learning, I have identified graduate students as significant catalysts for innovations in higher education teaching praxis.

Graduate students provide support to undergraduate students through their TA and graduate student research (GR/GSR) appointments, and many serve as formal and informal mentors. For example, graduate students may work in research labs, at campus resource centers, or with other university programs that allow them to connect with students within and beyond their departments. Despite the worry and self-doubt that graduate students may experience as first-time and early-career instructors, I find that they are often eager to design and lead courses in their fields and excited by the prospect of engaging students with shared academic interests. Their enthusiasm for connecting with students and awareness of the importance of positive instructor-learner relationships for student success signifies their potential for enacting a positive influence on the higher education community (Austin, 2002).

At the same time, graduate students enrolled at research institutions must learn to navigate the marginalization of teaching-focused positions and goals (Austin, 2002; Boyer, 1990; Hunt et al., 2012; Simmons et al., 2021; Smollin & Arluke, 2014). The neoliberal university's preoccupation with generating revenue guides institutional interest towards the productive capacity of faculty as researchers rather than as teachers (Boyer, 1990; Litwin, 2009; Shannon et al., 1998). Such a discrepancy in the priorities of higher education is reflected in the training—or lack thereof—available for instructors. For example, Blouin and Moss (2015) investigated teacher training for graduate students enrolled in sociology programs throughout the U.S. and Canada and found that while formal efforts have increased slightly and consistently across programs in the past twenty years, about 82% of the programs surveyed did not offer regular teaching courses for TAs and even fewer require that TAs complete formal training. The authors remark, “It is hard to imagine a graduate program neglecting to offer a required course that teaches their graduate students how to do research, yet this regularly happens for teaching” (2015, p. 134). Indeed, the message communicated to graduate students is that their pedagogical endeavors are less important and professionally meaningful than their achievements in research. This, of course, is despite universities' need to seek out (at least in word, if not in deed) tenure-track faculty candidates who are proficient in teaching and research in order to remain within the budget constraints imposed by a neoliberal agenda (Austin, 2002; Blouin & Moss, 2015). Although many graduate student instructors (GSIs) demonstrate enthusiastic commitment to their students, they often find themselves without a pedagogical model to which they may refer as they develop their praxes (Boman, 2013; Shannon et al., 1998).

My research interests guided me to find a theoretical home in Black Studies, but it is also within this

multidiscipline (Daniel, 1980) that I was inspired to cultivate my pedagogical praxis. Black Studies' presence within the academy and its grounding commitments to community needs and social justice exemplify the dual prioritization of research and pedagogy that many graduate students are striving to achieve. As I began cultivating my black studies mind, or situating myself within the capacious lineage of Black thought (Hine 2014), I was introduced to the sub-field of Black Girlhood Studies. Scholars of Black girlhood emphasize the creative capacity of Black girls and the necessity of educators working *with* Black girls, "and therefore being in relationship with them as co-creators of knowledge, co-witnesses of their genius, and co-conspirators of the radical acts of freedom they imagine and enact" (Owens et al., 2017, p. 119). It is within this framework that I have lovingly constructed my pedagogical praxis.

I have many years yet to hone my teaching craft, and I aim to continually improve and adjust to the needs of my students, but I am adamant that the pedagogical possibilities of the research institution are achievable within a Black Girlhood Studies framework, which is applicable to every discipline and field. I provide within this chapter an outline of the goals and values purported by Black Studies and how these are further developed through the critical interventions of Black feminist thought; a brief review of the pedagogical values identified by scholars within the emerging sub-field of Black Girlhood Studies; a critical reflection on the ways that I implemented these values into my development of an upper-level undergraduate course; and additional consideration of the ways that GSIs in STEM disciplines can meaningfully engage these values.

While it is often assumed that Black Studies and its contributions are only relevant to the humanities or social sciences and, more specifically, Black communities, I maintain that it is important for *all* educators to invest in its goals. I recognize the enthusiasm many graduate students have for putting their knowledge into practice and their flexibility when prioritizing student needs over established teaching conventions. I also hope that the attention given over the past several years to the problematization of national claims about the success of post-civil rights education is (re)igniting commitments to justice-oriented pedagogy and a radical re-envisioning of higher education. Just as emancipation did not equate to the eradication of slavery, school desegregation did not ensure equitable access to education (Harris, 1993; Du Bois, 1998; Castro et al., 2019; Givens, 2019). More to the point, pervasive racism in the contemporary education system will only be countered by the thick and even application of anti-racist and pro-Black pedagogical commitments throughout the academy. I posit that these commitments may be realized through the careful (i.e., care-filled) pedagogical prioritization of Black girls and I call upon graduate students, as energetic members of the professional teaching community, to provide a necessary foundation for its application.

