



If You Want to Keep Educators Like Me, You Need to Think Beyond Your Diversity Quota

By Educator Barnes – April 24, 2020

I enjoy following Dr. Monica Cox on Twitter. She shares experiences that I have also experienced as a black educator. Not only does she share her experiences, but she also pushes forward the narrative that we should not have to endure these situations. Recently, Dr. Cox shared [an Instagram post from DrPrisonProf](#) that got me reflecting back on an experience. "They never want to discuss what triggered you...just how you reacted."



Monica F. Cox
@DrMonicaCox

When my tweets blow up...



I retweeted the post with this comment:

#Truth A principal once told me that my tone was too stern when I responded to a colleague. Please tell me what tone I should use when a white colleague curses at me and also says I'm an affirmative action hire? Principal actually answered and said, "Don't take it personal."

Being forced to stay at home to help flatten the curve and save lives from the coronavirus has given me the opportunity to reflect on my career. Although I do write a lot, this is one story that few people know. I've written about being called an affirmative action hire, which has

happened more than once during my career at more than one school, but not about the situation I referenced in my tweet. I haven't shared what happened in this situation because I was embarrassed and ashamed of the consequence I received.

I know I shouldn't be ashamed because I did nothing wrong, but that's how white supremacy rears its head. The system pushes you down, the players who keep the system going mistreat you, and you feel shame and anger. I refuse to carry this shame any longer. I'm freeing myself by telling my truth.

I was excited about working at this school. I wasn't the only black teacher hired. I easily made connections with colleagues and was given opportunities I never had in other districts. Unfortunately, the district and the school leadership may have been excited about diversifying the staff, but some staff members weren't on board.

I thought it was just a few people being difficult with everyone, but then I realized these individuals were disagreeable with certain colleagues, the black ones. It is one thing to think someone is being difficult because you are black, but it is another situation once doubt is

erased and the person confirms it by looking you in the face and saying you are an affirmative action hire.

Yes, that was bold, but statements like that from white people have become less surprising as I have gained more life experience. I had someone, who I thought was my friend, tell me at Purdue that I probably got in on one of those minority scholarships. I didn't, but once you start having these types of interactions with white people, you become less surprised by what they will say to your face.

I felt attacked by my colleague, although I wasn't surprised. When I thought about all I had to overcome to get to that point in my career, the academic gains my students made, and my classroom management skills, that comment felt like a slap, no, a spit in the face.

I had to bottle up my anger. Bottling your anger does not mean ignoring your feelings. I explained what I had done in my career and what I was doing at that school. Then, the person started cursing at me and explaining how she was better than me. She told me that I should not have been hired. Since I saw that the conversation was going nowhere, I got up to leave. As I exited, I sternly explained how I should not be treated like this and how she should not talk to me like that. This is the only part of the conversation the principal heard.

Up until that point, I had a great relationship with the principal. I had no worries. I expected to share what I was reacting to and for the principal to respond. Instead, I received a documented verbal reprimand for unprofessionalism. The principal said my report of what was said to me before my stern response was hearsay and a consequence could not be given to the other person. What I could not get past then and even today was why did I receive a consequence?

Some of my Twitter pals expressed surprise that I did not do more than talk. Patrick Jones, Senior Director of School Innovation for the Mind Trust, said, "Whew — since that person is probably still above the earth, I'd say you handled it as professional as humanly possible." Education advocate, Lynnell Mickelsen, chimed in and said, "Oh my God. The fact that she is still alive is a testimony to your self-control." Think about it. What choice did I have? If I would have allowed my anger to explode into physical contact, I could have found myself convicted of assault, fired, and blocked from future jobs in the education sector. I had to choke down my anger, maintain self-control, and respond in the calmest way I knew how. I didn't curse, and I didn't yell. I even kept physical distance between us, so my proximately

could not have been perceived as intimidation although I'm 5'2" and weigh about 120 pounds.

Not only was I mad about how I was treated, but my anger was compounded by the consequence I received after I maintained self-control. Don't I at least have the right to stand up for myself? Don't I at least have the right to tell a colleague to not talk to me like that? Then, I reached out to HR. I was told the documented verbal reprimand would disappear from my file after two school years. The principal told me not to take it personally, and I should toughen up and not worry about what people say to me. The principal's response made me think that maybe the principal knew what I said happened actually happened, but the principal really didn't want to deal with the toxic culture at the school. Don't say you want to hire more black teachers if you are going to muzzle them and not allow them to speak up and voice their opinions and concerns.

To make matters worse, other white colleagues told me it wasn't in my head and even recounted stories to me about incidents this colleague and another colleague had with previous colleagues. How did that help me? How does it help black colleagues stay when white colleagues who are not mistreating you do nothing and don't speak up for you?

I couldn't stay at that school. I didn't feel emotionally safe. I also felt I couldn't even defend myself because I would receive another consequence. The only part of the situation I could control was whether I stayed or not, so I chose to leave.

This is one of the reasons black educators leave a school and even the profession. It doesn't matter how good your recruitment of black teachers is if you haven't addressed with your staff why you are intentionally hiring black educators. It should be clear that yes the educator is black, but yes the educator is talented and qualified. It should be clear that consequences will be given to educators who harass black educators and push them out of the door. The educators that really need to go are the educators who don't want to work with black educators. No surprise here, but the teacher who cursed at me also kicked black children out of her class a lot or made them sit in isolation in her room. The issues teachers like that have not only affect black teacher retention, but they also show up inside their classrooms with students.

I leave my shame here in this piece, and I'm moving forward. I hope school leaders read this and think about the situations they need to address with staff as they diversify their staff and

intentionally hire black teachers. You can't just add black educators to an all-white or mostly white staffed school and assume all will be well.

I'm going to dive deeper into the topic of recruiting and retaining black educators on my podcast Brazen Education on Saturday, April 25 with special guest Diamond Malone-Gilbert at 1 p.m. EST. You can watch on [Facebook](#) or on [YouTube](#), or you can listen later on [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), and [Google Play](#).

Brazen Education *with Educator Barnes*



*with Special Guest
Diamond Malone-Gilbert*

Episode 36: Why Teachers Leave the Classroom and How to Get Them to Stay