

Honoring the OGs Centering Black Educators as Theorists in Teacher Education

KISHA PORCHER

University of Delaware

SHAMAINE BERTRAND

The College of New Jersey

SITTING AT THE FEET OF DR. CHRISTINE KING-FARRIS and Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks, as an undergraduate, double majoring in English and secondary education at Spelman College, was an honor. Spelman College is a Historically Black College that prepares some of the most brilliant Black women to change the world. What made Spelman College magical were the professors such as Dr. Christine King-Farris and Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks. Both women are civil rights pioneers. However, if not a student in the education program at Spelman College, one would not know of their greatness.

There are two stories that stick out to me during my time as a student at Spelman College. First, Dr. King-Farris shared with us intimate details of her brother Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She gave us a glimpse of not just his activism, but also what it was like to be his big sister. For example, she shared the story of when Mahalia Jackson, a famous Black gospel singer and activist, came to their house to visit Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She knew who Mahalia was, but she couldn't believe she was coming to visit her brother.

She yelled through the house, "Mahalia is here! Mahalia is here!"

A lot of folx wanted to be connected to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. because of his work on civil rights. But for Dr. Christine King-Farris, he was still her little brother. To have access to those intimate details of the giants in the Black community who shared space with the King family is an honor.

Furthermore, I could never forget Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks. Her swag was impeccable even at 70+ years old and she expected the same of students. She would always say, "Walk with a purpose Ms. Woods (maiden name)! Don't drag your feet! I can't stand people who drag their feet!" She told our class a cardinal rule: "Smell good when you go to student teaching! Don't lean over students stinking! Kids won't want to be bothered with you!"

The advice that I carry with me often that she taught me is,

Don't ever embarrass children. Don't take their notes when they are writing back and forth in class. They have enough respect for you not to talk while you are talking. Don't argue with children and embarrass them in front of their peers. Always pull them in the hallway, and have a conversation with them. Respect their humanity. You are the adult in the room!

The wisdom and personal stories that Dr. King-Farris and Dr. Middlebrooks shared with me as a preservice teacher provided foundational knowledge about the importance of having a strong Black disposition and the importance of positive relationships with Black students. It is imperative that we elevate our personal stories as Black folx in our classrooms, so that students know our histories, ways of being, and ways of knowing. I will forever carry them with me.

Dr. B.

I did not take the traditional teacher education route because I did not know that I wanted to be a teacher until after I finished my bachelor's degree. A couple of years later, I completed a Master of Education and initial teacher licensure program. Then a few years after teaching, I began a Ph.D. program. Prior to getting accepted into the Ph.D. program, all applicants had to participate in an admissions interview. I remember sitting in the lobby and a Black woman walked out of the restroom and said,

"Hello, how are you?"

I responded, "I'm good thank you! How about you?"

She smiled and responded, "I am well, thank you."

Shortly after, I was greeted by that same Black woman. She shared her name and welcomed me to follow her to the interview room. This woman was Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley. She had on the baddest suit and exuded boss energy. By no means did Dr. Haley appear to be someone that you would play with; she had a certain level of sophistication yet did not appear to be unapproachable. There was a warmth to her and a Godly spirit that immediately connected to mine. She along with her colleagues asked me questions about my future and why I wanted to gain admission into the program. I remember during each response she would nod while I was talking and after I completed my sentences she would affirm my responses. I left the interview uncertain about whether I got into the program; however, I was thankful for the encounter that I had with Dr. Haley. I was inspired by seeing a Black woman in academia being her unapologetic self. That was not my last time seeing Dr. Haley. In fact, I got accepted into the Ph.D. program and she became my advisor, dissertation chair, and professor.

Dr. Haley always reminded me that all roads lead to dissertation. This was her way of telling me that I needed to be focused and strategic when navigating the program so that I could graduate and do the work that I was called to do in academia. She sacrificed her time to give me advice on the academic application process. When I started getting calls for interviews, she walked me through what I needed to say and to make sure I was prepared for the campus visit and interview. When it was finally time to defend my dissertation, Dr. Haley rehearsed with me and made sure that I was fully prepared. After I finished presenting and was told that I passed the

dissertation process, Dr. Haley held both of my hands and told me, “You are standing on the shoulders of giants and now you must allow someone to stand on your shoulders.” The support, love, sacrifice, encouragement, and realness that Dr. Haley extended was something that only a Black woman OG and elder could provide.

OG most commonly stands for Original Gangsta, but culturally and connotatively it has long moved beyond its literal meaning. In Black communities, it often refers to someone who has been around a long time (respected elder or seasoned saint), a person who is authentic and foundational to the Black community, and someone who has established something within the community. In the Black community, when we refer to someone as an OG, it establishes and signals credibility. We refer to our ancestors and elders here as OGs, under which title they are greatly respected and revered

Receiving intimate wisdom like this doesn't just happen for Black students in K-12 classrooms, and especially not in teacher education programs. Very rarely are we exposed to the brilliance and excellence of our OGs in Black education. More particularly, having OGs at our fingertips as our teacher educators was a privilege. Their wisdom, knowledge, and mere presence were essential to Dr. P.'s growth as a preservice teacher, and Dr. B.'s growth as a doctoral student. Furthermore, their knowledge, activism, and curricular practices, along with other OGs should be foundational knowledge in teacher education, to prepare students to disrupt and dismantle anti-Blackness in education writ large.

Centering Blackness in Teacher Education

Centering Blackness in teacher education is essential to disrupting whiteness that is prevalent in education (K-16) and miseducates all children (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Garvey (1921) posed the important question, “How many of us know ourselves?” (BlackPast, 2011 as cited in Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Many Black folx do not know ourselves due to the history of anti-Blackness in this country, and especially in the U.S. education system.

Anti-Blackness is an antagonistic relationship between Blackness and humanity (Dumas & ross, 2016). It is socially constructed to render Black people as inhumane, disposable, and inherently problematic (Warren & Coles, 2020). Black people are denied the opportunity to know themselves, their histories, heritage, former languages, names, birthdates, families, drums, gods—anything that secured their identity, essence, and African being (Wynter-Hoyte, 2020). Even seventy years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), anti-Blackness persists within U.S. curricula through the systemic erasure and misrepresentation of Black life and knowledge (Bertrand, 2025). Historically, schools have excluded curricular content that allows Black children to see themselves as human, brilliant, and essential (Bertrand, 2023; Cooper, 2003; Love, 2019). This curricular void is not accidental but rather reflects what Jenkins (2021) describes as spatial imaginary of anti-Blackness that constructs Blackness as deficit, non-human, or placeless.

Yet anti-Blackness in education is not sustained solely through the absence or distortion of Black content. It operates through multiple dimensions of curricula that function simultaneously: the formal curriculum (what is assigned and required), the taught curriculum (how instructors frame and model knowledge), the learned curriculum (what students internalize about race, Blackness, and teaching), and the hidden curriculum (the unwritten, unintended, unofficial, and implicit norms that communicate whose knowledge is legitimate, rigorous, and

foundational) (Cuban, 1992; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1968).

Within the formal curriculum of teacher education programs, whiteness often remains foundational, with Black scholarship positioned as supplemental, elective, or diversity-oriented rather than theoretical and generative (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Textbooks and classroom materials continue to center whiteness as the norm, positioning Blackness as problematic or peripheral (Woodson, 2017). The absence of Black educational history and Black scholarship in curricula and textbooks (Muhammad et al., 2020) signals to teacher candidates that Black knowledge is additive rather than epistemologically central. The taught curriculum reinforces this hierarchy when instructors present white ways of knowing, being, and epistemologies as the only true form of knowledge while treating Black perspectives as situational or objective. Through this enactment, preservice teachers often learn implicitly that Blackness is a topic rather than a framework.

The learned curriculum includes internalized deficit ways of knowing, seeing, and teaching Black students; narrow understandings of Black language, culture, and history; and limited exposure to Black traditions. Language policing and the enforcement of white mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020), respectability politics demanding Black assimilation (Baker-Bell, 2020; Porcher, 2021), and the centering of white texts, white authors, white epistemologies as “the standard” (Porcher, 2021) for what must be learned and what constitutes professionalism further solidifies these norms. Simultaneously, the hidden curriculum disciplines emotional tone, critique, and expressive practices that deviate from white normative standards, making anti-Blackness acceptable (Cuban, 1992). As Mathias and Mackey (2016) argued, teacher education programs recycle and retain the hegemony of whiteness through faculty, students, and curricula, enforcing pedagogies that fail to affirm Black students' identities or cultivate intellectual agency.

