PORTRAITURE: HOW CAUCASIAN TEACHERS BUILD TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS AND BRIDGE THE CULTURAL DIVIDE

By

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ABSTRACT

Educators are continuously challenged with ensuring that their students are capable of reaching their full potential. While trying to push students to do their best educators must also work to ensure that they are creating an accepting and welcoming environment for the diverse learners of today. Despite the diversity of the classroom a majority of the teaching staff throughout the nation are Caucasian, middle class, and generally female. The purpose of this study is to portray the universal themes that are present when creating and maintaining trusting relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. The significance of this study is to provide schools and teachers with the tools necessary to create relationships with students of different backgrounds than themselves. Doing this will improve the experiences for both teachers and students within schools. The research design for this is a qualitative study using the portraiture methodology. Through the use of interviews and observations the research questions will be answered through the portraits of the individual participants. The participants of each portrait will consist Caucasian high school teachers from two different campuses. The teachers' portraits are educators who work in public schools in the Southwestern United States. These portraits will illustrate the complexities in building trusting relationships between students and teachers of differing backgrounds and ethnicities. These findings will reveal the factors and themes necessary in creating student-teacher relationships to ensure that the school experience for diverse students is a positive one.

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As I first embarked on this journey, I was very nervous, however, I had so much support from not only my cohort members, chair and committee members but also my family:

To my cohort members, thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to do my best. Your love and support helped me through some very difficult times during these years and I know I could not have gotten through this without you all. To my committee members, thank you for dedicating your time to help me pursue my dreams and make this journey a reality. Your support and guidance have helped to shape me into the person that I am today. To my chair, thank you for your tireless efforts to help make me a stronger writer and person. Your dedication to the craft and to your students does not go unnoticed. Thank you for everything.

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Finally, thank you to my participants, who believed in me and were willing to give their voices and experiences to future research.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and my students. To my family, you have always supported my goals and aspirations in life; always taught me to strive and push to be the best I can be. You believed in me and helped me to achieve this dream. Thank you.

Chapter 1: Background of the Study

Introduction

Since the beginning of the American colonies African Americans have been looked down upon because of the color of their skin (Bartz, 2019). Despite the societal and political changes that have occurred to give them more freedoms than they have had historically, those same shackles still appear in many areas of society today (DuBois 1903). Education is supposed to be the great equalizer to help everyone to reach their full potential (Watkins, 2005). However, due in part to unconscious bias and racial prejudice, this is not always possible for African American students (Griffin, et al., 2017). This study is focused on how Caucasian teachers can build a trusting relationship with African American high school students to bridge that gap.

The literature around this topic began with the historical context of African Americans and the struggles that they went through when they were forcibly brought to the American colonies. This historical background follows African Americans from the slavery era to emancipation, the reconstruction era, the De Jure segregation acts, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and ending with the Black Lives Matter Movement that is prevalent in today's society.

From there this study looked at the inequalities that are prevalent within the education system. These conditions were based on the school climate that is prevalent within the individual schools. Finally, the literature review takes the reader through culturally responsive teaching practices and illustrated how building trust positively impacted the lives of these students.

The problem that occurred within the nation is the divide between how African American and Caucasian students are treated across the country (Griner & Stewart, 2012). This divide started in the early American colonies (Spring, 2018) and has continued due to the double-consciousness that it has caused African American learners (DuBois, 1903). The power struggle

that began in the colonies has continued to this day, and it can be seen in the many movements and fights for rights that have taken place across our nation's history (Douglass, 1845; Epperly, B. et al., 2019; Fairclough, 1960; Groves, 1951; Huggins, 1976; King, 1947; Peralta, 2016; Russo, 1994).

There is an understanding amongst many researchers of the educational disparities that occur for African American high school students. However, the suggested approaches and strategies that are many, are not necessarily practiced in a systems approach within high schools throughout the nation. Thus, all the work that must be invested in this or any other continuous improvement process will not result in positive changes unless the intended action steps are implemented with quality and commitment (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

This study was important because there has been a clear gap in the way that African American students are treated both inside and outside the school system. While there have been studies and methods used to improve these conditions, they have not been changed. There are many teachers who have needed a roadmap to educate these students in the best methods in order to improve and change the narrative in how African Americans are treated inside schools.

In the United States a majority of the teaching staff are self-identified as Caucasians. “In the 2017-18 school year, 79 percent of public-school teachers were White and non-Hispanic. About 9 percent of teachers were Hispanic (of any race), and 7 percent were Black and non-Hispanic” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These figures showed that a majority of teachers who have instructed minority students were Caucasian. A Caucasian teachers’ experiences are different from the experiences of their African American students (DuBois, et al., 2002; Mannheim, 1929/1936). In order for these teachers to be able to best educate their students they need to have an understanding of their students' experiences and they need to be

able to connect with their students in ways that ensure students feel supported so that they are more likely to be engaged in learning and have better academic outcomes.

Despite this need there is a gap in the knowledge on this topic. While there have been studies that have focused on improving African Americans educational experiences, a majority of these studies have been conducted in elementary and middle school settings (Bonner & Adams, 2012; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009). There has also been research conducted to determine whether culturally responsive teaching is an effective tool in helping better instruct African American students (Conway-Turner, et al., 2020; Patton, 2011). In addition, there have also been studies that have examined the opportunity gap that existed for students of color within different school settings (Milner, 2010). Throughout these various investigations researchers have proven that when utilized properly, culturally responsive teaching can make a difference in these students' lives (Gay, 2013).

There have been some studies conducted within the high school setting; however, these queries generally focus on double-consciousness, opportunity gaps, and colorism and how these types of ideals have impacted the lives of African Americans in this country (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DuBois, et al., 2002; Gregory, et al., 2016; Harris, 2018; Milner, 2010; Khanna, 2010; Rockquermore & Brunsma, 2002). In addition to how students viewed themselves, there has also been studies conducted that examined the racial climate of schools and how this impacted the student population (Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010; Griffin, et al., 2017). One of the best ways to combat these issues is through building trust. Some research has been conducted on how to best build trusting relationships within the school environment (Ahlstron & Dannell, 2019; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Watson, 2012). It

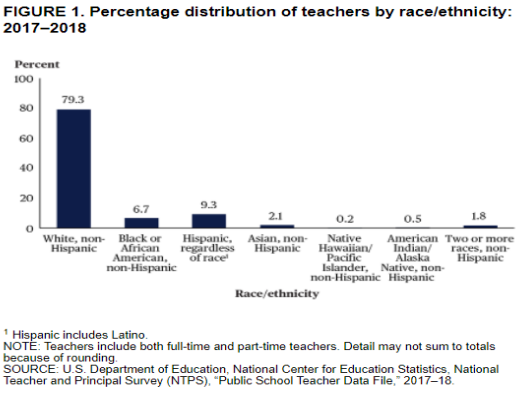
is through these values that this study was able to take its shape to determine the best way to meet and help these students to be the best versions of themselves that they can be.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how Caucasian teachers can build trusting relationships with their African American high school students. This recognition needed to come from an understanding of the power dynamics between Caucasians and African Americans, and how this can influence the way in which people build relationships with those that they do not share the same experiences with. “Implicit social and academic power structures exist among students in schools… Understanding these power structures and how they operate and are enacted can help educators bridge the space between social facets of the school environment with academic aspects” (Milner, 2010, p. 114). The data show that a majority of the teacher population is composed of individuals who self-identify as White, Non-Hispanic in the United States (Race and ethnicity of public-school teachers and their students, 2020).

Figure 1

Percentage of Teachers…



Research Questions

This study was able to answer four primary questions:

1. How do Caucasian teachers describe their efforts to build lasting relationships with their African American high school students?
2. How can teachers describe their efforts to bridge cultural gaps to build those relationships?
3. How do teachers describe how to build and maintain relationships with their students?
4. Do teachers perceive a power gap when building relationships with students of different ethnicities?

Significance of the Study

The predicted value of this study was to help high school educators across the country understand how Caucasian teachers were able to build relationships with their African American high school students despite their differences in lived experiences. This study benefited not only the educators who were able to learn and adapt their practices from reading the study but it also impacted the students with whom these teachers worked with on a daily basis.

By reading this study Caucasian teachers will be able to better understand the many facets that goes into building and maintaining a beneficial student-teacher relationship. They will be able to incorporate these methods into their everyday classrooms to improve the educational environment that consists of academic learning and social-emotional well-being for all students in their care.