BLACK STUDIES AS A PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATION

The introduction of Black Studies programs and departments to universities in the mid-twentieth century was part of a long history of Black initiatives that recognized public education as a right to be afforded to all (Du Bois, 1998; Castro et al., 2019). A poignant example of this commitment is the fact that even during segregation, historically black colleges and universities never pursued exclusionary admissions on the basis of race despite the reverse standing true for historically white institutions (Castro et al., 2019). The persistent exclusion of racially minoritized students from higher education has prompted scholars to reflect on the ways in which quality education is treated as a property right of whiteness rather than a universal right afforded to all (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Within

this framework of analysis, an individual's propensity for accumulating the skills sanctified by elite universities is reliant on denying others the opportunities to cultivate these same skills. Disciplinary boundaries restrict inter-field collaborations and the inequitable financial support afforded to STEM as compared to social science, arts, and humanities departments. This siphoning of resources to disciplines with significantly lower rates of racial and gender diversity exemplifies just one of the ways that stringent intra-academic boundaries are reinforced and intellectual competition is encouraged (Kniola et al., 2012; Ma & Xiao, 2021; Newfield, 2010). Scholars continue to uphold the assumption that high-level skills are scarce (Newfield, 2010). To this end, Daniel (1980) suggests that Black Studies constitutes a decentralized multidiscipline rather than the addition of an ethnocentric program into an already divided academy.

A Black Studies approach to higher education commands indiscriminate access and service to the needs of marginalized communities. Embedded within these priorities is the necessary interrogation of the national and global social, economic, and legal practices that have prevented equitable access to quality higher education. Black Studies challenges all educators to recognize the "world as it is and [to create] the conditions of possibility for a new one within and beyond the university" (Roane, 2017, para. 12). Thus, Daniel's (1980) proposition indicates a foundational intent to implement the goals of Black Studies throughout the university and, in turn, ground academic research and teaching in social wellbeing.

In a similar effort to distinguish the Black Studies project as a radical reimagining of educational priorities, Hine (2014) outlines the characteristics shared by Black Studies scholars. By presenting the "black studies mind" as those "historically sedimented and diverse practices and modes of thought" that scholars engage throughout their teaching, research, and academic aspirations, Hine invites Black and non-Black scholars to engage in the critical perspective of Blackness in order to advance a particular political agenda within the university (2014, p. 12). Unlike engaging a race-neutral or colorblind approach to teaching, in which the instructor attempts to ignore the conditions in which students live and learn and assumes that students possess the same skills and values upon course enrollment, instructors who exercise a Black studies mind consider how, and to what extent, their course design enables and empowers marginalized students to thrive. Instructors must attend to the harms of anti-Blackness in traditional, objective approaches to research; uplift the contributions of Black and other marginalized people to the discipline; and extend knowledge founded on principles of equity and justice. These practices destabilize interdisciplinary partitioning and resist the segregation of knowledge.

EXPANDING THE BLACK STUDIES MIND: THE INTERVENTION OF BLACK GIRLHOOD

Hine's (2014) analysis of the Black studies mind asserts the inseparability of the project of Black Studies from the contributions of Black feminism by including *intersectionality* as one of its five constitutive characteristics. Indeed, by outlining intersectionality as the first characteristic, she offers Black feminist thought as fundamental to the liberatory potential of Black Studies. As an analytic tool, intersectionality is used to understand the complexity of human experience as it is shaped by many axes of social division (such as race, class, gender, and geographic location) that overlap and influence one another (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). It is useful, for example, in helping scholars recognize the ways in which a disregard of differences in subjective experience amplifies the inequitable treatment of those who embody multiple marginalized identities. At the onset, Crenshaw (1989) employed

the concept to decipher the harm that occurred when the law failed to recognize discrimination against Black women as motivated by either race (due to their gender) or gender (due to their racialized status). Intersectionality is also employed to assist Black feminist scholars in identifying and challenging patriarchal, misogynist, homonormative, and nationalist ideas when they are reproduced within Black Studies (Hill, 2018).