Addressing anti-Black curriculum solely at the K-12 level risks patchwork reform that leaves intact the epistemological foundations shaping teachers' practice. Transforming isolated lesson plans or adding representative texts cannot fully disrupt anti-Blackness if educators have been prepared within their teacher education programs to normalize whiteness as the standard of knowledge and professional practice. Teacher education represents a critical intervention point. This is why we focus on centering Blackness in teacher education and within this curriculum design itself.

Fanon (1967) posed the questions, “Who am I? Am I who I say I am? And am I all I ought to be?” Without the centering of Blackness in education spaces, it is challenging for both Black students and educators to answer these questions. More specifically, the call from Black scholars (Asante, 1991; Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Du Bois, 1915; Kirkland, 2021; Porcher, 2020) to recenter Black perspectives, ways of being, knowing, learning and teaching, guided us to propose curriculum within teacher education (specifically English and Social Studies Education) that centers Black ancestors, elders, educators, activists and/or folx as theorists and knowledge bearers in teacher education programs. Centering Blackness is aligned to our rich history of educators in the Black community.

Mead (2001) highlights that during the three decades after emancipation and the first six decades of the 20th century, teaching was one of the few occupations open to college-educated Black folx. One of the primary leadership roles available to Black women was a teacher in their community. More specifically, Black teachers were employed in segregated states where there were larger numbers of Black students (Foster, 1997). With the high numbers of Black folx in education, there is a lack of research on the work and impact of these Black teachers.

The wisdom, experiences, and work of our ancestors, elders, educators, and activists demonstrate Black cultural and educational principles that have been passed down through generations. These principles are effective for teaching Black students and preparing educators. Delpit (1997, as cited in Foster, 1997) argues that we must look at the past through new eyes in order to determine what we must learn to provide an excellent education for Black children. Dillard (2022) encourages us to re(member) as a spiritual experience, who we are—our history, culture, and contributions—that honors the history of Black life, resistance, knowledge, and culture. These principles were instilled in us by Dr. King-Farris, Dr. Middlebrooks, Dr. Haley, and so many more Black folx.

This curricular choice is an act of resistance to existing hegemony (hooks, 1992). This act of resistance is an example of our unapologetic love for Blackness. This article creates a space for Black folx (educators and students) to know themselves and their histories, be empowered to love Blackness by developing positive Black racial identities (Foster, 1997; Porcher, 2024), and for white students to learn the truth and not be educated in the social construct and harm of white superiority (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). More specifically, utilizing the life history and curricular approaches of our Black OG educators, has the power to provide a Blackprint of how we can best educate Black students (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Foster, 1997; Ravitch, 2000). This curricular work and disruption is guided by the Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher 2023; Porcher & Bertrand, 2023).

Collective Black Feminist Currere

Our approach to theorizing curriculum that centers Blackness in teacher education is grounded in collective Black Feminist currere (McNair-Lee, 2025). Currere is an autobiographical reflection of one's educational encounters and lived experiences (McNair-Lee, 2025; Moore, 2013). Currere provides a deeper understanding of lived curricular experiences through a recursive process of remembering the past, imagining the future, and then analyzing emergent themes (Pinar, 2004). At the same time, we extend currere through the concept of curriculum of stay, which situates curriculum as a praxis of endurance and belonging, particularly in spaces such as teacher education where Black women educators have been historically marginalized as educational theorists. Rather than framing curriculum solely as becoming, curriculum of stay foregrounds persistence, relationality, and rootedness in the face of anti-Blackness (McNair-Lee, 2025).

Importantly, currere disrupts dominant principles and narratives within curriculum that are predetermined and established by institutions (Le Grange, 2021; Roofe, 2018; Tyler, 1949). It resists linear models of learning by positioning learning as ongoing, reflective, and communal; asking how educational experiences shape not only the individual but also their communities (McNair-Lee, 2025). Collective Black Feminist currere is rooted in the work of Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 1996), which recognizes Black women as knowledge producers whose lived experiences, relational histories, and intellectual labor, generate theory. We center our lived experiences as Black women students and educators. Furthermore, we propose Black women educators as educational theorists whose work, and knowledge must be foregrounded in teacher education (McNair-Lee, 2023).

Currere is traditionally framed by four stages of autobiographical reflection:

- Regressive: Looking back at past experiences that shaped who you are (especially as a learner and teacher);
- Progressive: Looking forward to hopes, dreams, and possibilities for the future;
- Analytical: Examining the present moment, making sense of tensions between past and future, and analyzing influences; and
- Synthetical: Bringing together past, present, and future into a more integrated understanding of self and curriculum (Pinar, 1994).

In theorizing curriculum through collective Black Feminist currere, we engage in these stages while also extending them. In practice, specifically in theorizing currere curriculum, we have reflected on our own educational journeys in teacher education (regressive stage). We open with a regressive moment by reflecting on our own educational journeys in teacher education; specifically, experiencing Black teacher educators within our programs yet not seeing them represented as foundational curriculum theorists.

We connect these reflections to our personal histories as former K-12 educators and now teacher educators. Our engagement with the progressive stage considers the persistence of anti-Blackness in teacher education and imagines possibilities for centering Black women theorists, not merely practitioners. In the sections that follow, we engage in the analytical and synthetical stages by offering a framework to center Blackness in teacher education through our OGs; those whose intellectual, relational, and communal labor has long shaped curriculum, even when unacknowledged.

More specifically, we focus on two Black educators, Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark, who we strongly believe should be taught as educational theorists for best practices to prepare preservice teachers to teach Black students. Their work, and the work of Black educators are imperative, as Black folx have always valued literacy and many learned to read despite being forbidden to (Foster, 1997). Organizationally, we highlight the Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) that grounds our work, providing background history of each Black woman, history of their time as Black educators, their activism, and their curricular practices. We conclude with what the OGs left us with that can be used in teacher education right now.

Theoretical Framework

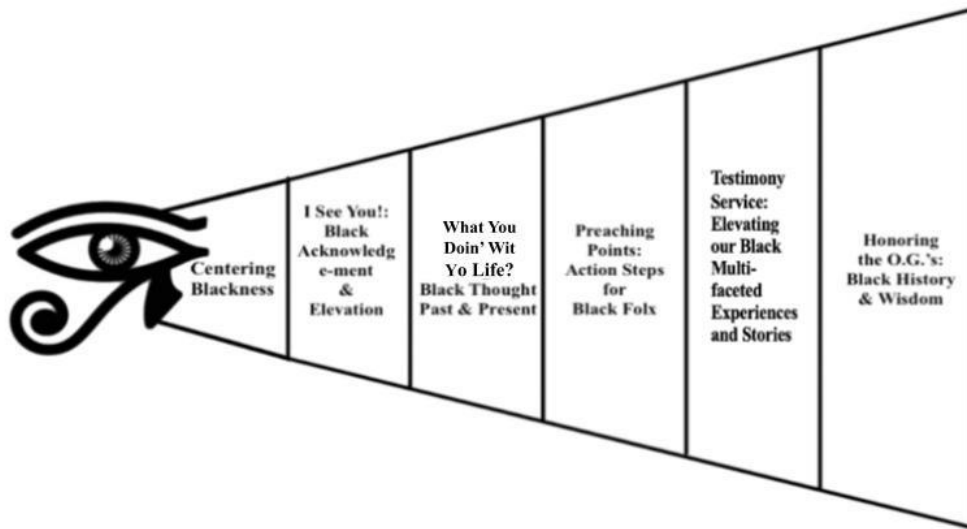
The Black Gaze Framework (BGF) is a theoretical and practical model that centers Blackness in teacher education by shifting the focus from the white gaze to the Black gaze (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Porcher & Bertrand, 2023). BGF insists on the specificity of the Black, a focus that refuses the erasure of Black experiences within broader “people of color” narratives (Dumas & ross, 2016). The framework comprises of five tenets:

- Honoring the O.G.s: Black History & Wisdom;
- Testimony Service: Elevating our Black Multifaceted Experiences and Stories;
- Preaching Points: Action Steps for Black Folx;
- What You Doin’ Wit Yo’ Life?: Black Thought Past & Present; and
- I See You!: Black Acknowledgement & Elevation (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Porcher &

Bertrand, 2023) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Black Gaze Framework



While BGF emerged from teacher education, it is not discipline-bound. Rather, it offers an adaptable, cross-curricular framework that can inform all areas of educational practice by providing a liberatory model for reimagining pedagogy, curriculum, and learning spaces through a lens of Black history, love, wisdom, and brilliance (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023).