Definition of Terms

- African-American/Black: A person who is described as ‘of relating to any of various population groups of having dark pigmentation of the skin’ or ‘of relating to African American people or their culture’.
- Caucasian/White: A person who is described as ‘white skinned’ or ‘of European origin’

- Socioeconomic: Relating to or concerned with the interaction of social and economic affairs.
- Colorism: Prejudice or discrimination against individuals with different skin tones, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.
- Culturally Responsive Teaching: A rich, intentional approach to teaching that focuses on the assets students bring to the classroom that raises expectations and makes learning relevant for all students.
- Double-consciousness: Describes the feeling of having more than one social identity, which makes it difficult to develop a sense of self.
- Inequity: A lack of fairness or justice.
- Trust: A firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

Limitations

There were some limitations in this study. The first limitation of this study was that it will be conducted only in the Southwestern United States. The study could produce different results when conducted in different parts of the United States or different countries around the world based on the differing cultures. A second limitation is that this study is only focused on high school teachers of Caucasian descent. There may be some teachers of differing ethnic backgrounds who have found ways to build these relationships with African American high school students that could be identified in a different study.

Since this study was based on the portraiture of selected individuals across the Southwestern United States, I needed to establish a rapport with the participants before asking my interview questions. This will be a limitation because I had limited access and in some cases no contact with these participants prior to the study. To fully understand and develop a portrait of my participants I needed to build an accord in which they felt comfortable sharing their

experiences with me. As a portraitist, "we see relationships as more than vehicles for data gathering, more than points of access. We see them as central to the empirical, ethical, and humanistic dimensions of research design, as evolving and changing processes of human encounter" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 138). To address this limitation, I worked to develop an understanding of the participant's perspective, became an active listener, was self-reflective, set specific boundaries and structures for each interview/observation, as well as to be respectful of the participant's boundaries (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

A third limitation was that while I intended to conduct in-person interviews and observations, I could be limited to using digital tools for data collections. To help mitigate this I had to ensure that the study participants had a clear understanding of the online platform in advance of the interviews in case they had to be conducted this way. Doing this ensured that the study participants were comfortable when being interviewed.

A fourth limitation to this study was that while I conducted in-depth interviews with the study participants, I was only getting their word on how these relationships were built. Building this type of connection is a two-way street and throughout this study only one side of that relationship was considered (investigated in-depth).

Delimitations

For this study I chose to look specifically at Caucasian teachers because they represented the majority of the teaching staff in the United States. Additionally, this study focused on African American high school students that attended the public-school systems. The selection criteria for the teachers involved in the study included speaking with members of the Black Student Unions of the chosen sites and having them anonymously select three to five Caucasian educators with whom they felt they had built a trusting relationship with. These students were

also given the option to write an explanation as to why they felt strongly about that teacher's selection.

The study was conducted with public high school teachers in the Southwestern portion of the United States. The timing of this study was during the Fall and Spring of the 2022-2023 academic school year. Therefore, it was important to note that the findings and results may not generalize to other subjects, locations, or future time periods.

Summary

This study discussed the gap in knowledge for how Caucasian teachers were able to build trusting relationships with their African American high school students. This was an important study because it could help bridge the divide between African American and Caucasian students while helping to break down the power struggle that has existed since the development of the American colonies. There are some limitations of this study because it could only be conducted in the Southwestern part of the United States. Additionally, this study was limited to Caucasian teachers within public high schools. Despite these limitations, the knowledge gained from this study could help to shape and improve the learning environment for African American high school learners.

Organization of Study

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 gave an overview of the related literature on this subject. In this chapter I looked at the historical context of African American learners from the early days of the colonies until now. The literature then delved into the inequality that plagued the educational system. While looking at these inequalities, different facets were looked at to understand how African Americans viewed themselves while in these academic settings. This understanding has helped to guide the research to look at the school climate and how this has impacted African American learners. Finally, to help improve these

conditions, culturally responsive teaching will be researched, primarily in the areas of trust and how this has shown to improve the learning environment for African Americans.

Chapter 3 presents the study's methodology. This began by looking at the theoretical framework and design for the study. It then discussed ethnography and the specific subsection of this methodology that was utilized, portraiture. Portraiture was used as the methodology within the chapter as well as demonstrated my positionality on the subject.

Chapter 4 discusses and presented the portraits of the participants in this study. These participants were identified by members of the Black Student Union at the selected school sites. The four research questions were answered through the sharing of the participants' portraits. Portraiture was chosen for this study because it allowed me to conduct a more thorough investigation into the personal stories of these educators and form a deeper understanding of how they built these relationships and the impacts that they made.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter of this study. Within this chapter a comparison of the different participants was illustrated by comparing and contrasting their lived student-teacher relationships. Throughout this chapter the portraits were related to the literature that has come before and a theory was completed to determine how Caucasian educators can continue to slow the gap and build these trusting relationships with their students.

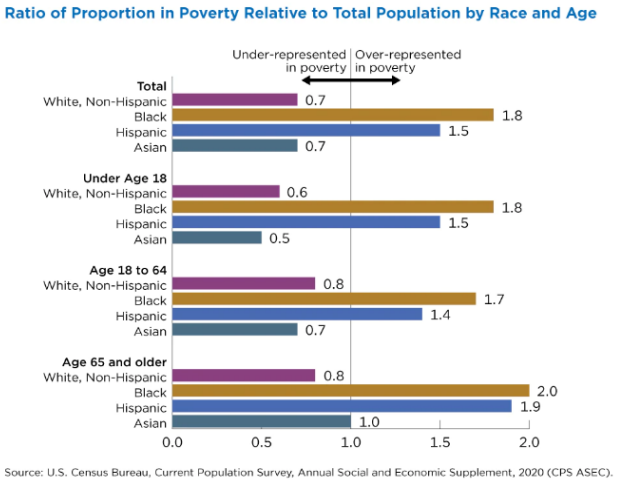
Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

Throughout history there has been a clear divide between the upper and lower socioeconomic classes of the American people. In fact, the United States currently has the highest rates of income inequality of all G7 nations (Schaefer, 2020). This divide is further illustrated by the fact that a majority of the people living in poverty are people of color (Creamer, 2020). The table below illustrates the poverty rates based on age and race

Figure 2

Poverty Rates to Total Population by Race and Age



Beyond the economic divide there has also been a rift between the freedoms that people are able to enjoy, and this split is made evident by the color of a person's skin. This point was illuminated by DuBois when he described the disparities of how a person can be perceived in society based on the color of their skin. This perception can affect the person's consciousness and how they view themselves (DuBois, 1903).

Since the beginning of the Americas within the colonies there has been a clear depiction of the dominant role in society, and that role takes the form of a White male. Joel Spring expresses this idea in his book *The American School* where he shares the ideals and practices of

early education in the United States and how during this time the colonies were male dominated (Spring, 2018). This norm, while it has been dampened in more recent times, is still in the hearts and actions of many in the United States today. “It is not bad fortune that has befallen the young people… it is bad policies. It is segregation and isolation and racism. It is an economic system that gives advantage to those whose pockets have been stuffed with advantages since birth” (Michie, 2019, p. 110).

The White male dominated society that Spring depicted at the birth of America can still be seen in today’s history (Gay 2013; Spring 2018). It can be seen when Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the NFL preseason (Michie, 2019), the Black Lives Matter Movement (Peralta, 2016), and within the walls of today’s classrooms. Each of these examples depicts the fight against inequities that people of color continue to face on a daily basis. “Educators appear to be more confident and comfortable with the idea that socioeconomic factors, particularly resources that determine wealth and poverty, influence educational inequities, outcomes and opportunities” (Milner, 2013, p. 28). These behaviors have led to the current societal conditions that African Americans, and other students of color face today. These viewpoints and behaviors are some of the reasons that the achievement gap between people of color and Whites has grown even larger since the early days of the colonies (Glenn, 2009a; Michie, 2019; Milner, et al., 2019).

The divide that began in the colonies between the White male and African Americans can be illustrated in the achievement gap of today’s youth. There is still a clear and evident divide in the achievement gap between minority students and Caucasian students (Grinner & Stewart. 2012). One of the reasons for this divide is because despite African Americans gaining more rights and opportunities such as the right to vote and not being excluded from public spaces, the negative stereotype that follows people of color is still prevalent (Walton et al., 2020). This can

be seen early on by the overrepresentation of African American students disciplined in schools (Milner et al., 2019). This type of behavior adds to the racial climate that can be seen within a school and can impact the academic achievement of minority students (Griffin, et al., 2017).

There is evident racial bias within the nation that can be seen through the inequality and injustices that occur on a daily basis. Change needs to occur in order for African Americans to stand a chance at a fair and equitable education (Jones & Hagopian, 2020) and to stand a chance at living the true American dream, without fear of retribution (Watkins, 2005). "Equity means developing environments and systems in ways that provide students with what they need on the basis of careful and systematic attention to the particulars of their situation" (Milner, et. al., 2019, p. 12). The best place to begin this dream of equity for all is in the education system (Watkins, 2005).

There is increasing evidence that through the support and use of culturally responsive teaching practices equity can be achieved for all students (Gay, 2013; Jones & Hagopian, 2020). Culturally responsive teaching "is a means for improving achievement by teaching diverse students *through* their own cultural filters" (Gay, 2013, p. 50). When implemented correctly students will gain a new appreciation of the differences of others. In addition, students will be able to celebrate those differences and understand the diversifying world around them with new, and opened eyes (Gay, 2013).