While Black feminist thought has ensured that the contributions of Black Studies extend beyond the Black American, cis-gender, heterosexual, and male experience, scholars within the emerging field of Black Girlhood Studies critique the omission of youth perspectives from Black feminist scholarship (Halliday, 2020; Smith, 2019). As theories in Black Girlhood Studies draw conclusions about social life from the multiple and overlapping identities that shape Black experience, they constitute Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). However, the exclusion of youth voices in theoretical development indicates that not all Black feminist scholarship falls within Black Girlhood Studies (Smith, 2019). Black Girlhood Studies scholars address the ways that the experiences of Black girls, in particular, are excluded from study or submerged within categories of youth (generally), Black children (broadly), or girlhood (without specifying the realities of racialized difference). Additionally, they challenge the deficit framework through which Black girls and Black girlhood are generally examined, when they are even discussed at all.

Many investigations into Black girlhood attend, at least in some way, to the spaces of schools. Education is “one of the most important protective factors in a girl’s life,” but schools are significant sites in which Black girls are surveilled, criminalized, and demeaned (Morris, 2016, p. 3). Black girls are mandated to attend school, and yet education policy, curriculum, and social norms conspire to push them out (Morris, 2016). Scholars of Black girlhood prioritize “the political relationship of being in community with and for Black girls” and thus engage strategies in research, teaching, and activism to uplift and protect Black girls (Owens et al., 2017, p. 118). Indeed, Butler (2018) finds that those educators who “express a deep concern for Black girls’ health, lives, well-being and ways of being” (p. 33) develop curricula to facilitate Black girl thriving in school. Such curricula necessitate educators’ capacity to learn from and alongside Black girls as they collaboratively interrogate the ways that Black girls are represented and regarded and highlight Black girls’ collective strategies of survival.

The educators that Butler (2018) surveyed attend to more than their students’ academic performance, they demonstrate care by maintaining concern for the implications of the curricula and their teaching practices on students’ lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Although Butler’s investigation focuses on educators who self-identify as Black girls/women¹, commitment to Black girls’ thriving can, and should, extend beyond personal experience, and anti-racist and pro-Black teaching must be engaged by non-Black instructors, too. Following Black Girlhood Studies scholars’ emphasis on working with and alongside Black girls as co-creators, co-witnesses, and co-conspirators, GSIs of all racial backgrounds can establish a political commitment to teaching *for* Black girls by embedding within their pedagogical praxis an attention to Black girls’ well-being within and beyond the classroom.

1. Butler (2018) follows the Black Girlhood Studies tradition of using “girl” in a way that challenges the dichotomous separation between girl and woman, asserting that Black girlhood is both a fluid category and lifelong process and, therefore, experienced by those in young and adult bodies (Brown, 2014; Cox, 2015; Hill, 2019).

TEACHING FOR BLACK GIRLS

Preparing the course

Throughout the process of designing a course for my campus's inaugural Black Studies minor, I held a single question in mind: *What if I were to teach this course only to Black girls?* As Black students make up a mere 4% of the population at my historically white institution, the scenario was unlikely²; still, I felt it necessary to investigate what it might be like to facilitate a course that fit the needs and desires of novice Black women scholars. I reconceptualized what a quality course entailed by pondering what my course would look like from start to finish should all my students identify as Black girls.

I started this process by considering the three stages of the understanding by design (UbD) framework developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2011; 2005). However, I quickly realized that the UbD framework, though useful in providing a curricular foundation as I built a course from the ground up, did not align with my goal to teach for Black girls. The UbD framework may evade reproducing a deficit model, in which educators assume students' educational failure is due to individual and cultural deficiencies rather than inequitable pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Picower, 2009), but it also renders irrelevant the skills with which students already possess and forgoes consideration of student contexts and individuality (Cho & Trent, 2005). Within the UbD framework, a course with high alignment—one in which the instructor's lessons, assessments, and learning objectives are connected and coherent—is a quality course (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). But teaching for Black girls entails more. Drawing from Black Girlhood Studies, teaching for Black girls requires that educators work alongside Black girls—as co-producers of knowledge, co-witnesses to their genius, and co-conspirators in the struggle for equity and freedom (Owens et al., 2017).

The UbD framework encourages teachers to undergo reflective practices but to the ends of determining whether or not they have appropriately identified what students are (mis)understanding from the course content (Cho & Trent, 2005). Indeed, as with other standards-based educational reform initiatives, epitomized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, UbD prioritizes the role of the teacher as an assessor (Cho & Trent, 2005). Wiggins and McTighe (2005) direct instructors to link the “desired results” or learning objectives identified in the first stage with the “established content standards,” such as those dictated by local and federal governments. By defining assessments as “those performance tasks and related sources of evidence” and teaching as “enabling performance,” Wiggins and McTighe (2005) evade critical inquiry into educational standards and the responsibility of teachers to dismantle or otherwise challenge them.