There is an overwhelming presence of theories created by white men and Eurocentric approaches to teaching and learning in teacher education programs (Muhammad et al., 2020). The limited experiences of Blackness are often presented in surface level diversity and multicultural literature courses. BGF is rooted in the work of the OG, Morrison (1993), who urged us to shift from the white gaze. The future of Black education research and practice hinges on documenting barriers to Black teacher and student school success and identifying promising pathways to actively dismantle such barriers (Warren & Coles, 2020).

BGF is a promising pathway for actively disrupting anti-Blackness in teacher education. BGF builds upon Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black StoryWork, and BlackCrit that conceptualizes the experiences of Black people. CRT has four tenets:

- race as a normal fact of daily life,
- theory of interest convergence,
- historical contexts and
- counter-narratives (Taylor, 2009).

CRT highlights the importance of counter-narrative storytelling, through the lived experiences of

minoritized groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and it is a “tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29).

BGF leans upon elevating the stories of Black folx through counter storytelling; more specifically, Black Story Work (Coles, 2023). Coles (2023) defines Black Story Work as the individual or collective stories that emerge from the lived experiences of Black people and communities. It uses Black knowledge(s) as a tool to extend and author oneself beyond the conditions of anti-Blackness. Black Story Work is a direct response to overcome society’s “refusal to acknowledge Black peoples as human, and worthy of regard, recognition, and resources” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p.8). As Muhammad (2020) argues, Black people do not wish to merely exist in this country but to exert our presence and make our mark on history by sharing, elevating, and amplifying our own narratives. BGF encourages Black folx to share their multifaceted stories of love, pain, joy, genius, brilliance, culture, experiences of social constructs, hope, and liberation in education. Collective Black Feminist currere deepens BGF by examining how Black educators’ pasts, presents, and imagined futures actively shape curriculum, reframing it as lived, embodied, and collectively theorized through Black women’s experiences. By centering relational histories, endurance, and belonging as forms of curricular knowledge, it moves counter-storytelling beyond narrative expression into curriculum theorizing.

Dumas and ross (2016) argue that CRT cannot fully employ the counter-narratives and/or Black Story Work of Black peoples’ experiences of structural and cultural racism, because CRT on its own does not capture how anti-Blackness constructs Black subjects. It aggregates the experiences of Black people into the experiences of people of color. This act has made Black people unnamed, and our experiences denied and forsaken (Kirkland, 2021; Noguera, 2003). Kirkland (2021) argues, the opposition to whiteness requires people of color to work together but the cost of this collective action has been the forced abandonment of our unique differences and histories. Furthermore, the equity, diversity, and inclusion work that typically focuses on ensuring white people understand their role in racism, sidelines Blackness, and thereby centers whiteness yet again. Black people require different treatments for our challenges (Kirkland, 2021) and specific frameworks to elevate our experiences and dismantle anti-Blackness. Many of us have not considered who we are outside of the standard of whiteness, and BGF provides the space for us to do so.

The framings of BlackCrit are:

- anti-Blackness as endemic to all dimensions of human life;
- Blackness existing in tension with the “neoliberal-multicultural imagination”;
- creating space for Black liberatory fantasy; and
- resisting revisionist history that erases whites from a history of racial dominance (Dumas & ross, 2016).

BlackCrit emphasizes the specificity of Blackness and loving Blackness. BGF builds upon BlackCrit and CRT which conceptualizes the experiences of Black people. BGF is an act of political resistance of loving Blackness (hooks, 1992) to counteract the unrelenting attacks on Blackness (Dumas & ross, 2016). Many Black theories focus only on critically theorizing race, which is imperative; however, we focus on centering Blackness, amplifying the voices and experiences of Black people, and offering next steps to disrupt anti-Blackness.

BGF is a pathway for engaging self and historical identity while moving toward action that elevates those who have long centered Blackness in their work. This framework answers

Kirkland's (2021) call for a pedagogy for Black people, rooted in freedom, committed to developing consciousness, and grounded in valuing Black life, and builds upon BlackCrit and Critical Race Theory to move toward concrete practices that center Blackness and liberation. Grounded in an unwavering love for Blackness that resists ongoing violence (Dumas & ross, 2016), this article focuses specifically on Tenet One of BGF: Honoring the O.G.s.

Tenet One: Honoring the OGs: Black History & Wisdom

Black OGs paved the way for the ongoing liberation of Black folx. We recognize and honor those who have come before us. Our elders and ancestors were on this journey of liberation longer and understand what to expect, especially in the face of anti-Blackness. They have done the work for us to do the work, especially in education. By honoring the OGs we elevate and study their Blackprints (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) for Black liberation in teacher education. This tenet is essential because in most teacher education programs and K-12 education, Black students are denied the histories of Black authors, advocates, educators, and activists who have come before us in content knowledge. We focus specifically on English and Social Studies education. This tenet allows teacher educators and students to reflect, research, and respond by sharing those Black people who have paved the way or made strong contributions in education, specifically curricular practices.

Teacher educators should use texts (widely defined) that are written by OGs, watch speeches or interviews featuring OGs, and/or evoke the presence of an OG in teacher education courses. One area that is most important, is studying the curricular practices of these OGs as models to prepare students to effectively center Blackness in their courses. Through the lens of currere curriculum, this is not simply an additive practice; it is regressive. For example, engaging the words and works of OGs invites students to look back and situate themselves within historical, intellectual, and cultural lineages of Black educational thought. Rather than beginning curriculum with dominant, institutionally sanctioned theorists, teacher educators can prompt students to reflect on whose knowledge has shaped the field and whose has been omitted. OGs function as anchors of collective memory and intellectual inheritance.

By returning to the sources (Wilson, 2023), the foundational pedagogical and curricular practices of Black educators, we provide a Blackprint (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) for Black educators (and others who recognize the necessity of centering Blackness in teacher education) to reimagine, enact, and sustain pedagogical and curricular practices shaped through the Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Wilson, 2023). While educational theorists are defined as someone who develops ideas about the explanation of events (Cambridge Dictionary, 2026), we define theorists as pillars and giants in the Black community who have made an impact in their selected career fields, more specifically, in education. We unapologetically disrupt dominant assumptions about who counts as a knowledge bearers in teacher education. These OGs centered Blackness in their classrooms and curricular practices, disrupted anti-Blackness, and engaged in practices that have the power to free Black folx.

Below are examples of Black OGs, Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark, who should be taught as educational theorists in teacher education curriculum, along with their pedagogical and curricular practices as models for centering Blackness in teacher education.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

Figure 2

Photograph of Alice Dunbar-Nelson in a Hat



Note. From [Alice Dunbar Nelson Photography] Paul Laurence Dunbar Gallery, 2022, Ohio History Connection P70, https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/dunbar_photos/26/

Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar-Nelson (Figure 2) was born on July 19, 1875, in New Orleans to Patricia Wright, a washerwoman and formerly enslaved woman (National Park Service, 2021). She graduated from Straight University, now Dillard University, in 1892 and became a prolific poet, critic, journalist, activist, and educator. Dunbar's writing spanned poetry, essays, and newspaper columns (Erickson, 2024; National Park Service, 2021). Her literary career began with the publication of *Violets and Other Tales* in 1895 (Figure 3), which drew the attention of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and led to their marriage in 1898 following a courtship by letter (*Violets and Other Tales*, 1895/2017)

Figure 3

Violets and Other Tales Cover Page



Note. From *Violets and other tales*, by Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, 1895, Daniel Murray Collection (Library of Congress), <https://lccn.loc.gov/95233207>

Dunbar-Nelson endured four years of abuse during the marriage and left Dunbar after an assault in 1906. She later relocated to Wilmington, Delaware, where she continued her intellectual and activist work (National Park Service, 2021). She married twice more, maintained relationships with women, and died of heart disease in Philadelphia on December 18, 1935. Her ashes were scattered in the Delaware River (National Park Service, 2021).