Martin Luther King Jr. said it himself in his essay entitled *The Purpose of Education*, that "intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of education" (King, 1947, p. 1). But, in order for this dream to become a reality for future generations, this type of teaching practice needs to be implemented correctly where the outcome the teachers are expecting is the reality of what students are experiencing (Gay, 2013). For this to occur there

needs to be a level of trust that has been built between the teacher and the student if deliberate character building is to take place at school (Bonner, 2012).

The literature that was selected for review was done so in a way to fully understand the struggles that African Americans have had to endure and how it impacts their education. This was completed through the use of electronic databases and specific citations of peer-reviewed articles and novels. Some of the earlier publications that are used are referenced as seminal works to contribute to the growing database of knowledge that incorporates African American's and their stories in how they relate to double consciousness, race, and trust.

Historical Context

To truly understand the context that African American learners face in today's world it is important to understand the historical background through which they lived. Understanding the history of African Americans and education provides a historical frame of reference for the problems of today (Knight, 1929).

Since the beginning of American history, African Americans have been thought of as less than others. When they first entered the United States they were enslaved, not citizens. They were taken from their homes; taken from their families and left with no familial bonds. This made them entirely dependent on their masters (Klein, 1999).

There are many anecdotes about the horrors that slavery wrought, one of the most famous being the story of Frederick Douglass. In his book *Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, Douglass depicts his life starting as a slave and ending as a free man and his fighting as an abolitionist. Through his eyes, people are able to see the devastation of slavery. Douglass was separated from his family at a young age and became dependent upon his masters. Taught to read from one of his masters' he was able to obtain the education that most in his station lacked. His story takes us through the trials and brutalities of his life as a slave to the

climax of his escape into freedom (Douglass, 1845). His is just one of many stories about the lives of the enslaved and the hardships they had to endure while confronting oppression.

During this pivotal time in American history, citizens were beginning to wrestle with the moralities of slavery. This internal struggle is what led to the American Civil War and the divide between the North and the South (Ransom, 1989). While the American Civil War did put an end to slavery through the thirteenth amendment in 1865 (History -Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment), it did not end the hardships felt by those newly freed citizens in their pursuit of the American dream or the bonds that held them down (Conklin, 2008).

Following the American Civil War came the Reconstruction era. During this time African Americans were not given the rights that should have come with their newfound freedoms thanks to the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments (History -Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment). The South had replaced slavery with segregation practices (Spruill, 2016). One example of this was the way that African American voting rights were restricted due to the intimidation tactics that were used to keep their voices silenced (Valley, 2004) despite the fifteenth amendment barring anyone from being denied access to voting.

Another example is in the court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* where a man named Homer Plessy was arrested for refusing to give up his seat on a train to a White man in 1896 (History - Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment). This case was brought before the Supreme court with an 8-1 ruling against Plessy. The majority stated that "…If one race is inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane" (History - Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment). This court case made segregation practices lawful under the idea that conditions and practices were separate but equal (Groves, 1951). It has also been noted that there were many Southerners who opposed giving African Americans the rights

earned post emancipation. There were some who even called the Southerners vengeful over losing their unpaid labor force to freedom (Carter, 1985).

Many states in the South implemented the *Black Codes* which once again took away freedoms from African Americans. These codes were enacted to restrict African Americans' ability to work, and the types of activities they could partake in. In some instances, the property that they could own was limited, and high wages were restricted. Anyone who broke these codes were either arrested, beaten, or forced into free labor themselves. With this system African Americans had no voice against the continued White oppression of the South (Williams, 1940).

In addition to violence, these groups also used legislation to assert their dominance against the African American voice. In fact, "many state legislatures enacted laws that led to the legally mandated segregation of the races" (History -Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment) known as the Jim Crow laws. They enacted lynching and other tactics to scare African Americans away from the polls and away from their chance at a democratic freedom. This intense use of violence and intimidation were the building blocks of the tactics employed by today's white supremacists (Epperly, B. et al., 2019).

Despite the trials that emancipation wrought there were also victories. For instance, the Freedman's Bureau was formed by Congress to organize schools for the newly freed African Americans. In the beginning these schools focused on reading and writing, however, as time went on students began to advance their studies further. Unfortunately, "many bureau schools remained hopelessly inadequate because of insufficient construction and funds" (Smallwood, 1981, p. 23). There was also a struggle to find educators willing to teach African American students beyond missionaries and clergymen because "most whites considered it a disgrace for members of their race to teach Negroes" (Smallwood, 1981, p. 29). In spite of these difficulties

the Freeman's Bureau was able to educate thousands of African Americans who otherwise would not have been able to attend school (Butchart, 2020).

After Reconstruction, African Americans were trying to find their place in the world. They were looking to express themselves and the pride they held for their culture. This expression took hold in what is known as the Harlem Renaissance. Within this movement African Americans were able to share their culture by expressing themselves in creative fashions such as writing, painting and music (Locke, 1999). The Harlem Renaissance was a symbol for the African American people. It was the embodiment of the trials they had faced and the strength they showed to continue on in their path (Huggins, 1976).

Langston Hughes is one of the most renowned voices of the Harlem Renaissance. He introduced Jazz poetry as a concept which is now translated into hip hop and lyrical music that depicts the struggle that many deal with to this day. Within his work his main argument was that people of color can create, think, and live; he wanted to celebrate their culture (Wallace, 2007). In addition to famed writers, poets and artists; the Harlem Renaissance brought Jazz music into the world.

The Cotton Club was a place where people could go to enjoy Jazz music. Though the club was built by African Americans, it had a strict color guideline where only Caucasian people could be patrons. Although African Americans could play there, they could not attend as viewers. While the club was celebrating the art form of the African American people it was not celebrating them as equals (Jerving, 2004).

African Americans faced yet another hurdle after the highs of the Harlem Renaissance. That hurdle was the Civil Rights Movement. The spearhead of this movement came from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People known as the NAACP. Founded in

1909 this organization worked to protect African Americans from racist actions enacted by Jim Crow legislation (History- Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment). The NAACP heard many cases, but the most well-known was Brown v. Board of Education in 1954-1955. This case was a was a consolidation of five separate cases that were heard by the Supreme Court about the issue of segregation in public schools. These cases worked to prove the unequal and inequitable school systems that were in place for Black and White children. After a rehearing of the trial the justices unanimously agreed that having separate educational facilities for different races was inherently unequal (History- Brown v. Board of Education re-enactment).

Prior to this case De Jure segregation laws deprived minority students of equal education opportunities, even though this went against the Equal Protections clause of the fourteenth amendment. These laws kept African American and Caucasian students in separate buildings; and the Caucasian schools had better facilities, superior teacher training and a lower student to teacher ratio. After this monumental court case, the supreme court, with a unanimous ruling, voted to end the De Jure segregation laws and to start the desegregation process for schools (Russo, 1994).

Despite the ruling, these changes did not take effect immediately. In 1957 school desegregation began in Little Rock, Arkansas where nine African American students were able to enroll in Little Rock Central High School. These students were met with angry protesters as they entered the school; the protests got so bad that the United States military had to intervene. These students were threatened, beaten, and called names daily. This was the price that they paid to better themselves through education (Conklin, 2008).

In 1964, ten years after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, only 2% of African American students in seven out of eleven Southern States had been able to integrate schools.

Between the years 1958-1990 there were 20 supreme court cases on the topic of desegregation. These court cases worked to make schools a place where equal learning opportunities could take place (Russo, 1994). In 1964, to combat the continued inequality of education the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) developed the Freedom Summer School which gave African American students a place to think creatively and draw on their unique experiences. During this same time the Black Panther party established a free lunch program as well as other educational programs such as the Liberation schools. They used these platforms to share and recognize oppression and ways to overcome it with the youth (Watkins, 2005).

The desegregation of schools within the United States caused racial tensions to skyrocket. African Americans once again took a stand to fight for their freedoms (Harvey et al., 2004). This stand began with Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus in 1955 for which she was arrested. After this incident, the NAACP organized a bus boycott that lasted a year. This was the first time that African Americans had stood up for themselves in the face of this hatred and fought for their rights through peaceful protests.

This act led to sit-ins across the South. These peaceful protests were met with anger and violence from the Southerners who refused to change their practices (Conklin, 2008). Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed that he could curb the hatred of the South through nonviolent demonstrations. He believed that if the rest of the nation could see the effects and disparities that come with segregation, they would fight to change it. During his march in Birmingham, Dr. King was arrested. Protesters came to support Dr. King through peaceful protest, and they were met with an attack that included police dogs and fire hoses. This attack was caught on camera; and the nation was left shocked at the footage (Fairclough, 1960).