Assessment does not always entail grading and, indeed, the UbD framework instructs teachers to regularly incorporate ungraded and low-stakes assignments into curricular planning to ensure that

2. The campus also maintains Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) status. HSIs generally tout greater Black student enrollment than predominately-white institutions (PWIs), but this is not found to correlate with stronger feelings of campus belonging (Garcia, 2019; Pirtle et al., 2021).

assessment is not left until the end of the course (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). However, the UbD framework in no way advocates for teachers to challenge the institutional expectation of assigning grades. Critical literacy theorist Asao B. Inoue (2019), asserts that “grading, because it requires a single, dominant standard, is a racist and White supremacist practice” (p. 5). Distinguished educational theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995,) further details that when grading is at the center of pedagogical praxis, “the goal of education becomes how to “fit” students constructed as “other”...into a hierarchical structure that is defined as a *meritocracy*” (p. 467, original emphasis). Taken together, these analyses oppose assessment-driven frameworks such as UbD and conclude that the assignment of grades, as tools used to measure students’ proximity to whiteness, is in service to white supremacy and to the detriment of marginalized students, including Black girls. Thus, in the language employed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), assessment-driven teachers enable their students to perform whiteness and base assessment on how convincingly they accomplish this task.

Alongside upholding whiteness, hooks (2003) and Inoue (2019) conclude that grading fosters a fear-based approach to education that affects instructors and students. They posit that instructors become preoccupied with the potential professional consequences of low testing scores within their class while students, fearing the wrath of their teachers should they underperform, doubt their capacities to learn and fixate on answering questions correctly rather than thoughtfully (hooks, 2003; Inoue, 2019). The result is a classroom ecology generated by hierarchical and competitive relationships among students and between students and instructors (Inoue, 2019). For Black students who are already exposed to institutionalized discrimination, such an ecology could be especially detrimental to learning and further minimize the possibility of cultivating positive student-teacher relationships, which are positively associated with fostering students’ senses of belonging and improvements in academic achievement (Legette et al., 2022).

If, as I assert, teaching for Black girls necessitates that educators engage their students as co-creators, co-witnesses, and co-conspirators, then a radical re-articulation of learning through the interrogation of educational norms and standards must also ensue. In designing my course, I sought to recognize and begin repairing the harm inflicted on students who may have encountered biased disciplinary policies, apathetic educators, and an individualistic campus climate, and encourage deep and critical inquiry into the course themes of race, identity, and belonging in the African Diaspora and the meaning of learning. For many students, even those who were intrigued by the disruptions I posed to the norms of university coursework, the task was uncomfortable. I altered or excluded many of the elements of the course that students had come to expect. For example, I omitted assignment due dates, and rather than declaring universal learning objectives, I prompted students to contemplate what they wanted to learn in the course and develop individualized course goals. Perhaps the most perplexing element of my course plan was the implementation of a hybrid grading contract (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Inoue, 2019).

Grading contracts are a set of terms that an instructor and their students agree upon at the beginning of the course (Inoue, 2019). Although there are many different approaches to grading contracts, Inoue’s (2019) insistence that traditional grading and assessment-driven pedagogy stems from an institutional commitment to whiteness led me to incorporate greater emphasis on labor than quality into my proposed contract. Even when I emphasized quality writing I did so by deferring to students’ definitions of excellence through my implementation of self-evaluations (Appendices C and D). In

this way, students were prompted to set the standards of excellence and evaluate their work and class contributions accordingly. I used a minimum grade of a C to indicate the labor necessary to pass the course to accommodate students who intended to enroll in the course on a Pass/Fail (rather than letter grade) basis. This lessened the workload for students who anticipated having less time to engage course materials without the threat of penalty. Students who enrolled in the course on a letter grade basis were guaranteed a B following the assumptions of conscientious effort and commitment to labor outlined by Danielewicz and Elbow (2009) and Inoue (2019). Students who anticipated earning an A in the course committed to complete additional coursework (i.e., more labor) and demonstrated via self-evaluations how their work achieved excellence according to their own definitions.

My use of a grading contract set the tone for a learning ecology that challenged the status quo. As contracts must be agreed upon by more than one party, I could only propose a contract—the final version had to be negotiated and approved by students. Additionally, the language of a contract implies that re-negotiation, or a return to the contract to arrange different terms of agreement, is always possible. The document, alone and in combination with several other curricular choices that I outline below, addressed four pedagogical values that emerged from the political demands of teaching for Black girls. These values—*instructor responsibility, student agency, collaboration, and reflexivity*—helped guide me in maintaining my relationship with students as one of *co-creation, co-witnessing, and co-conspiracy*.