History as a Black Educator

Alice Dunbar-Nelson was widely recognized as an outstanding English teacher who cultivated in her students a love of learning, academic excellence, and pride in Black identity. After graduating from Straight University, she began teaching in the city schools of New Orleans, Louisiana (National Park Service, 2021). She was committed to helping her students understand both their ability to compete with white students and the importance of promoting positive representations of Black people in the United States (Gibson, 1997). In 1902, she began teaching at Howard High School (Figure 4) in Wilmington, Delaware, where she served for 18 years, including as head of the English Department (University of Delaware, 2023). In addition to her secondary teaching, she also worked as a teacher educator, directing and teaching summer sessions for Black teachers at Delaware State College for seven years (Gibson, 1996).

Figure 4
Howard High School



Note: From the new Howard High School building, circa 1930, Delaware Historical Society, <https://library.udel.edu/residency/gallery/>

Activism

Alice Dunbar-Nelson served as secretary of the Peace Committee of the American Friends Service Committee and was deeply engaged in social and political activism. In September 1920, she was dismissed from her position as head of the English Department at Howard High School by Principal Ray Wooten after attending Social Justice Day in Marion, Ohio. Principal Ray Wooten cited “political activity and incompatibility,” and the central administration upheld his decision (Gibson, 1997). Beyond the classroom, Dunbar-Nelson worked to secure women’s suffrage, advocated for anti-lynching legislation, and advanced civil rights, serving as a field organizer for the women’s suffrage movement and on Delaware’s State Republican Committee. In 1924, she actively supported the passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill then under consideration in Congress (The Rosenbach, 2010).

Curricular Practices

In Alice Dunbar Nelson’s papers, there are detailed outlines of her courses of study for first, second, and third year English courses at Howard High School (see Figure 5). For example: First year, first term students studied the following classics: Irving’s *Sketch Book*, Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*, and Kingsley’s *Old Testament Narratives*. For rhetoric, Howard High freshmen studied Scott and Denney’s *Elementary Composition*. Poems freshmen memorized included Lincoln’s Gettysburg speech; Wordsworth’s *Sonnet on Milton*; “The Holy Supper” from *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, “He Prayeth Well” from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Up From Slavery*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Those venerated classical works were followed in subsequent years by *The Odyssey*, *Lady of the Lake*, *Idylls of the King*, *Twelfth Night*, *As you Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, *Beowulf* (in translation), and *Macbeth*; then works by Spenser, Chaucer,

Milton, and Macaulay. (Gibson, 1997)

As stated above, Dunbar-Nelson ensured that her students would be able to compete with white students. So the texts selected for students to read are from the white gaze, and considered the ‘literary canon.’ However, Dunbar-Nelson still exposed students to Blackness, Black scholars, and Black texts. One of the most renowned legacies of Howard High School—and of Dunbar-Nelson’s leadership as head of the English Department—was its successful integration of classical educational objectives with the study and appreciation of works by and about Black people across the curriculum. For example, in *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920), Dunbar-Nelson provides a variety of poetic and prose selections. In the foreword of *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920) by Leslie Pinckney Hill (president of Cheyney University), he states:

Colored boys and girls have not been reading about heroic black warriors and statesmen, martyrs and saints. They do not ponder enough the pages of the black man's romance written by the black novelist. They have not stored their minds with the poetry that has sung its way out of the black man's sorrow and travail and made a place for itself among the lasting monuments of the world's music (Gibson, 1997, Alice Dunbar Nelson Section, para 21).

Dunbar-Nelson's *Speaker* was one of her successes in addressing the issue of a classical education while honoring the importance of centering Blackness. This challenge that Dunbar-Nelson had as a Black educator, is still one that is prevalent in contemporary curriculum for Black students. Whiteness (people, scholars, texts, ways of being, ways of learning, and ways of teaching) are centered in curricular practices. Furthermore, white ways of being, learning and teaching are centered as the standard for academic excellence (Porcher, 2023). Black educators have consistently had to create ways to incorporate Black ways of being, learning, and teaching into their curricular practices; even when those approaches were not recognized as academic excellence or deemed worthy of inclusion in formal curricula. In addition to the ‘literary canon’ and works of Black people, Dunbar-Nelson also required her students to be knowledgeable of current affairs and to participate in oratorical contests. Not only did she prepare her students to think critically and to speak in an articulate manner, but she also was one of the teachers who made famous the programs and graduation celebrations for which Howard High was renowned for. While Black language (Baker-Bell, 2020) is important to Black culture and ways of speaking, when Dunbar-Nelson was an educator, Black students were taught to be “articulate” which is also a white way of being. Black language was not appreciated or not seen as legitimate language.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson should be understood as a theorist in teacher education curriculum because her life and work model a pedagogy rooted in Black intellectual excellence, literary rigor, and social responsibility. As a teacher, writer, poet, and activist, she demonstrated how curriculum can simultaneously cultivate academic rigor, cultural pride, and critical consciousness. When preservice teachers encounter Dunbar-Nelson’s work as foundational, not supplemental, they gain models of how to design classrooms where Black histories, literatures, and ways of knowing are central rather than peripheral. This benefits Black students who see their identities and intellectual inheritances affirmed, and it benefits all students by expanding whose knowledge is recognized as authoritative. Her curricular practices offer guideposts for

teacher preparation, while her poetry and prose can serve as core texts in the ELA classroom, shifting the center of literary study away from a white-dominant canon and toward a Black literary and pedagogical tradition that has always been rigorous, expansive, and transformative.

Figure 5

Alice Dunbar-Nelson's English Curriculum at Howard High School

COURSE OF STUDY		
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH		HOWARD HIGH SCHOOL
Wilmington, Del.		
FIRST TERM, FIRST YEAR.		
Classics:	Irving's Sketch Book,	English Sketches
	Lowell's Vision of Sir Launfal	
	Coleridge's Ancient Mariner	
	Kingsley's Old Testament Narratives	
Rhetoric	Scott and Denney's Elementary Composition	
	Part I to Page 87	
	Narration PP 129 to 176 (Selected)	
Poetry to be memorized	Lincoln's Gettysburg Speech	
	Wordsworth's Sonnet on Milton	
	Advice of Polonius to Laertes	
	June Passage, "Better to meek" "The Holy Supper" from The Vision of Sir Launfal.	
	"He prayeth well" from The Ancient Mariner	
	The Lark Song, from Cymbeline	
	Shakespeare's Epitaph from Stratford on Avon.	
Themes.	Based on Classics Imitation of "A Country Church" from Irving. Imitation of The Stage Coach, etc.	
	Selected narratives from Rhetoric.	
	Oral narratives	
	Themes based on stories of Samson and Ruth.	
Required Reading	Pilgrim's Progress	Tom Brown's School Days
	Up from Slavery	Treasure Island
	Robinson Crusoe	Uncle Tom's Cabin
	Any others selected by pupil.	
	The above insisted upon.	
Current Events throughout the year.		

Note. From MSS 0113 Alice Dunbar-Nelson papers, <https://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/24346> [Fair Use and Education Use]

Septima Poinsette Clark

Septima Poinsette Clark was born on May 3, 1898, and was raised in Charleston, South Carolina, as the second of eight children to a mother described as “fiercely proud” and a father who was gentle and tolerant (SNCC Digital, n.d.). Although her parents had limited formal schooling—her father having been formerly enslaved on the Poinsette Plantation and her mother educated in Haiti—they deeply valued education and ensured she attended quality schools, including Avery Normal School, from which she graduated in 1916 after passing the teacher’s examination (SNCC Digital, n.d.). In 1920, she married Nerie Clark; after his death five years later, she moved to Columbia, South Carolina, where she continued teaching and pursued further education during the summers. In 1937, she studied under W.E.B. DuBois at Atlanta University, later earning a B.A. from Benedict College in 1942 and an M.A. from Hampton University in 1946. Clark died at the age of 89 on Johns Island on December 15, 1987 (SNCC Digital, n.d.).