In 1963 President Kennedy gave a speech about the Civil Rights Act. This law made it illegal to practice segregation. It brought hope for the African American community and upset some Southerners who refused to obey the new laws. To continue his fight, Dr. King planned a march on Washington where he gave his famous "I have a dream" speech (Conklin, 2008). In this speech Dr. King references the fact that despite being granted freedom 100 years prior, he and other African Americans were still not free. That they are still shackled to the "manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination" (King, 1963, p. 1).

He depicts the hardships African Americans have had to endure at the hands of the American people. Despite these hardships, he refuses to believe that a better future cannot be found. He urged others to rise and join the fight for racial justice, and despite the violence he had witnessed and received he still called for peaceful protests; promising to always march on and not look back (King, 1963).

Peaceful protests were not the only types of resistance fighting that people were engaged in during the Civil Rights Movement. There were other voices that had influence during this time as well. These voices included Malcolm X who believed in the idea that African Americans had to take back their freedom through whatever means necessary, including violence (Conklin, 2008). Additionally, the Black Panthers believed that they could get power by having the White people fear them (Watkins, 2005). These different groups were all fighting for equality (Conklin, 2008). Despite the contrasting viewpoints and ideas of establishing changes all people involved in this struggle wanted the same thing, a better life for their families. Many believed that this better life started with education (Watkins, 2005).

Unfortunately, in the times since Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X the racial climate of this country has not changed drastically. There is still a need to stand up and fight for

the justice and inequality of minorities both in and out of schools (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Jones & Hagopian, 2020). Since the attack of September 11 there has been a radicalized fear of the *other*. This tension has caused a fear of people who are different from the norm. These *others* usually have inadequate learning opportunities and are stuck in a cycle of poverty through which they cannot escape. This fear can lead to unconscious racism and can have a lasting impact (Fanon, 1952; Watkins, 2005).

In 2011 the Black Lives Matter Movement began. It was propelled by the unnecessary killings of African American youth and the police officers who were getting by unscathed. This movement has shone a light on the darkness that has been placed on certain communities as well as the police that serve those communities (Peralta, 2016). There has been an increase in support for this movement. Many have attributed this increase to the presidency of 2016 and his appeals to prejudices (Demby, 2020). In addition, they have noted that people feel more open to talking about these issues than they had in the past. The catalyst for this openness being the COVID-19 pandemic and their awakening of the injustices that are happening beneath their noses (Demby, 2020).

In addition to the Black Lives Matter Movement there has been a secondary movement known as the Black Lives Matter at School. This movement began in 2016 in Seattle. This act is "the story of resistance to racist curriculums, educational practices, and policies" (Jones & Hagopian, 2020, p. 1). The role of this organization is to put a stop to zero tolerance discipline policies, hire more Black educators, an authorization of Black history to be taught in K-12 curriculum, and to put an emphasis on the importance of hiring more counselors and not police officers to enforce the needs of students in schools (Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

Inequity and Inequality of the Education System

Throughout history, education has been thought of as the great equalizer. Within the different historical movements one truth has held firm; education is the way to true liberation for African Americans (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Watkins, 2005). Despite this truth, "even at a time in U.S. and world history when formal sanctions of slavery and Jim Crow have long since ended, there are still deeply ingrained social realities that disallow certain populations of students to reach their full capacity to learn" (Milner, 2010, p. 4).

Audre Lorde, an African American poet highlights the importance of celebrating differences as a way to unify and strengthen the bonds of diversity in her poetry to further prove this point. She states, "difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde, 2017, p. 54). Unfortunately, this is not always the case for African Americans learners in the education system.

The reason for this is that education is a mirror to the society it serves, and society still has racial biases towards African Americans (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Milner, 2010; Watkins, 2015). This is because teachers will often make snap judgements about a student's abilities based on the color of their skin, their vernacular, and their clothes. "Hunter theorizes that teachers make attributions regarding who is and who is not smart based on attractiveness, teachers may lower their expectations of darker students, challenge them less, and may indeed rate them lower on assignments" (Rist, 2016, p. 29). This mindset is further illustrated by Ford who states that African Americans are looked at as inferior to more dominant races, and this mindset is seen within the classroom as well (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

What this means is that a teacher will generally give more attention and care to students they believe will have a higher success rate based on that attractiveness (Rist, 2016). The

students that generally receive this attention are students with Eurocentric features: lighter skin and eyes, straighter hair, etc., because they are deemed as more intelligent (Keith, 2009). This ties back to the idea that race plays a role in student success (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Rist, 2016).

Studies have been conducted that show that African American youth as young as six years old understand the racial stereotypes that surround them. “Research has found that both children of color and White children develop a ‘White Basis’ by the time they enter kindergarten” (Banks, 1995, p. 392). Of even greater concern is that these youth are likely to experience these stereotypes in the form of prejudice by the time they are eight years old. “Unfortunately, recent research suggests that racial/ethnic discrimination is a common experience for adolescents of color in schools and other public settings given the overabundance of negative stereotypes that situate Black and Brown youth as dangerous and threatening to society” (Hope et al., 2015, p. 85). The school system is supposed to be a place that ensures students are receiving the education they need to have a successful future. This can be difficult, when the school setting, that students are placed in can lead to a low self-esteem and stressors that can lead to negative outcomes later on in life (DuBois, et al., 2002). This is what is happening to a large majority of African American students in the United States (Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

A study conducted showed that African American males are the most likely to witness or be victims of racial discrimination or prejudice while on school campuses; followed by African American females (DuBois, et al., 2002). These occurrences will lead to a lower self-esteem which can impact these students throughout their entire lives. One of the factors of low self-

esteem is the social and academic challenges that African American students face (McClure, et al., 2010).

These systemic factors can lead to negative school experiences and discourage students from academic success (Amemiya et al., 2020). One of the most powerful ways this is seen is through the students' perception of teacher support and care. In a study done by Noguera, 80% of students noted that they believed their teachers did not care for them (Noguera, 2016). Research suggests that one reason for this is that the minority youth is often looked at as dangerous and threatening by society which can lead to labels that result in student failure (Fanon, 1952; Hope et al., 2015; Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

In addition to these stereotypes research has shown that Caucasian people view their interactions with African Americans differently than how it is viewed by African Americans (DuBois, et al., 2002). It has been noted that "Black students hold themselves back out of fear that they will be ostracized by their peers" (Noguera, 2016, p. 445). These differing viewpoints emphasize the importance of people trying to see the other side of the story (Gay, 2013). This can be difficult based on Mead's theory of the generalized other. This theory states that people are not limited to their own experiences (Mead, 1929). When people can feel safe to openly give their perspectives while listening to the perspectives of others; that is when the barriers of class, race, and territory can be broken down and lead to true cohesion (Dewey, 1916).

Another way that the education system has hindered African American learners is through the over representation in special education programs. African American males are more likely to be placed in special education programs (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Noguera, 2016). In fact, according to Cruz and Rodl, African American students are 2.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with an intellectual deficit and 1.5 times more likely to be identified with an emotional

disability (2018). When the school system is disproportionately placing these labels on African American learners, they are stigmatizing them. These labels will often follow the students and either set them up for success or mold them into becoming the scapegoat of society (Rist, 2016). Students who are improperly labeled can hold these clouded and misguided views of themselves even after school has ended (Mannheim, 1929, 1936).

Discipline is another area of schools where African American students are overrepresented (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Noguera, 2016). There is a concern over the racial discipline gap as minority students are disproportionately misrepresented in school discipline practices (Gregory, et al., 2016). One longitudinal study conducted in Texas showed that African American students were more likely to receive an out of school suspension as well as a referral for a first-time infraction than compared with other students at the school (Gregory, et al., 2016).

According to the data, a promising way to reverse this trend is through restorative justice practices. This type of intervention is integrated into daily practices within a school site and has been shown to transform the ways in which students and peers interact. It is believed that this will improve the overall school climate as well as correct the labels students could receive (Gregory, et al., 2016). These types of practices have been shown to improve the levels of discipline around the school. In an urban high school, the violence was reduced by 52% with the proper use of restorative justice practices. Similarly, in a rural high school, discipline was reduced by 50% through the use of these practices. Finally, in a suburban high school setting, the violence was reduced by 70% after one year of implementing restorative justice programs within the school (Gregory, et al., 2016).

In many school systems across the country white flight has also continued to be an issue that leads to the resegregation of schools. One example of this was at Farragut High School when

the school population went from 8.6% African Americans in 1950 to 91% African Americans in 1968. This population change led many of the Caucasian administration and teaching staff to feel unprepared and threatened. The Superintendent at the time, along with some of the African American teachers were able to oust the principal and teaching staff who were not up to the challenge of teaching a diverse population of students. The teaching staff were able to implement reforms that would help to heighten the new student populations' educational opportunities (Watkins, 2015).

Yet another example of this can be seen through the efforts of the Jefferson Public School system in Louisville, Kentucky. This school system went to great lengths to desegregate their schools. They realized that students who attend diverse schools have higher test scores, higher graduation rates and a higher likelihood to graduate from college than students who attend segregated schools (Berman, 2013).

