


Chapter 11

The Power of Unapologetically Centering Black Girls and Women in the Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

*The experiences of Black girls and women in the U.S. educational system are unique. However, these experiences are treated as additive when teaching the history of U.S. education and those who contributed to its development. When centering the theme of humanizing teaching and classroom experiences, faculty must consider how everything from their course content, readings, assignments, and classroom structure potentially hinder students from seeing themselves represented in the discussion. Using the development of a graduate course, *Black Girls and Women in Education*, as an example, the authors reflect on and explore how the creation of this course fostered new levels of awareness and provided a safe space for much*

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needed reflection related to gender and racial identity development. Graduate student reflections from the course and reflective questions for instructors are shared to demonstrate the humanizing nature of the course and the chapter concludes with recommendations for faculty to consider when developing courses that are intended to be humanizing and culturally responsive.

INTRODUCTION

When arriving to the University of Rochester, I was prompted with the question, “If you could create and teach any class here, what would it be?” I responded with an idea that I thought would be received favorably by my faculty peers as worthy of graduate study related to college access and transition but then my true passion spoke up on a whim. “I would actually really love teaching a course about Black women and girls in education. There’s so much that we still don’t know or talk about.” Assuming that the latter would be ignored or met with empty praise, I was shocked to see the eyes of my colleagues light up with excitement and intrigue around the potential offering.

However, before diving into the construction of this course, it is important to reflect on the importance of humanization in education. As it stands, systems of U.S. education, K-20 alike, are rooted in White supremacist logics that determine a) what is knowledge; b) who are knowledge producers; and c) who are left as illegible in our learning and understanding of larger U.S. society. Considering this, as a Black woman educator, I wanted to develop a course that worked as the antithesis to the status quo peddled in U.S. education through tools developed by and for Black women. Theories like Black feminist thought (BFT) and Black girlhood were important to ensure the centering of Black girls and women in construction of the course and honoring Black girl’s and women’s ways of knowing (Brown, 2009; Collins, 2000). The use of these theories was my initial permission to envision a class structure that was open to all but unapologetic of its focus.

This course would be my first time witnessing a school of education providing the possibility to completely center the experiences of Black girls and women in education from a U.S. context. What I embarked on as an initial journey of bringing my research to the curriculum and expanding my own interest has now developed into a space of memory-work, healing, affirmation, and knowledge-production beyond what I imagined. In this chapter, I and graduate students who took the course focus on the theme of “humanizing college classrooms through culturally responsive curriculum” by exploring the creation of the “Black Girls and Women in Education” graduate course. Next, we share our individual positionalities, student

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