History as a Black Educator

Clark was a community teacher, activist, and human rights leader who viewed education as a tool for Black liberation and advancement (Hall et al., 2010). Because Black teachers were initially barred from teaching in much of South Carolina, she earned her license and began teaching on Johns Island, one of the few places where Black educators were permitted to work (see Figure 6). After joining the NAACP, Clark returned to Charleston and organized Black students at Avery Normal School in 1917 to collect petition signatures demanding that Black teachers be allowed to teach in the city's public schools (Foster, 1997; Lake, 2013). Throughout her career, including her work in Columbia at Booker T. Washington High School and her later return to Charleston, Clark used education and activism to help Black communities claim their rights and transform their lives (Lake, 2013).

Figure 6

Septima Clark at First Teaching Job on Johns Island, SC (1919)



Note: From Education: Septima Poinsette Finds Her Calling, 1912-1919, 1919, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. <https://discovering.charleston.edu/files/show/514>

Activism

Clark dedicated decades to Black women's organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), mentoring Black girls, and improving the lives of Black South Carolinians (Lake, 2013). As a leader in the Charleston NAACP, she helped secure the hiring of

Black teachers and principals in Black public schools and participated in a class action lawsuit that achieved pay equity between Black and white teachers in South Carolina (Charron, 2012; Hall et al., 2010; Lake, 2013). After 40 years of teaching, her contract was not renewed in 1956 because she refused to resign from the NAACP, as required by a state law banning public employees from membership (Lake, 2013). Undeterred, Clark worked with civil rights leaders to establish Citizenship Schools beginning on Johns Island in 1957, a literacy initiative, first sponsored by the Highlander Folk School and later the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), that used accessible, community-centered materials such as the Citizenship School Reading Booklet. During an oral history interview with Clark (July 30, 1976), she shared,

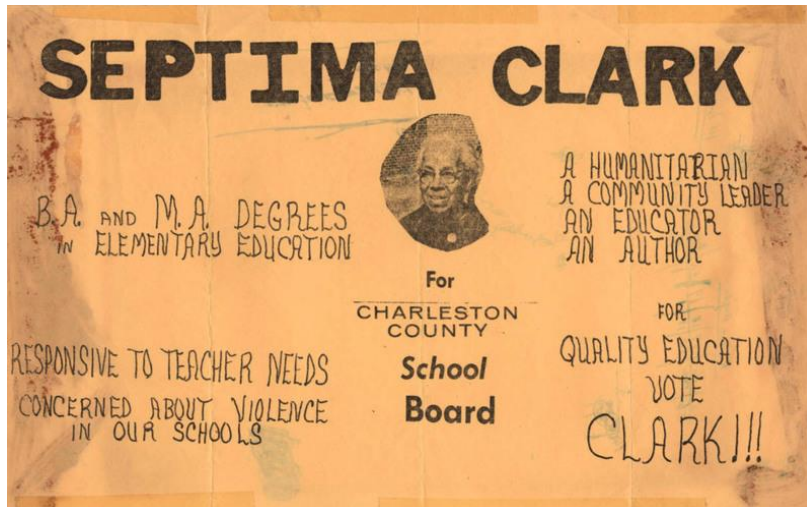
I started working at the Highlander Folk School in 1954, and we had a court case in 1959. I was arrested, and padlocks were put on the doors at Highlander Folk School. And Dr. King said that he would like to have the program that we started at Highlander come to Atlanta. So I was sent to Atlanta to carry out the citizenship education program, a program designed to eliminate illiteracy and get people ready to register and vote. When Dr. King took it over, we worked at a center in Liberty County, Georgia, a center that was owned by the American Missionary Association (Clark, 1976, Oral History Interview, para. 2).

After the Highlander Folk School was closed, funding from the Marshall Field Foundation was transferred to the SCLC, where Clark continued leading the Citizenship Education program. Her leadership in this work earned recognition from numerous civil rights leaders and public officials, including former President Gerald Ford (Clark, 1976).

In 1970, Clark retired from the SCLC but remained active in political and community advocacy, focusing on women's rights, the needs of African American children, and elder care (Hall et al., 2010). In 1972, she was elected to the Charleston County School Board, becoming its first woman and first Black member (see Figure 7). She also served on the local Advisory Council on Aging and collaborated with clubwomen to establish a daycare center, continuing her lifelong commitment to community uplift (Hall et al., 2010).

Figure 7

Flier for Septima P. Clark's Campaign for the Charleston County School Board, Charleston, South Carolina, ca. 1970s



Note: From Remembering Individuals, Remembering Communities: Septima P. Clark and Public History in Charleston, Lowcountry Digital History Initiative (LDHI): A digital history project hosted by the Lowcountry Digital Library at the College of Charleston, https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/septima_clark/local-and-national-leader

Curricular Practices

When Clark lost her job in Charleston, she left South Carolina to work at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. At this school, she taught adult students and visitors from the South how to read by reciting the U.S. Constitution. The Highlander School held workshops for Civil Rights activists that covered union organization, human rights discussions, voter education, and basic skills like money management. Clark's work at Highlander led to the birth of other citizenship schools across the South (Payne, 1995).

Working alongside her cousin Bernice Robinson and community leader Esau Jenkins, Clark helped develop the concept of Citizenship Schools to cultivate grassroots leadership and political empowerment. She described their purpose as discovering and developing creative leadership within local communities (Clark, 1976). Beginning with the first school on Johns Island in 1957, the program focused on literacy and South Carolina election laws to help African Americans pass voting literacy tests, particularly following the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (SNCC Digital Gateway, n.d.) (see Figure 8). The model proved successful, leading to additional schools on nearby islands and resulting in more than 600 African Americans registering to vote in Charleston County within three years (Charron, 2012; Lake, 2013).

Clark can be viewed as a theorist that intertwines literacy, citizenship, and activism. Clark has created a Blackprint (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) of how to teach curricula such as the U.S. constitution, policies, laws, citizenship, etc., which classifies as Social Studies content. Her work also focused on helping people learn to read and gain life and basic skills. In addition, she

is a model for teacher educators on how to enact social justice for Black students and community members. Oftentimes, teacher educators believe that they are unable to cover their course curricula while centering Blackness.

Figure 8

Table of Contents from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Citizenship Workbook, mid-1960s

Table of Contents	
	Page
The Purpose of the Citizenship School.....	1
History and Philosophy of S.C.L.C.....	2
Our America.....	2A
Georgia Election Laws.....	3
Summary of State Government.....	5
Making Words from the Alphabet.....	6
Making Little Words from One Big Word.....	7
Using the Words in Stories and Sentences.....	8
Your Social Security.....	9
How to Write my Name and Address on a Mail Order Blank.....	10
Writing a Friendly Letter.....	11
Practice Lesson.....	12
Beginners' Arithmetic.....	13
Advanced Arithmetic.....	15
Good Manners.....	17
Be Polite.....	18
How to Fill in a Money Order Blank.....	19

Note: SCLC Citizenship School Workbook for Georgia, 1962 Table of Contents.
https://www.crmvet.org/docs/cit_schools_ga_workbook62.pdf

Curriculum in Action

Sharing the life and experiences of OGs such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark, creates opportunities for teacher educators to introduce preservice teachers to Black educational theorists while simultaneously engaging essential content in literacy and Social Studies methods courses. It is important to recognize the opposition that Dunbar-Nelson

and Clark endured as educator activists. The violence of being fired from their positions for centering Blackness in their classroom spaces and advocating for the rights of Black folx parallels the opposition educators face today for teaching texts written by diverse authors, telling truthful histories of anti-Blackness, racism, oppression, and discrimination in the US, and challenging white supremacy.

In both historical and contemporary contexts, efforts to affirm Black life and knowledge are framed as disruptive, inappropriate, or politically charged. The punishment may look different across time, but the underlying impulse to regulate and silence transformative teaching remains strikingly consistent. These patterns reveal how centering Blackness in education continues to be treated not as intellectual rigor, but as resistance. Looking to the wisdom, knowledge, and actions of our OGs helps us to navigate these tumultuous times while developing curricular practices that intentionally center Blackness. Through collective Black Feminist *curre*, engaging the lives and work of OGs becomes a regressive act of remembering and a relational act of reclamation.