This school district went through multiple plans to desegregate their schools. These plans included bussing, the redrawing of school boundaries, and integrating magnet schools within the district. From 1975-2007 these plans were in place and student scores improved. This plan was met with opposition from parent groups which led to a Supreme Court decision that overturned their student assignment plan (Berman, 2013). Despite this setback the district continued to find a path to desegregation; but these plans were once again met with parental outrage, stating that they "no longer believed diversity was worth the inconvenience of busing" (Berman, 2013, p. 16). These continued remarks had the school board abandon the plans which led to an eventual resegregation of schools within the district.

In 2005 the National Center for Educational Statistics published data to show the extent of segregation taking place in the schools.

> In 2003, 66% of the 4th graders and 63.4% of the 8th graders in large central city public schools attended schools where over 75% of the students were minorities. By comparison, 21.8% of the 4th graders and 18.5% of the 8th graders in all public schools, and 17.2% of the 4th graders and 14.7% of the 8th graders in urban fringe area public schools, attended schools that were over 75% minority. (Welch, 2007, p. 55)

One way that schools have worked to desegregate is through bussing. In 1971 the Jefferson County school district bussed 22,000 students between the Black and White sections of their districts. "The percentage of black students attending schools that were 90 to 100% minority fell from 58% in Charlotte and 66% in Louisville immediately before the rulings, to 2% in both districts immediately following the rulings" (Welch, 2007, p. 56). Unfortunately, despite the positive reports from teachers and students the bussing has been moved back which has led to the resegregation of schools (Welch, 2007). This is in large part due to the cost of bussing these students. During the 2016-2017 school year the average expenditure per student to be transported was $1,025 (U. S. department of education, 2021).

Despite the added costs that it takes to ensure schools are desegregated, the benefits seem to outweigh the costs. In fact, students who graduated in the 1980s from desegregated schools "stressed the importance of their daily experience of negotiating race in high school as one of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects of their education" (Holme et al., 2005, p. 18). Furthermore, through desegregation, African Americans and other minority students will have an even greater chance of acquiring an excellent education that generally takes place at more affluent schools (Crawford & Bohan, 2019; Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

Unfortunately, despite the advantages of keeping schools desegregated, the schools with high levels of poverty receive less funding than more affluent schools which generally have less

minority students. (Bireda & Chait, 2011). Despite these inequities there seems to be an agreement that there is a need for increased resources at these low socioeconomic schools (U.S. Department of Education Equity and Excellence, 2013). This is because low socioeconomic schools tend to have less access to effective educators and curriculum. In fact, "schools that primarily serve Black students are twice as likely to have teachers with only one or two years of experience, as compared with schools in the same district with mostly White students" (Krasnoff, 2016, p. 24). These inequities are a direct correlation to the resegregation of public schools.

These changes show that traces of De Jure segregation still linger in the country today; the idea of separate but equal is slipping back into the school's philosophy, which will only increase the achievement gap that already exists (Berman, 2013). It has been proven time and again that diverse communities lead to growth (Berman, 2013). Furthermore, there are appropriate ways to educate in these diverse communities where everyone can be successful.

In spite of the inequities that many African American students face there are those who are able to thrive despite their trials. This is due to teachers showing that they care and being willing to go the extra mile for their students (Milner et al., 2019). A seminal example of this is the practices that were highlighted in *The Dream keepers* where eight educators were able to teach African American students to be highly successful (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

In this review there will be two areas that will be analyzed and discussed regarding African Americans in the education system. These areas will focus on race (Watson, 2012), and the importance of trust (Gay, 2013). Each of these areas directly impacts the theories, policies, and practices for African Americans' success in education today.

In the first part of the study there was a review on race and the power struggle that African Americans still go through in this country (Spring, 2018). Despite these endeavors there are those who still work to lay the groundwork for these students to have successful lives (Berman, 2013; Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010Watson, 2012). This data illustrates the African American's experience and effort to overcome these restrictions.

Once the experiences and history of African Americans in this country have been thoroughly examined then the discussion of building relationships can begin to take place. There have been many who have worked to discover the best ways to educate and meet the needs of African Americans in this society. Most notable are Ladson-Billings in her work *The Dreamkeepers* (2009), as well as Watson in her work *Learning to Liberate* (2012).

These two areas build upon the conceptual framework of how African American high school students can be successful in the educational system that can often works against them. While looking at these works people can begin to focus on the areas of building trusting relationships to help further strengthen the successes of these individuals. To do this the works of Geneva Gay (2013) and Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000) will be examined to determine the best ways to strengthen and build these trusting relationships.

School Climate

The way a student perceives themselves within the school walls, and how others view them can either add or detract from their experience, and this is largely dependent on the school climate. School climate can be defined as "the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between the students, teachers and the administrators" (Mitchell, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010, p. 272). How these culminating factors manifest will be dependent upon the school, the administration, the teachers, and the students on campus (Watkins, 2015).

These shared beliefs and values will only last if the people involved can follow through on their words. The school system is encapsulated by the society that surrounds it (Watkins, 2015). Spring made this notion clear when he discussed how education was a battleground for culture wars in the early days of education. This culture war is still a part of today's battle on school campuses (Spring, 2018).

Systemic and unconscious racism is prevalent throughout America. It is in this framework that the American school system was created (Griffin et al., 2017). It is this reality that schools need to try to stem. These forms of bigotry must be made an idea of the past if the community wants the social climates of their school to be open and welcoming to those of different races, ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomic status (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Watkins, 2015).

A positive teacher-student relationship is one of the most important pieces in creating a supportive school climate for students of all races, and this cannot be done unless the teachers are invested in the needs of their students (Gregory et. al., 2016). In a study done by Howard in 2001, a group of African American elementary students were able to have their voices heard regarding how culturally responsive practices were implemented at their school (Howard, 2001). The study revealed that for African American students, the relationship that they can build with their teachers is one of the most important aspects in building up their school climate (Bonner & Adams, 2012).

These forms of positive relationship building involve teachers who take an interest in their students not just on an academic level but on a personal level as well (Milner, 2010). In doing this, the teacher will help the student to generate positive energy towards school, which in turn will help them to push themselves intrinsically (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Research

conducted in the early 1990s (Christophel, 1990) demonstrated that positive student-teacher relationships increased student motivation, self-efficacy, and achievement. More recently, the research has continued to show the positive effects of teacher-student relationships and its abilities to bridge learning gaps for students (Bonner & Adams, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). In addition to building stronger relationships, the students also feel more comfortable to be themselves within the classroom (Griner & Stewart, 2012).

On the opposite side of the spectrum, students admitted that when trusting relationships were not formed between the student and teacher the classroom environment suffered. Without strong relationships, classrooms exhibited the following characteristics: "(1) teacher-centered classrooms, (2) perceived racism and discrimination toward students in interracial patterns and expectations, and (3) lack of personal teacher-student relationships" (Howard, 2001, p. 134). By the end of the study, the team had identified three themes that needed to be carried across the campus for a classroom climate to thrive. Those three themes were: caring educators, an establishment of a community/family classroom environment and a fun education (Howard, 2001).

Another study examined teacher and student perceptions of school climate (Mitchell et al., 2010). This study was done in Maryland on a group of fifth grade students and their teachers. Throughout the study, the team began to understand that having large classroom sizes and high teacher turnover rates often lead to an unfavorable classroom climate. In fact, "in all of the student models, gender and ethnicity were significantly associated with both overall climate and academic emphasis" (Mitchell et al., 2010, p. 275). School climate is one of the first levels that teachers and administrators try to tackle when looking at school improvement because the climate can make or break the achievements of a school and district (Mitchell et al., 2010).

It is also important to look at the dimensions that encompass school engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) and how these measures relate to the school racial climate for students (Griffin et al., 2017). The perceived norms and values regarding race are what make up the school's racial climate. One study looked at 139 African American students that attended high school in the Southeastern part of the United States. While looking at school climate, these researchers explored the idea of school engagement being a mediator for students in a negative environment because a "positive relationship between classroom and emotional climate and grades was mediated by engagement" (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 675).

The study goes on to explain that race-related experiences are crucial in the development of ethnic minority children. Due to this high impact, it is important to build the relationships of social context within the school environment. Building these relationships early on can help students feel more accepted and fairly treated, which can yield a more positive influence on the children later on in life (Griffin et al., 2017; Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

The issue that is seen throughout the various studies on school climate is that there are disparities between Caucasian students and African American students when it comes to building these relationships (Griffin et al., 2017). The reason for this is because all the factors that are listed as necessary to improve school climate are not always possible for the schools in impoverished areas. This is partially because of the high turnover rates for teachers and principals within these low-income schools (Milner, 2010). "Students' scores tend to decrease the year immediately following a vacancy, and it takes about five years for a principal to really put his or her vision in place at a school and significantly change the school's performance" (Superville, 2014).