On par with the motivations of Black Studies, I hoped that by introducing students to different ways of thinking about their relationship to higher education, I also prompted their investment in a university structure that dissolves the segregation of knowledge and uplifts, rather than denigrates, Black girls. Accordingly, I intend for this chapter to motivate GSIs to commit to teaching for Black girls and empower them to develop a pedagogical praxis that engages justice-oriented, rather than standards-driven, ways of teaching and learning. Teaching for Black girls does not necessitate a shared racial or gender identity among instructors and learners, but it does require both to unlearn and critically examine commonly held beliefs, norms, and goals (Hill, 2018). GSIs with a variety of intersecting identities and within every academic discipline can initiate a commitment to teach for Black girls by prioritizing *instructor responsibility, student agency, collaboration, and reflexivity* in their curricular design.

Instructor responsibility

Contract grading encompasses each of the four pedagogical values that I prioritize in teaching for Black girls, but it is especially indicative of the instructor's responsibility to students. As contract grading presents students with a tangible document with which they may use to hold the instructor accountable (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009), it helps initiate a co-conspiratorial relationship between the instructor and students. To me, co-conspiracy connotes a tone of covert action or concerted efforts to engage in illicit behavior. Drawing from a Black Girlhood Studies framework, I find it useful to think about the role of educators in this way as they embark on a controversial approach to learning that eschews the demands of neoliberal standardization. Engaging in conspiracy also

suggests an intimate level of trust between participants, as you might expect only those with whom you have built trust will endeavor to jointly participate in illicit behavior. Here, illicit behavior indicates concerted efforts to challenge the hegemonic status of white supremacy within higher education. Thus, curricular elements that highlight instructor responsibility prompt educators to model accountability to the class and individual learning and build trust between the instructor and students.

Detailing the process of creating a grading contract is beyond the scope of this chapter (see instead Inoue, 2019), but I provide here an outline of the grading contract that my students approved at the beginning of the course (Appendix B) and indicate in bold the changes that were made during the mid-quarter renegotiation process. Labor-based grading contracts do not dictate the types of course assignments that instructors must engage; rather, they prompt instructors to consider the time that students must dedicate to following the assignment guidelines (Inoue, 2019). In this way, assignments are not differently weighted as they are when grades are assigned. Upon receiving completed assignments, instructors should provide individualized feedback to help students advance their learning.

In a writing-based course such as mine, this may mean providing students with written and/or verbal feedback to assist them in strengthening how they articulate ideas, extend concepts, and synthesize what they have learned. For example, the grading contract in my course included two autoethnographic essay assignments that students could submit for my feedback. Whether or not they chose to submit for feedback, they had to submit revisions for one of the essays and indicate on their self-evaluations how their revisions demonstrated excellence. I provided suggested due dates for all assignments and indicated that students seeking instructor feedback needed to submit by a certain date but largely eliminated submission deadlines. Thus, I demonstrated to students that I trusted them to prioritize their work as they saw fit.

A second way I modeled accountability was by providing students with a list of teaching objectives or things that I would engage to facilitate student learning (Appendix A). My university requires that course syllabi include a list of student learning objectives that should clearly outline the knowledge or skills that students will acquire during the course. On my course syllabus, I positioned proposed student learning objectives alongside my goals for facilitating learning. This modeled to students that I, too, should be held accountable to course commitments.

Finally, taking responsibility for the course also meant acknowledging that students were in my care. In so doing, I remained conscious of their existence as more than bodies in a classroom (material or virtual) and attuned to the ways that they were engaging in the course. As the course took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and on the heels of a summer filled with white supremacist violence and anti-police violence uprisings, I was acutely aware of the additional stress that students were experiencing. To ground the course—and each class meeting—in student wellbeing, I facilitated mindfulness exercises and regularly asked students to reflect on how they were feeling as

they entered the class, how they felt during and after reading course texts, and how they were caring for themselves as the quarter progressed. As I demonstrate in Table 1, students indicated satisfaction with each of these curricular approaches, noting that they presented a meaningful intervention during a disruptive social climate.