Below we provide practical applications by offering curricular practices that teacher educators can utilize in their courses. The Black Gaze Mini-Lesson Template (Table 1) serves as both a resource and a starting point for honoring Black OGs as foundational and essential to being, learning, and teaching in education. Using BGF, the template guides educators through a reflective and justice-centered process that aligns directly with lesson planning.

The framework begins with Honoring the OGs, where educators identify a Black figure whose testimony and service ground the lesson and provide necessary historical and cultural context. Within traditional lesson planning, the honoring OGs element of the lesson plan is aligned with the lesson topic or content knowledge that an educator would select to ground their lesson. The second tenet of the Black Gaze mini lesson plan is Testimony Service. This tenet expects the educator to provide background knowledge that students should be exposed to about the OG. More specifically, this aligns with the traditional section of lesson plan where educators are expected to provide background knowledge and a rationale for the lesson plan.

With the Preachin' Points tenet, educators explore what the OGs teach about centering Blackness in teacher education, community, and liberation—and how those lessons can inform pedagogy today. This is aligned to the traditional element, mini-lesson, of the lesson planning. This element requires educators to provide direct instruction, which lends itself to Preachin' Points. The tenet, What You Doin' Wit Yo' Life moves theory into practice, prompting teachers to integrate readings, videos, and media that embody the OGs' wisdom and work, and connect directly to course content. This requires educators to identify course content, materials, and resources that align with the course topic. Finally, the tenet, I See You bridges the past and present, linking the work of the OGs to contemporary educators, artists, and activists who extend their legacy. Within traditional lesson planning, educators are expected to make real world connections, and this tenet aligns purposefully. Finally, there are guiding questions within the template to support teacher educators in centering Blackness in teacher education and engaging in lesson planning.

Together, these BGF tenets and lesson plan elements help educators design lessons that honor Black brilliance and make centering Blackness an intentional and integral part of curriculum design, not an afterthought. This lesson planning process moves *curre* curriculum from theorizing, to actualizing the curriculum in the classroom, through all of the four stages. The Black Gaze Mini-Lesson Template transforms traditional lesson planning into an act of remembrance, reverence, and resistance—cultivating classrooms grounded in Black ways of

knowing, being, and doing.

Table 1

Black Gaze Mini-Lesson Format

Honoring the O.G.s	Who is the OG you are centering and exposing students to?
Testimony Service	What is important background knowledge that students should be exposed to?
Preachin' Points	• What is this person preachin' and/or teaching us about the importance of centering Blackness in our classroom and curricular practices? • How do you implement what they are preachin' into your course/classroom? • How do you center their ways of being, learning and teaching as foundational to teaching and learning in education?
What You Doin' Wit Yo' Life	• What readings, videos, podcasts, and other forms of media will you explicitly teach in your course? • How will you connect to the content knowledge of your course as the knowledge that students "must" know?
I See You	• What readings, videos, podcasts, and other forms of media will you explicitly teach in your course that connects to contemporary folx work? • How will you connect to the contemporary folx and their work, to the work of the OG?

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

In this mini-lesson (Table 2), teacher educators are provided with an example of how to expose students in English Education to the background knowledge of Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Within the testimony service, teacher educators are exposed to general information about Dunbar-Nelson. This is essential for English Education, as Dunbar-Nelson was an English teacher, in the state of our teacher education program specifically. This provides a real-world example of English educators in our community, who taught at the only high school for Black folx in the state.

For the Preachin' Points, teacher educators will expose students to a major challenge that occurs in curriculum in districts. Many school districts adopt prescribed curricula that position whiteness as the normative standard. This often becomes a justification for teacher educators to refrain from centering Blackness in their courses. However, Dunbar-Nelson confronted a similar constraint. Despite institutional limitations, she intentionally created opportunities for her students to engage with Black authors and texts, demonstrating that centering Blackness in

curriculum is possible, even within restrictive systems.

This mini lesson provides examples of how to use her work as a poet, in their Teaching of Reading and/or Writing course. More specifically, “I Sew and Sit,” (Dunbar-Nelson, 1895/2017) and “You! Inez!” (Dunbar-Nelson, 1921) can be incorporated into teacher education courses to help preservice teachers learn how to engage critically with literary theory, especially gender criticism, while analyzing Black women’s voices and experiences. Teacher educators are also exposed to contemporary scholars who may critique, expand, and build upon Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s work.

In this mini-lesson plan, teacher educators engage with the work of Morris (2016) and Nyachae et al. (2024) in alignment with the work of Dunbar-Nelson. More specifically, exploring the essential questions: How do these texts help us examine how gendered and racialized expectations limit Black girls’ identities, expression, and learning experiences? How can teachers create classrooms that disrupt these limits? Please find a more detailed example of the mini-lesson below.

Table 2

Alice Dunbar-Nelson Black Gaze Mini-Lesson

Black Gaze Framework: Mini Lesson “Bout That Action”	
Honoring the O.G.’s	Alice-Dunbar Nelson
Testimony Service	● Poet, Novelist, Journalist, Teacher, Diarist, Women Suffrage Organizer, Civil Rights Leader, Lecturer, Political Leader, Survivor of Domestic Violence ● Former Secondary English Educator & English Teacher Educator for Black Folx
Preachin’ Points	● Ensure that you unpack & explore who you are, and all of your identities --then expose students to your greatness. Dunbar Nelson cultivated her Black identity. She also worked to develop the positive Black identities of her students. ● If you “must” expose students to non-melanated folx in your state’s curriculum, you betta’ expose them to Black folx too! Dunbar Nelson, taught literature that centered whiteness, because that was considered the standard; however, she exposed her students to the greatness and work of Black folx. ● Center Blackness in the face of opposition. She too received opposition because of her activism work, but she kept going to fight for freedom of Black and marginalized folx.

What You Doin' With
Yo' Life

Teaching of Reading Analysis and Writing: Gender Criticism

- “I Sit and Sew:” Dunbar-Nelson (1988/2019) challenges the idea that women belong only in the home. The poem shows how doing only domestic work can be both limiting and emotionally draining. The speaker’s frustration makes clear how gender expectations can restrict women’s freedom and participation in society. This connects to gender criticism theory (Butler, 1990) because it helps preservice teachers analyze how society creates and enforces roles for men and women, and how those roles can limit women choices and freedoms.
- “You! Inez!:” Dunbar-Nelson (1921) explores feelings of desire, longing, and closeness, and challenges the idea that women must only love or express affection in ways approved by society. In a lesson, preservice teachers can guide students to notice how the speaker expresses love and emotion, and then invite them to discuss how gender norms and expectations shape who people are allowed to love and how they are expected to show those feelings. This helps preservice teachers practice gender criticism by examining how society influences personal relationships and emotional expression.

I See You

Contemporary writers & activists whose work stands on her shoulders:

- Nyachae et al. (2024) teaches preservice teachers how to engage gender criticism by showing how Black girlhood is shaped through social expectations, power relationships, and the regulation of identity expression.
- Morris (2016) documents how Black girls are disciplined for their ways of being and are required to labor emotionally and behaviorally to be deemed acceptable.
- Discussion Question: How do these texts help us examine how gendered and racialized expectations limit Black girls’ identities, expression, and learning experiences—and how can teachers create classrooms that disrupt these limits?

Septima Poinsette Clark

In this mini-lesson (Table 3), teacher educators are provided an example of how to expose students in Social Studies education to the background knowledge of Septima Poinsette Clark. Within the testimony service section, teacher educators are exposed to the life and legacy of Clark—an educator, civil rights activist, and founder of Citizenship Schools. This context is essential because Clark modeled how teachers could be both educators and activists within their own communities. Her story demonstrates how teaching literacy can also be a form of liberation.

In particular, her work on Johns Island and with the NAACP offers students a framework for examining how educators can challenge inequitable systems while maintaining deep commitment to their students. For Preachin' Points, teacher educators are encouraged to highlight Clark's insistence that collective success is non-negotiable and her use of the U.S. Constitution to teach literacy and rights simultaneously. This positions Clark's pedagogical approach as a model for integrating civic engagement, critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) into the social studies curriculum.