Conversely, however, it is important for schools to recognize that even with the factors in place for a positive school climate there may still be an unfavorable racial climate that leads to lower self-esteem for African American students (Griffin et al., 2017). For this reason, it is important to build on practices that incorporate ways for teachers to build lasting relationships with their students to broker this self-concept; the way to do this is through culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013).

Caring Teachers

Building relationships is at the forefront of achieving success for students. These relationships could not be cultivated unless the students felt cared for by their teachers. "Caring learning environments are spaces where all students feel fully seen, heard, respected, and cared for" (Milner et al., 2019, p. 97). It is in these types of environments that students will be able to feel comfortable taking chances and will being to thrive both academically and socially (Legette et al., 2020).

To create this type of environment teachers must be able to establish a student-centered classroom, hold high expectations and rigor for all students, use persistent practices, and develop partnerships with families and communities (Milner et al., 2019). Establishing these principles in the classroom will allow the teacher to understand their students on a deeper level. "The more deeply a teacher knows their students, the greater the opportunity to tie that knowledge of students' lives and interests into the lessons" (Milner et al., 2019, p. 100). Doing this will help students understand the why behind their learning which can help build trust (Romero, 2015).

Research has shown that when people walk into a classroom they hope to see "someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions" (Friere, 1998, p. 49). These characteristics help to build on the type of caring environment where students will have the ability to achieve (Milner et al., 2019). This is because

when students are able to ask questions and fully participate in the classroom environment they create a positive learning experience (Romney & Holland, 2020). These positive experiences strengthen the notion that their teachers care not only about their academic success, but their well-being and future success as well (Legette et al., 2020). “Student-teacher relationships stand out in the educational literature as a proximal and powerful lever for improving Black students’ academic and social outcomes in school” (Legette et al., p. 280), and culturally responsive teaching is a great way to build these relationships (Gay, 2013).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Unfortunately, there are some who are still resistant to the idea of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013). The reasons for this range from teachers not believing in its ability to help students, as well as anxiety about implementing yet another practice into their already packed curriculums. This apprehension and reluctance come from not grasping what culturally responsive teaching practices are or how to incorporate them into the curriculum (Gay, 2013).

Culturally responsive teaching is a way to embrace the diversity of the growing nation, as well as the diversity of the classroom itself. When implemented correctly it can hold great powers in shifting these negative viewpoints, “success does not emerge out of failure… instead success begets success…to pursue [learning] with conviction, and eventual competence requires students some degree of academic mastery, and personal confidence and courage” (Gay, 2013, p. 55). It is not enough to simply add an infusion of ethnic content to make culturally responsive teaching effective, the curriculum needs to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Howards, 2001, p. 135).

Most educators that hear the words culturally responsive teaching will believe one of two things; one being that they already incorporate these types of teaching practices into their daily

routines; and two that they doubt the relevance of these practice. “Society and schools cultivate resistance through persistent and pervasive practices that treat ethnic and cultural diversity as contentious, negative, insignificant, or nonexistent” (Gay, 2013, p. 56).

Teaching effectively is about more than teaching the curriculum. It is about holding students to high expectations, contributing to positive social and academic outcomes, using diverse resources while valuing those divergent differences, and collaborating with community members and colleagues (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010; Milner et al., 2019). This can be done by using proximity, being sensitive to cultural behaviors and norms, using body language to show that student’s thoughts are valued, arranging the classroom to incorporate discussions and activities, displaying culturally responsive materials to support student learning, modeling behaviors that are expected, and building a team atmosphere (Krasnoff, 2016).

Culturally responsive teaching is not a one size fits all band aid. It is an approach to teaching and learning that builds on the unique perspectives and experiences of the teachers and students within a school while centering the curriculum upon those differences (Gay, 2013; Milner, 2010). In other words, it is teaching that “exemplifies the notion that instructional practices should be shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the settings in which they occur, and the populations for whom they are designed” (Gay, 2013, p. 63). Within culturally responsive teaching there seems to be certain practices in how to make it successful and sustainable. These practices include parent/family involvement, ensuring that teachers are socially aware of themselves, building on the classroom climate to build lasting relationships with students; and critical reflection over lessons and biases (Gay, 2013; Milner, 2010, Milner et al., 2019).

One of the best ways to incorporate culturally responsive methods is by understanding the households that students come from (Bonner & Adams, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The empirical data found by examining Ms. Finley's ability to understand her students is a great example. Her teaching style was based on grounded theory where she was able to use her personal history, knowledge of mathematics, as well as knowledge of her students and their communities to enhance her classroom and ensure her students' success (Bonner & Adams, 2012). Finley, and other teachers like her can bridge the gap between student's home world and their experiences on the school campus (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Michie, 2019, Milner et al., 2019).

For minority students there seems to be a disconnect between their home lives and their school lives. That is to say that the person they are when they are on the school campus does not mirror the person that they are when they are at home or with their friends (Howard, 2001). This creates a double consciousness within these students and forces them to adapt to different versions of themselves to fit their environment (DuBois, 1903). One of the best ways for teachers to close this gap is to get parents/guardians more involved on school campuses (Gay, 2013).

To combat this disconnect, schools and classrooms need to be reflective of the environments within the homes of the students they serve (Bonner & Adams, 2012). According to a study done by Bonner and Adams, one way that a math teacher, Ms. Finley was able to find success was through her knowledge of the community. This study was conducted using grounded theory where individuals were interviewed with semi-structured dialogues over a four-month period. In addition to the interviews the researchers also held 50 observations as well as collected artifacts such as lesson plans for triangulating evidence. These interviews were then coded in

three stages: open, axial, and selective to find major themes and core concepts (Bonner & Adams, 2012).

Ms. Finley was successful because of her ability to build relationships with the families of her students through curriculum nights, parent phone calls, and night classes where she would teach the parents of her students the same math lessons she would teach the kids. Doing these activities helped to bring the classroom home for the students because the expectations in both places were now similar. Incorporating these practices into her daily routines also helped to bring the curriculum to life for her students (Bonner & Adams, 2012).

Simply teaching a concept to a pupil is not enough to make that lesson be ingrained into their memories or truly make an impact on their lives. The lesson needs to be given importance; it needs to be relevant to their lives (Bonner & Adams, 2012; Milner, 2010). In this respect it is important to give real life examples that match the lives of the students. Teachers give examples to their students throughout their lessons, whether this is math, history, science, etc. (Gay, 2013). Those examples often do not match the lives of the students whom they are teaching. It is important that teachers get to know their students on a deeper level so that they can incorporate the students' interests/family lives into the lessons at hand (Bonner & Adams, 2012; Milner, 2010). Not only will this make the lesson more meaningful, but it will also make the information that is being passed to them more relevant to their lives. This will help to build equity and importance to their lives (Gay, 2013).

Another way of incorporating the students' lives into lessons is by using their tastes in music or dance to make the lessons more influential. Doing this will draw on the students' knowledge in different ways and will make it easier for the information to stick (Bonner & Adams, 2012). Acclaimed teacher, Ron Clark, has emphasized the importance of movement in

the classroom to engage students, “doing the changes gets the students up and moving, their blood gets pumping, and they get a burst of energy!” (Clark, 2011, p. 207).

When incorporating students’ lives into lessons it is important for educators to understand their students’ cultures to ensure cultural appropriation does not happen. Cultural appropriation refers to “using elements of marginalized culture without demonstrating an understanding of the historically and emotionally significant elements of the… culture” (Karen, 2020). To stop this from happening teachers must first recognize the culture and have an understanding of it so they can engage their students in meaningful discussions about the importance of these different cultural aspects (Karen, 2020).

By drawing on their students’ cultures, teachers can bring their lessons to life even further for them. Doing this will not only add depth and understanding to the lesson but it will also “create caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued” (Gay, 2013, p. 50). Through the incorporation of these cultures teachers and students can gain a deeper understanding and respect for their peer’s cultures which can build equity (Karen, 2020). Showing this value in the students’ personal lives, cultures and beliefs will help to foster a relationship that can go beyond classroom walls (Bonner & Adams, 2012).

Within culturally responsive teaching the most important aspect that was listed was the relationships between students and their teachers (Gay, 2013). “The best educators are able to teach this generation because of their ability to reach them, listen to them, and learn with them” (Watson, 2012, p 11). There have been many studies conducted that have made it clear that students struggled more if they did not have a good relationship with their teachers. These studies showed that teachers that had built a trusting rapport with their students had greater academic and social success (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Howard, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2010).

It was these relationships that built a classroom climate where students felt heard and accepted. It was this type of environment that allowed the students to thrive and push themselves beyond what they thought possible (Bonner & Adams, 2012). In fact, "teacher-student relationships can accelerate learning more than the average 0.40, which represents a year's worth of growth" (Sprenger, 2020, p. 13). When teaching students, especially minority students, it is important that teachers verbally set and hold all students to high standards (Bonner & Adams, 2012). This shows the students that the teacher is serious about pushing them to their full potential and that the teachers will not allow them to slip. This type of trust and respect are the foundation of a strong and lasting relationship that will propel the student for years to come (Gay, 2013).