Student agency

I aimed to empower students to exercise agency by encouraging them to take initiative in constructing individualized learning objectives and by determining the capacity to which they engaged course assignments. I deferred to students in determining course outcomes by constructing a syllabus that outlined concepts and themes related to the object of study but leaving it up to students to guide which material we spent the most time with or even eliminated from our agenda. Students approached their objective design with intentionality and indicated such goals as engaging critically with specific concepts or writers, improving written articulation, developing respectful critiques, constructing well-informed questions, and using African diasporic theory to deepen solidarity with Black communities. In their self-evaluations and final presentations, student returned to their objectives to demonstrate what they had learned in the course. While students could submit a written final project, they were also invited to develop a creative expression of their learning to present to the class. Examples of these presentations included interviews with family members, a memorial altar for writers with whose work we had engaged in the course, and songs and paintings inspired by specific course themes or concepts. The result was a beautiful tapestry, the diversity of which represented the many different ways that students chose to approach the course and demonstrate what they had learned.

My instruction of autoethnographic writing methods also allowed students to demonstrate agency in two significant ways. First, students were permitted to write a traditional essay investigating a course concept if they did not feel comfortable writing an autoethnographic piece. In this way, students were invited to exercise agency in choosing which assignment form was best for their learning. Second, students who did chose to engage autoethnographic writing were empowered to critically examine their lived experiences. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that presumes that the writer's investigations of their own experiences are just as informative as an investigation of someone else's. This method, then, places value on the writer's ability to turn inward and presents an opportunity for marginalized writers, in particular, to leverage personal encounters to respond to and resist racist, sexist, homophobic, classist etc. narratives and norms. Although it remains marginalized in academic research, autoethnography is a foundational method employed by Black women intellectuals who invite others to bear witness to their claims (Brown-Vincent, 2019). In designing a course assignment rooted in the history of witnessing, I embraced my role as a co-witness to students' creativity and genius while upholding the pedagogical value of student agency.

Collaboration

Each of the four pedagogical values highlighted counter those upheld by the neoliberal university, but collaboration is perhaps the most recognizable as it directly contradicts the hierarchy of knowledge and the demands of competition. I implemented collaborative course elements such as open class discussion, group presentation projects, and instructor office hours to motivate community-building. By facilitating dialogue about course texts, I encouraged students to collectively analyze arguments and assist each other in answering and posing questions about the readings and deciphering how they fit into the broader course themes. It was important that I demonstrate to students that I valued their commitment to inquiry rather than their ability to formulate coherent impromptu arguments. By modeling encouraging behavior such as praising students for asking interesting questions and thanking students for their contributions, I demonstrated the ways that I hoped students would participate in the space, thus establishing a collaborative cultural norm (Yosso, 2005). On several occasions, I reached out to students ahead of class and asked if they were comfortable sharing portions of their writing assignments with peers. Sharing their work allowed for students to learn from one another and participate in collective celebration of peer work.

Students were also required to complete a presentation in which groups of 4-5 peers facilitated class discussion of a course text. In my experience, the social dynamics of group work do not always benefit all students. Group work can instigate anxiety among students who are concerned with relying on others for a grade. My use of contract grading eliminated this anxiety, but in order to further encourage students to approach group work as an exercise in collaborative learning and view each other as co-creators of knowledge, I provided a self-evaluation rubric (Appendix C) that required each group member to consider their individual contributions to the presentation and the overall groups' demonstration of excellence. I provided students with a presentation format and, to accommodate students' varying time commitments and schedules, I permitted use of class time for presentation preparation. A similar concern for student schedules prompted me to offer flexible office hours so that students could meet with me as a group or individually to discuss the course or receive feedback on their writing or presentation plans. I implemented attendance to at least one 15-minute instructor meeting into the grading contract for students seeking to receive an A in the course to demonstrate respect for students' time and encourage interpersonal trust between students and myself.

Reflexivity

Bridging the four pedagogical values is the role of reflexivity throughout and following the close of the course. Reflexivity is a key tenet in feminist praxis, and Black Girlhood Studies scholars, specifically, emphasize its importance in ensuring continuous attention to the ever-shifting needs of Black girls (Smith, 2019; Smith, 2012). Reflexivity reinforces accountability to the collective and demands interrogation of our daily practices, beliefs, and behaviors (Butler, 2018). As I have detailed in previous sections, I incorporated self-evaluation rubrics into the grading contract. While grading rubrics are used to identify student proficiency in skills established by the instructor, self-evaluation rubrics facilitate student reflection on their accomplishments and identification of points for improvement. The assignment of these evaluation rubrics communicated to students that accountability to themselves and their community of peers takes precedence over their accountability to the instructor.