The What You Doin' Wit Yo' Life component provides opportunities for students to study Clark's oral history interview with Eugene Walker and her handwritten essay "Good-bye to Jim Crow?" as core texts for understanding education as activism. These materials help students see how Clark's work embodied Black Gaze Framework principles—centering Black ways of knowing, teaching, and organizing. The I See You section then connects Clark's legacy to contemporary educators such as LaGarrett King, Asif Wilson, and Tiffany Mitchell Patterson, whose scholarship and pedagogy extend her work on citizenship, justice, and critical historical inquiry. Teacher educators can use this lesson to explore the essential question: How can teachers today create classrooms that honor the liberatory practices of Clark—spaces where literacy, history, and activism are intertwined to advance freedom for Black students and communities?

Table 3
Septima Poinsette Clark Black Gaze Mini-Lesson

Black Gaze Framework: Mini Lesson "Bout That Action"	
Honoring the O.G.'s	Septima Poinsette Clark
Testimony Service	● Educator, Civil Rights Activist, School Board Member, Advisory Council Member, Advocate for Black women; Mentor of Black girls, Founder of Citizenship Schools
Preachin' Points	● If all Black teachers ain't winning then I ain't winning. Septima Poinsette Clark had a teaching position on John's Island, SC. She heard about what was happening in Charleston with Black teachers getting fired and joined the NAACP. Her contract was not renewed because of the work that she did with the NAACP making sure that Black teachers were paid equitably and hired in Black public schools. ● As long as we know our rights, the law, and constitution... We gonna be alright! Clark used the U.S. Constitution to help Black folx learn how to read. While they were learning how to read they were also learning their rights as citizens. Clark did not allow Jim Crow to stop her from this good work. She responded to Jim Crow by preparing Black folx for the literacy tests that non-melanated folx created to keep Black folx from voting.

- Greatness can't be stopped. Clark was fired while working at the Highlander School because non-melanated folx were hating. The Black folx at the school were accused of being served alcohol and they didn't have a liquor license. The closing of the Highlander School did not stop Clark from working. She joined Southern Christian Leadership Conference where she led citizenship education courses and eventually started opening citizenship schools throughout the South. Non-melanated folx couldn't stop this great work that Clark was doing around teaching Black folx their rights, laws, and how to read.

What You Doin'
With Yo' Life

Teaching Citizenship Education and Activism

- Students listen to Septima Poinsette Clark (Clark & Walker, 1976) share her journey of creating citizenship schools and working to get Black folx registered to vote. Students gain insight into the strategy and organization of the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, they gain an understanding of how many people worked together to push Black people forward.
- After students read this handwritten essay: "Good-bye to Jim Crow?" (Clark, personal communication, 1910) by Septima Poinsette Clark they gain first-hand knowledge of the historic differences between Black and white America during Jim Crow. They can even explore why Clark titles this essay good-by to Jim Crow, but uses a question mark.

I See You

Educators & activists whose work stands on her shoulders:

- Black History Nerds Saturday School (King, 2025)
- Black Teachers Centering Justice with Black students in Chicago Public Schools (Wilson, 2023)
- The Black Gaze Podcast (Bertrand & Porcher, 2022)
- Discussion Question: In what ways do these educators and activists expand on this work of citizenship, activism, and using education to help Black people move forward?

Conclusion

Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark are two of many Black OG educators who have used education as a tool to cultivate Black minds and transform the lives of Black folx, and work against systems of oppression (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) for how to center Blackness in teacher education. Like Drs. Christine King-Farris, Gwendolyn Middlebrooks, and Marjorie Hall Haley, they have provided knowledge, correction, direction, wisdom, love, and hope that continue to guide this work. Within a collective Black Feminist *currere* framework, their lives and pedagogies are not simply historical references; they are curriculum. Their lives are

reminders that centering Blackness is not new, but deeply rooted in our ancestral practices of teaching, learning, being, and becoming.

Collective Black Feminist *curre* requires more than individual autobiographical reflection. It calls us into relational remembering; into examining how our identities, commitments, and pedagogical practices are shaped by Black women's ancestral knowledge and lived experiences. Returning to the OGs is therefore a regressive act of remembrance, but it is also communal and political. It requires us to look back, examine our lived experiences, reflect on what shaped us, and deliberately reimagine how we move forward. More specifically, it requires us to locate ourselves within a lineage of Black women educators whose work has often been omitted and erased from teacher education. Through this remembering, we moved into the analytical and syncretical stages: interrogating how anti-Blackness continues to structure teacher education while deliberately reimaging curriculum that affirms Black life.

Honoring the OGs through collective Black Feminist *curre* transforms biography into theory. Their resistance, endurance, and pedagogical innovation become analytical tools for understanding the present and guides for constructing liberatory futures. It is because of these OGs that we can stand unapologetically in our Blackness and introduce teacher educators and students to Black educators they may have never encountered but need to know. Honoring these OGs is not merely an act of respect; it is curriculum work grounded in Black feminist commitments to relationality, community, accountability, and knowledge production. It is a moral and pedagogical responsibility. Too many teacher educators and preservice teachers have never learned about Black people's intellectual, cultural, and political labor. And too many teacher educators still feel pressure to "add" Blackness instead of centering it.

Through collective Black Feminist *curre*, our Blackprint and accompanying mini-lessons are not supplemental resources; they are acts of curricular reorientation. We have let Eurocentric knowledge, whiteness, and colonial ways of being, learning, and teaching guide the field of teacher education since its inception. Now, it is time for a shift. Collective Black Feminist *curre* calls for a return, a re(remembering) (Dillard, 2016), and re-centering—that positions Blackness as foundational rather than peripheral. The OGs have already shown us the way. We are simply honoring them by telling the truth and teaching their stories.

References

- African American Registry (2026). Howard high school (Wilmington, Delaware) is founded. <https://aaregistry.org/story/howard-high-school-wilmington-delaware-founded/>
- Asante, M. K. (1991). Afrocentric curriculum. *Educational Leadership*, 49(4), 28–31.
- Baker-Bell, A. (2020). *Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Bertrand, S. & Porcher, K. (2024). Bans will make em' dance: CRT, masks, banning books & removing history in schools. <https://youtu.be/qGYJ8TEqm3w?si=imXYU0y6b5JJqvFm>
- Bertrand, S. (2025). "It's the who and what are you afraid of?" for me: Centering Blackness in teacher education to equip preservice teachers for Black student success. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 38(10), 1563-1580. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2025.2452986>
- Bertrand, S., & Porcher, K. (2023). Shifting the gaze to blackness in ELA: Using the black gaze framework in literacy teacher education courses. *Language Arts*, 101(1), 27-39.

- Biography. (2020, September 1). Septima Poinsette Clark: Septima Poinsette Clark was a teacher and civil rights activist whose citizenship schools helped enfranchise and empower African Americans [Article]. Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/activist/septima-poinsette-clark>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2026). Theorist. *Cambridge Dictionary*.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/theorist>
- Charron, K. M. (2012). *Freedom's Teacher: The life of Septima Clark* [enhanced ebook]. Univ of North Carolina Press.
- Clark, S. P. & Walker, E. (July, 30 1976). Interview with Septima Poinsette Clark Southern Oral History Program Collection [Audio Interview]. Retrieved from https://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/playback.html?base_file=G-0017&duration=01:26:08
- Coles, J. A. (2023). A BlackCrit re/imagining of urban schooling social education through Black youth enactments of Black storywork. *Urban Education*, 58(6), 1180-1209.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920908919>
- Cooper, P. M. (2003). Effective white teachers of black children: Teaching within a community. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(5), 413–427,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487103257395>
- Cuban, L. (1992). Curriculum Stability and Change. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Curriculum* (pp. 216-247). Macmillan.
- Dillard, C. B. (2022). *The spirit of our work: Black women teachers (re) member*. Beacon Press.
- Dillard, C. B. (2016). Learning to remember the things we've learned to forget: Endarkened feminisms and the sacred nature of research. In N.K. Denzin & M.D. Giardina (Eds.) *Qualitative inquiry—past, present, and future* (pp. 288-305). Routledge.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1915). The immediate program of the American Negro. *The Crisis*, 9(6), 310–312.
- Dumas, M. J., & ross, k. m. (2016). “Be real black for me” imagining BlackCrit in education. *Urban Education*, 51(4), 415-442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916628611>
- Dunbar Nelson, A. M. (1988/2019). *I sit and sew*. Transformer Press.
- Dunbar Nelson, A. M. (2017). *Violets and Other Tales*. CreateSpace Independent. (Originally published in 1895)
- Dunbar Nelsson, A.M. (1921). *You! Inez!*. Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52760/you-inez>
- Erickson, J. (2024). Alice Dunbar-Nelson Reads. <https://sites.udel.edu/alicerereads/>
- Fanon, F. (1967). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Penguin.
- Foster, M. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching*. The New Press.
- Gay, G. 2000. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Garvey, M. (1921). Address to the second UNIA Convention. <https://blackpast.org/african-american-history/1921-marcus-garvey-address-second-unia-convention/>
- Gibson, J. (1997). *Mighty Oaks: Five Black educators*. University of Delaware.
<https://www1.udel.edu/BlackHistory/mightyoaks.html>
- Giroux, H. A., & Penna, A. N. (1979). Social education in the classroom: The dynamics of the hidden curriculum. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 7(1), 21–42.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1979.10506048>
- Hall, J.D., Walker, E.P., Charron, K.M., & Cline, D.P. (2010). "I train the people to do their own