There are those who can argue that little has changed in education and that classrooms look like they did years ago. However, in education today, things are constantly changing and shifting thanks to the globalized technological world. These changes include the books students read, how information is transferred, the setup of classrooms and lessons, and much more. (Bolt-Lee & Foster, 2010). One thing that should never change is a teachers' ability to reflect: not only on their lessons but on themselves as well (Gay, 2013).

Additional studies have reported using tools such as the *Double Check Self-Reflection Tool* and the *Teacher Self-Report Survey* allow teachers to reflect on their own cultural beliefs and how those beliefs could impact their teaching and classroom environment (Khalifa et al., 2016).

> Teachers' understanding of self-awareness must include learning the self in relation to structural racism - acknowledging one's racial biases, and understanding how racial biases shape emotions and behaviors toward Black students in the classroom…A clear

> and critical understanding of Whiteness and what it means to occupy a position of Whiteness (even when you do not identify or identified as White) in a racially oppressive society. (Legette et al., 2020, p. 283)

This type of self-reflection is especially important because much of the student population are minority students, but the majority of the teaching workforce is self-identified as middle-class Caucasian women (Bradshaw, 2015).

While writing her dissertation, Watson reflects on the lessons she learned while researching urban education, "I did not enter these courses in search of some Black experience, but was cognizant that I should be pushed (and I was) to learn about being white" (Watson, 2012, p. 27).With these types of differing demographics, it can be difficult not to find some biases that lay beneath the surface of even the most well intentioned teachers. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance for teachers to constantly be reflecting on their practices (Gay, 2013; Romero, 2015). This means not just focusing on how they deliver their instruction, but also on how they interact with their students as well (Griner & Stewart, 2012). There could be some unknown biases that could be causing unfound anxieties for students.

A recent study done by English, et al. (2020) reported that on average, African American students, reported experiencing five discriminatory events daily. These discriminatory practices could be manifested through "biases in grading practices, discipline decisions, differential perceptions, and academic placement evaluation and expectations" (Legette et al., 2020 p. 281). These behaviors, whether known or unknown, will shape the culture of the classroom. For these reasons it is important for teachers to ask questions, to "critique their own beliefs about culturally diverse students, and how these affect their instructional behaviors" (Gay, 2013, p. 55).

There are two districts that have implemented studies on culturally responsive teaching practices, one in Wisconsin and one in Los Angeles, California. Wisconsin chose to incorporate culturally responsive practices due to the disparities seen between Black and White students (grades 4 and 8) on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The state asked each district for participation and had four percent of schools participate in this program. The schools that agreed to participate in this study had larger enrollments, access to more Title I funds, located in cities/suburbs, and served a majority of Black students. However, despite implementation they saw little growth and meaning from the study (Conway-Turner et al., 2020). This is because this program lacked the proper intensity and quality needed for success (Borman & Hewes, 2002). Additionally, it did not have the full backing of those involved to make lasting change (Kotter, 2012).

The second study came out of California where the Los Angeles Unified School District took on implementing culturally responsive practices. Their culturally relevant and responsive education professional development program included nine domains to help prepare educators to make these changes. This study incorporated a mixed-methods methodology to see the effectiveness of the program. Staff who participated in the program went to 399 hours of professional development; 235 of those hours were specific to culturally responsive practices and 117 hours focused on non-culturally responsive content. Within this professional development program there were "significant improvements in student achievement outcomes for African-American students who received standards-based, culturally relevant and responsive instruction by elementary general and special educators who participated in CRRE program" (Patton, 2011, p. 91).

It is not just teachers who need to be culturally responsive on school campuses though. It is a team effort that starts with the leaders of the schools. School leadership is an essential part of the building blocks and foundation upon which a school is built (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (Kotter, 2012, p. 28). If the people in charge of the school do not uphold these same principles, then the changes made in classrooms will not have as much of a lasting effect. It has been shown that strong leaders impact the academic achievements within schools, conversely a lack of strong leadership can lead to withdrawals in this area (Superville, 2014). This is because “only leadership can motivate the actions needed to alter behavior in a significant way” (Kotter, 2012, p. 33).

The ways in which principals and other school leaders can impact the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices are as follows: Ensure that staff members within the school are critical of their self-awareness; ensuring that teacher preparation programs within the school site and curriculum are culturally responsive; ensure there is an inclusive school environment; strive for high engagement with parents and students on campus; and develop curriculum/practices that teachers can employ to be culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016). To make this type of change a reality in schools it must be seen as a priority for leaders and staff workers on the campus (Kotter 2012).

Elements of Trust

The best way to build a strong relationship is through trust. Trust is defined by one person’s reliance on another; and when someone puts that reliance on another person, they are making themselves vulnerable to that person (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Building trusting relationships within the classroom is one of the most important aspects of culturally responsive

teaching (Gay, 2013). However, trust can be hard to quantify within a classroom and within life because it is multidimensional and has many facets (Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009).

Trust can greatly impact the successes of schools (Gay, 2013). Romero found that both students behavioral and academic performance can improve based on the students' ability to trust their teachers (2015). Unfortunately, with the combination of media, news and laws mandates, the trust that people feel in schools has lessened, and a negative light has been shone on districts throughout the country (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

For instance, in the United States today, people have little trust in the political and social news that they hear. In fact, only ⅓ of Americans currently trust in their government to do what is right (Friedman, 2018). As stated previously, schools are a mirror of the society in which they serve; currently, America has a lot of distrust within its leadership and this viewpoint is adopted by the students and families attending schools (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Schools are built and run on a network of trust. Students need to trust their teachers to learn. It has been stated that students who show a great trust in their teachers will exhibit more cooperative behaviors in the classroom (Amemiya et al., 2020; Romero, 2015). In the same breath, teachers need to trust one another, as well as their administrators to accomplish success both in and out of the classroom. "When schools are characterized by high levels of trust, teachers tend to feel greater responsibility and are more likely to invest themselves in the operations of the school" (Goddard et al., 2009, p. 298).

Having this level of trust can also impact the social and emotional learning of a school. "Social emotional learning (SEL) combines youth development with the promotion of particular competencies, with the aim of enabling students to respond appropriately to environmental demands and fully take advantage of opportunities" (Belfield et al., 2015). Many have stated that

a “positive student-teacher relationship experiences profoundly shape students’ sense of belonging, which can lead to evidence of SEL skill development, greater participation in classroom lessons, and overall improvement in students’ academic performance” (Legette et al., 2020, p. 280).

Unfortunately, even with proper programming in place, schools can often be littered with distrust if the proper steps are not taken (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). An example of this can be seen through a study done in Sweden where teachers who exhibited high standards were given a pay increase. This study, though meant to improve school development, instead only caused mistrust and insecurities amongst the staff (Ahlstrom & Danell, 2019). Schools with low socioeconomic status have seen a negative correlation with school trust and success on standardized tests (Goddard et al., 2009).

Despite the obstacles that need to be overcome when building trust, it is possible to do so. When looking at trust there are six characteristics that play a key role within the school system. These include: willingness to risk vulnerability, benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness (Goddard et al., 2009). Each of these play an important role in building and maintaining a trusting relationship with others and build upon one another (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

The first step to building trust is by having a willingness to risk vulnerabilities in front of others. “Drawing on organizational trust literature, we maintain that when teachers make themselves vulnerable, , they invite their students to also be vulnerable, creating an environment that is more conducive to deeper learning” (Romney & Holland, 2020, p. 3). Allowing another to see ones’ vulnerabilities can be hard to do because it involves putting trust into the unknown (Cohen, 2016). For a person to become vulnerable, they first need to be confident enough in

themselves to be exposed to others which can build their confidence. This can allow the person to trust and grow from the uncertainty a new position may bring them (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Another factor in growing and maintaining trust is showing benevolence. This is about the confidence someone feels when they believe that their wellbeing, or what they care about will be protected (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Parents feel this when they drop their children off at school, and teachers feel this when they walk into the school building. It is the ability to trust that people's vulnerabilities will not be taken advantage of.

> Students' perception of benevolence may be influenced by whether students and the teachers get along with one another, if the teacher demonstrates interest in them as a person, and praises their efforts. Benevolence lowers students' sense of vulnerability. (Romero, 2015, p. 217)

Incorporating both vulnerability and benevolence will help to build generalized trust. Within generalized trust it is assumed that members of a different group will not knowingly harm or exploit vulnerabilities because they are following the structure of the school (Cohen, 2016). In fact, young children have proven to show greater trust in their teachers when they are treated fairly and shown that their best interests are at heart (Amemiya et al., 2020). However, in order for people to be trusting of others, they need to have confidence that others will have their best interests at heart (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Along with benevolence, to gain the trust of others, it is important to be reliable. This means that people will come to know what to expect from one another (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Understanding this reliability is what builds generalized trust in others and helps to sustain the social order that can be seen both inside and outside of the classroom (Cohen, 2016).