Instructors are ultimately accountable to the students whose learning they are responsible for facilitating. To this end, I engaged in a scaffolded process of reflexivity that included a formal post-quarter course evaluation and weekly memos about the successes and challenges of the course. Formal course evaluations are a normalized aspect of university teaching. Constructed by the university, evaluations permit students to communicate their (dis)satisfaction with instructors by ranking instructor effectiveness, though these evaluations often reveal gendered and racial biases (Goos & Salomons, 2014). Along with the grading contract re-negotiation process, I used feedback throughout the course to adjust course reading requirements, lecture delivery, and assignments. By recording weekly memos, I collected observations of the effectiveness of the course from my standpoint. Along with the formal course evaluation, I used the ideas that I recorded in my memos to revise the content of the course and gather ideas for adjustments to my general teaching practices. By utilizing my training in ethnographic methods to observe the successes and challenges of course design and implementation, I reinforced the necessary convergence of pedagogy and research within the research university. I indicate excerpts from student feedback in Table 1 to demonstrate that without explicit knowledge of my pedagogical values, students noticed and appreciated the way these values framed the course. The trust that we built in this course makes their constructive critiques and suggestions for improvement all the more meaningful, as I know that they recognize me as their co-creator, co-witness, and co-conspirator.

Table 1. *Four Pedagogical Values for Teaching for Black Girls.*

Pedagogical value	Curricular implementation	Student feedback
Instructor Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grading contracts • Instructor-facilitated course objectives • Principles of universal design • Mindfulness exercises 	<p>“... I appreciate that she gave us a space to reflect on how remote learning has impacted our lives personally and academically.”</p> <p>“She was patient and supportive throughout our individual experiences with the material and never was judgmental in how we related to what [was] presented.”</p> <p>“I hate remote learning but Theresa made all the difference. She did guided meditations during class and always had...pulse checks on the class as a whole.”</p>
Student Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-constructed learning objectives • Assignments that engage methods significant to non-dominant learning practices (ex: autoethnography) 	<p>“I really enjoyed the agency given to us students to have a say in our assignments and accommodations made for completing them.”</p> <p>“[She] empowered us to make this course about what we hoped to learn and achieve on an individual level. Creating our own learning objectives and working as a class to make edits to the syllabus so that we had more realistic expectations about our capacity as students was really cool and honestly, should be the future of teaching.”</p>
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open discussion • Non-competitive/celebrative atmosphere • Group assessments • Required office hours (individual meetings with instructor) 	<p>“[She] valued the connections with us, and wanted to make sure we all connected to the content as well as each other...”</p> <p>“Remote instruction made it harder to connect with peers at the beginning of the course...[however] I felt the most connected and engaged with classmates in this course than I have in past courses ...”</p>
Reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation rubrics³ • Teaching journals 	<p>Overall effectiveness: “I hope this class continues to be offered and I see it as critical for the retention of ABC [African, Black, Caribbean] students and creating a more understanding campus community.”</p> <p>Constructive feedback: “Maybe, for her next class, Theresa could include audio/visual content in her lectures to engage students with the topics she is talking about.”</p> <p>“The slides were dense at times and it was difficult to understand the complex theories that we were discussion [sic] without having taken previous classes.”</p>

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING FOR BLACK GIRLS IN STEM

My course was situated within a humanities department and my educational training in sociology may make the arguments and recommendations I presented in this chapter more legible to graduate students teaching within a humanities or social science department. As such, I feel compelled to provide additional consideration for GSIs in STEM. There are myriad academic initiatives that aim to integrate social justice commitments with these areas of study. The work of scholars within science and technology studies (STS), and feminist STS scholars specifically, has produced fascinating and pragmatic research on the inextricable link between socio-political facts and innovations in STEM.

3. Both self-evaluation rubrics that I used were modified versions of “Final Growth Reflection” and “Rubric for Rigor” written by Savannah Shange (personal communication, January 13, 2021).

Contemporary scholars such as Ruha Benjamin (2019), Safiya Noble (2018), Jenny Reardon (2017), Harriet A. Washington (2008, 2021), Kim TallBear (2013), Alondra Nelson (2016), and James Doucet-Battle (2021) have addressed topics in technology, engineering, medicine, and biology and genetics. Additionally, Black feminist astrophysicist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein has addressed the implicit connection between racial justice and science in her debut book, *The Disordered Cosmos: A Journey into Dark Matter, Spacetime, and Dreams Deferred* (2021).