- talking:” Septima Clark and Women in the Civil Rights Movement. *Southern Cultures* 16(2), 31-52. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/scu.0.0106>
- Collins, P. H. (1996). What's in a name? Womanism, Black feminism, and beyond. *The Black Scholar*, 26(1), 9-17.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End Press.
- Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Jenkins, D. A. (2021). Unspoken grammar of place: Anti-Blackness as a spatial imaginary in education. *Journal of School Leadership*, 31(1–2), 107–126.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684621992768>
- King, L. (2026). Black history nerds Saturday school. <https://ed.buffalo.edu/black-history-ed/programs/saturday-school.html>
- Kirkland, D. E. (2021). A pedagogy for Black people: Why naming race matters. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 54(1), 60-67.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 47-68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2022). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Lake, R. (2013). Sailing with Septima: A curricular journey through the Jim Crow South. *Counterpoints*, 412, 59-77.
- Le Grange, L. (2021). Individual responsibility in decolonising the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(1), 4–20. <https://dx.doi.org/10.20853/35-1-4416>
- Library of Congress. (1895). Violets and other tales [Page view Book / Printed Material].
<https://lccn.loc.gov/95233207>
- Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.
- Maguire, B. (2013, March 3). Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s struggle as a multiracial woman in biracial America [Blog Post]. Retrieved from
<https://urliteraryneworleans.wordpress.com/2013/03/03/alice-dunbar-nelsons-struggle-as-a-multiracial-woman-in-biracial-america/>
- Gibson, J. Y. (1996). Mighty oaks: Five black educators. In C. Marks (Ed.) *A History of African Americans of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore*.
https://archivesfiles.delaware.gov/ebooks/A_History_of_African_Americans_of_Delaware_and_Marylands_Eastern_Shore.pdf
- Matias, C. E., & Mackey, J. (2016). Breakin’ down whiteness in antiracist teaching: Introducing critical whiteness pedagogy. *The Urban Review*, 48(1), 32-50.
- Mayorga, E., & Picower, B. (2018). Active solidarity: Centering the demands and vision of the Black Lives Matter movement in teacher education. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 212–230.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747117>
- Mead, M. (2001). The school in American culture. *Society*, 39(1), 54-62.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02712620>
- McNair-Lee, D. (2023). Towards a curriculum of stay: How and why Black women teachers remain in urban classrooms. The George Washington University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2023. 30530575.
- McNair-Lee, D. (2025). Songs in the key of currere: Who am I as a Black woman as taught by Salt-N-Pepa. SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071986653>

- Moore, L. (2013). Starting the conversation: Using the currere process to make the teaching internship experience more positive and encourage collaborative reflection in internship site schools [Paper presentation]. International Symposium, Barcelona.
<http://som.esbrina.eu/aprender/docs/5/MooreLeslie.pdf>
- Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. New Press.
- Morrison, T. (1993). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Vintage.
- Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic Incorporated.
- Muhammad, G., Dunmeyer, A., Starks, F. D., & Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2020). Historical voices for contemporary times: Learning from Black women educational theorists to redesign teaching and teacher education. *Theory Into Practice*, 59(4), 419–428.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2020.1773185>
- National Park Service. (2021). Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar [Website Biography].
<https://www.nps.gov/people/alice-ruth-moore-dunbar.htm>
- Noguera, P. A. (2003). The trouble with Black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African American males. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 431-459. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085903038004005>
- Nyachae, T. M., Smith-Purviance, A., Reynolds, A. D., & Toliver, S. R. (2024). Where we live and be:(Re) turning to Black girlhood for project-praxes of otherworld-making in educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241300996>
- Payne, C. (1995). *I've got the light of freedom: The organizing tradition and the Mississippi freedom struggle*. Berkeley.
- Pinar, W. F. (2004). The miseducation of the American public. In W. Pinar (Ed.), *What is curriculum theory?* (pp. 15–34). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pinar, W. F. (1994). The method of “Currere” (1975). *Counterpoints*, 2, 19–27.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42975620>
- Porcher, K. (2023). Love Yourz: Developing black students’ positive racial identities in ELA classrooms. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 56(4), 589-607.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2023.2297207>
- Porcher, K. (2021). Don’t talk about it, be about it: Centering Blackness in a grammar and language English education course. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 21(2), 266-296.
- Porcher, K. (2020). Teaching while Black: Best practices for engaging white Pre-service teachers in discourse focused on individual & cultural diversity in urban schools. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, 15(1), 116-134.
- Porcher, K., & Bertrand, S. (2023). Black Gaze Framework: Centering & Celebrating Blackness in Education for Liberation. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*. 1-33.
- Porcher, K., Bertrand, S & Mitchell-Patterson, T. (March 2nd, 2022). Bans Will Make Em’ Dance: CRT, Masks, Banning Books & Removing History in Schools. *Black Gaze Podcast*. Season 3, Episode 2. <https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/wjOXzOpc8wb>
- Ravitch, D. (2000). A different kind of education for Black children. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (30), 98-106.
- Roofe, C. (2018). Schooling, teachers in Jamaica and social responsibility: Rethinking teacher preparation. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 14(4), 816–827. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-10-2017-0202>

- Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. (1920). The Dunbar speaker and entertainer, containing the best prose and poetic selections by and about the Negro race: with programs arranged for special entertainments; ed. by Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, and an introduction by Leslie Pinckney Hill Retrieved from <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5dc59020-0034-0130-ce82-58d385a7bc34>
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Digital Gateway. (n.d.). Septima Clark. <https://snccdigital.org/people/septima-clark/>
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- Taylor, E. (2009). The foundations of critical race theory in education: An introduction. In E. Taylor, D. Gillborn, & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 1-13). Routledge.
- Erikson, J. R. & Timmons, M. (2010). The authorship and activism of Alice Dunbar-Nelson. <https://www.rosenbach.org/past-exhibitions/i-am-an-american?rq=dunbar>
- Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. University of Chicago Press.
- University of Delaware. (2023). Alice Dunbar-Nelson Reads: Alice Dunbar-Nelson and the Western Canon. https://sites.udel.edu/alicerreads/introduction/#Alice_Dunbar-Nelson_and_the_Western_C
- Warren, C. A., & Coles, J. A. (2020). Trading spaces: Antiracism and reflections on Black education futures. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53(3), 382-398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1764882>
- Wilson, A. (2023). Returning to the Source: Black Teachers Centering Justice with Black Students in Chicago Public Schools. *The Urban Review*, 56, 495-515/. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-023-00673-6>
- Woodson, A. N. (2017). ‘Being black is like being a soldier in Iraq’: metaphorical expressions of blackness in an urban community. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(2), 161–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1243269>
- Woodson, C. G. (2017). *The mis-education of the Negro* (Reprint ed.). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. (Original work published 1933)
- Wynter-Hoyte, K., & Smith, M. (2020). “Hey, Black child. Do you know who you are?” Using African diaspora literacy to humanize blackness in early childhood education. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 52(4), 406-431. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296x20967393>