Just as I designed my course by holding in mind the realities of being a Black girl in an institution that constantly calls for, or participates in, our exclusion (Morris, 2016), Prescod-Weinstein (2021) considers what it means to be a Black woman/femme/non-binary scientist and how scientific frameworks perpetuate racist, imperial, and sexual violence. She presents the following:

...[W]hat are the conditions we need so that a thirteen-year-old Black kid and their single mom can go look at a dark night sky, away from artificial lights, and know what they are seeing? What health care structures, what food and housing security are needed? What science communication structures? What community structures? What relationship to land do they need? And I do not mean to ask these questions on behalf of a child who has been marked as highly gifted and who is confidently planning to study astro/physics at Harvard or Caltech one day. I mean any thirteen-year-old Black kid. A Black feminist physics requires asking these questions and understand that there are a whole series of human-made structures that interfere with the night sky, not just passively, but actively, aggressively. (p. 260).

Prescod-Weinstein's reflections on who is permitted to participate in scientific inquiry forces an interrogation of what constitutes "physicist thought" and to which futures scientific studies will contribute. They detail the barriers they have encountered in the field as they have worked to heal from racial, sexual, and class trauma and sustained their passion for theoretical physics research. As I read Prescod-Weinstein's beautifully painful account, I found myself pondering how might their journey have been better supported if their teachers were committed to teaching for Black girls? What kind of liberatory possibilities become realities when scientists recognize the value in becoming co-creators, co-witnesses, and co-conspirators to all Black girls?

By drawing attention to the inequitable distribution of power—and with it financial and social resources—within academia, Prescod-Weinstein (2021) critiques the neoliberal university's role in harming communities and the environment. Further, they condemn the "power statement" that scientists, "the most economically powerful intellectuals in academic institutions," make "when they choose to ignore a politics of solidarity" (p. 266). As educators, scientists could commit to such a politic by cultivating a pedagogical praxis that takes as its center the wellbeing of marginalized students. This can and should extend beyond the classroom. Graduate students in STEM are well-positioned to challenge the deficit narratives that reinforce scientific exclusion and should advocate for current and future students within and beyond their campuses. It is important that graduate students who seek to pursue industry jobs or faculty

positions that do not require many classroom commitments understand that this power follows them into these spaces; and that as researchers they will continue to play a pivotal role in the way that science is communicated to students.

CONCLUSION

The pedagogical goals and skills of Black Studies cannot be bounded by the confines of a particular department or the campuses of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as their funding fluctuates with the tides of social interest. Students cannot rely solely on Black Studies programs and Black teachers for providing anti-racist and pro-Black pedagogy. The continued marginalization of Black Studies from academic prestige accompanies the racial disparities in the professoriate. In 2018, the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.) reported that Black men and women each account for only 2% of full-time tenure-track professors. Critical education scholars relate this contemporary trend to the active pushout of Black educators immediately following school integration, arguing that the neoliberal values upheld by the academic institution permit the continued exclusion of Black thought and Black people. By committing to teach for Black girls, graduate students in all fields may work to alter the future of academia and university learning.

In this chapter, I have posited teaching for Black girls as a pedagogical approach derived from Black Girlhood Studies. I offered curricular planning techniques and presented specific tools, including instructor learning objectives, student self-evaluation rubrics and a grading contract, that GSIs may implement in their courses. I also demonstrated how these tools and various assignments, such as autoethnographic essays and group presentations, work to instill within the course four pedagogical values: instructor responsibility, student agency, collaboration, and reflexivity. Finally, I linked these values to the necessary roles of educators as co-creators, co-witnesses, and co-conspirators and presented course feedback to demonstrate that students could identify these values without prior knowledge of them. Ultimately, I narrated my process of integrating the lessons I have learned in cultivating my Black Studies mind to cultivate a cohesive pedagogical praxis that uplifts the students most vulnerable to the inequities and violences imposed by the neoliberal university.

The normalization of the pedagogical values and practices shared here will also hopefully help to shift the ways that teaching is recognized in the research university and in graduate programs and the standards of teaching writ large. As more graduate students, specifically, engage these practices and demonstrate their effectiveness in fostering holistic student success, the standards for teaching in higher education will also shift. Graduate students, as both current instructors and future faculty, who implement these values into course design and teaching practices and make them the basis of their pedagogical praxis will model to students liberatory ways of knowing and learning, thus training the next generation of researchers and educators to maintain this ethos. As graduate

students mentor their peers and demand better from their faculty leaders, they will also shift the culture of the university and the priorities of higher education.

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