When people come to expect certain behaviors from others; those behaviors will tell the person whether a person can be relied upon (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Student - teacher relationships will often grow when students can expect consistent behaviors from their teachers (Amemiya et al., 2020).

One of the areas of trust that is easy to spot is competence. “Competence is perceived expertise, skills, or knowledge. For students, perceptions of competence include whether or not teaches set high expectations and expect success, and the extent to which the teacher is able to make learning interesting and challenging” (Romero, 2015, p. 217). When people are competent, they can gain the trust of others because it is clear that they know what they are doing (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

An example of showing competence can once again be shown through Ms. Finley, who experienced such high success rates with her learners. She was such a competent teacher that every student wanted to be a part of her classroom. Her competence and her abilities gained the trust of parents, teachers, and students alike because she proved that she was a master of her craft (Bonner & Adams, 2011). The idea of competence can also be seen in *The Dream Keepers* and how those exemplary teachers conducted themselves and ran their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This is the type of trust that can make a large impact in the lives of students.

Another significant aspect of trust is honesty. Trust is built upon the foundations of character, integrity, and authority. The moral instrument of trust is a person’s ability to rely on the commitment of others. This is achieved through honesty (Cohen, 2016; Milner, 2010). Having these qualities helps people to understand that they can rely on one another. When people are honest, their words will match their actions and they will be viewed as

authentic (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). “Through establishing vulnerability and honesty, both teachers felt that they could teach more freely” (McFarlane, 2015, p. 52).

Unfortunately, when honesty is not present, the trust someone has in an idea of a person will drop. For instance, when the United States had record high employment rates and prosperity within the stock market, there was still mistrust due to the lack of facts and information being shared; a lock of honesty (Friedman, 2018).

The final facet of trust is a person’s ability to be open. When people are open about their lives or their experiences, they are sharing a vulnerable side of themselves with others (Amemiya et al., 2020; Milner, 2010). Sharing such personal information helps to breed trust. Conversely, people who are unable to bare their souls will end up building walls around themselves, which ends up alienating them in the process (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). However, people will not be able to move to this step unless they have built trust with individuals in the process (Cohen, 2016).

The reality of building trusting relationships is that it will look different no matter where it is seen. This is because building this type of rapport will be dependent upon individual characteristics and needs (Amemiya et al., 2020). There are those who trust more easily, and they generally have a higher faith in humanity. In the same breath, people who have been let down will be more likely to be suspicious of others and trust less (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). It is important to understand that trust is an important factor within the informal school structure. When produced correctly, trust can help to stop certain risks seen within a school as well as enhance and support student learning (Goddard et al., 2009). “In terms of achievement, student trust is associated with identification with the school, engagement, and achievement motivation” (Romero, 2015, p. 218).

Trust is determined by the social context in which people live. This puts constraints on trusting relationships based on a person's conceived values and sanctions. Despite these chains, trust can look different depending on the context of the situation (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). For example, as people get to know one another, their trust will grow. It always begins with people getting to know each other, trust will grow within this relationship based on the institutional structures through which the relationship was born. This is known as generalized trust (Cohen, 2016).

As people continue to get to know one another they can learn about each other's history and a relationship can begin to develop. As time goes on people will begin to feel empathy towards one another. Trust is something that is built over time; not given away (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). As this trust continues to grows, it will move from generalized trust to particularized trust. The difference being that particularized trust is the attitude that people have towards a person they have built a relationship with versus someone or something that is unknown (Cohen, 2016). It is particularized trust that teachers hope to build with their students because it can enhance the learning experience and success for their students (Milner, et. al., 2019; Romero, 2015; Romney, 2020).

Trust in the Classroom

According to a seminal work published by Mitchell and Spady (1983) when students feel that they can trust their teachers, they become more willing to take risks. These risks involve being able to ask clarifying questions and engage in help-seeking behaviors, both of which have been shown to improve student achievement. This was shown in a longitudinal study conducted in 400 Chicago elementary schools which showcased the role that trust can have in building successful learning communities

> Not surprisingly, then, we found that elementary schools with high relational trust were much more likely to demonstrate marked improvements in student learning… Most significant was the finding that schools with chronically weak trust reports throughout the period of the study had virtually no chance of improving in either reading or mathematics. (Schneider, 2003, p. 43)

A similar study was conducted in the Mid-Atlantic region with third through twelfth grade students which further illustrated this point. This study looked at students' trust in their teachers, their academic press, and optimism. When students exhibited educational optimism within this district there was a direct correlation between these measures and their achievement on standardized tests for both math and English (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013).

In addition to trust being shown to improve academic success there is also research that demonstrates trust in teachers can develop positive behaviors which enhances student achievement. A study conducted by Gregory and Ripski (2008) showed how building trust between teachers and students could not only improve academic outcomes but also improve behaviors as well, “This significant association between a relational approach and low defiant behavior was explained by student trust in teacher authority” (p. 345).

Building Trust with Different Genders/Ethnicities

While it is true that building trust will look different because of the individualistic needs of each person, it is also true that race and gender can impact ones ability to build trust as well (Williams, 1998). “According to a significant body of research: Students tend to benefit from having teachers who look like them, especially nonwhite students” (Miller, 2018, p. 1). This is because students are able to see their teachers as role models. Though this idea of role models holds truer for a teachers’ ethnicity versus their gender, gender can take on a more critical role as students get older (Miller, 2018). “The most widely discussed examples are ‘role model’ effects,

which occur when the presence of a demographically similar teacher raises a student's academic motivation and expectations" (Dee, 2005, p. 159).

Unfortunately, this is not always possible due to the high demographics of White educators across the United States with an increasing diversity of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The data from Gersehenson, Holt, and Papageorge "suggests that on average teachers are more likely to expect low levels of educational attainment for students of different racial backgrounds than they are for students of the same race" (2016, p. 17). These expectations can have an impact on how individual students are seen by their teachers which can then impact how students view themselves (Dee, 2005). It is because of this that building relationships with students is so crucial. "Student-teacher relationships stand out in the educational literature as a proximal and powerful lever for improving Black students' academic and social outcomes in school" (Legette et al., 2020, p. 280).

Varying Degrees of Student Success

When discussing academic success, it is important to note that there are many ways for students to illustrate their accomplishments. Many people across the nation look to standardized test scores when discussing the academic accomplishments of a school or a district. However, there are many other variables that can be utilized to determine these achievements. "Multiple outcome measures are considered including graduation status, grade point average (GPA), highest math class taken, and postsecondary plans" (Romero, 2015, p. 216). It is important while discussing the measurement of these successes that a thorough look at the student and their achievements be recognized (Adams, 2010).

There have been a considerable number of studies conducted in each of these areas. Many of the studies relating to trust come from elementary education; however, there is limited data on how teachers can further bridge this divide in high schools. Additionally, the only studies

that were conducted in high schools focus on the racial school climate, microaggressions, or the opportunity gaps that exist which all show a negative implication in the area of trust.

Summary

Since the beginning of the American colonies African Americans have been seen as inferior (Spring, 2018). Today, this viewpoint is further illustrated by the negative stereotypes that darker skinned individuals receive (Walton et al., 2020) as well as by the continued levels of poverty people of color live in (Creamer, 2020). Due to the racial bias that lives on within the society there have been many injustices that have led to inequality and inequity for African Americans both inside and outside of the school system (Jones & Hagopian, 2020). This has been made evident by the increased number of African American youth in the special education system as well as being referred for discipline referrals in schools (Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Noguera, 2016).

These biases have caused many African Americans to live a double life where they feel the need to act differently in public due to how others see them (Craig, 2009). This double consciousness has led to a negative self-perception which impacts the mindset of these youth from an early age (Du Bois, 1903). This mentality can not only impact the youth experiencing it but it can also impact the climate within the school walls as well (Mitchell et al., 2010). The school's climate can determine whether a group of students has a positive or negative experience at school. One way to improve these conditions is through culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013).

Evidence suggests that by incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices diversity can be embraced and elevated to a new level (Gay, 2013). The foremost way to improve these conditions is by building and maintaining trusting relationships between students and teachers

(Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). When teachers build relationships with students it will look different for each of them and this is because relationships are multi-faceted (Goddard et al., 2009). However, despite these differences the evidence suggests that these positive relationships can positively impact the classroom nature and environment which can improve the successes seen in the students on campus (Amemiya et al., 2020). Additionally, having positive student perceptions of teachers can translate into successful academic outcomes through motivation, interest in school, and higher grades (Midgley et al., 1989; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Wentzel, 2002). Chapter 3 will present the methodology in which this research study will work in while looking at how teachers build these positive relationships.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter includes the restatement of the problem as well as the purpose of the study. This chapter describes the paradigm that this research project was based on and the framework through which it was conducted. The chapter also consists of the research questions which the study intends to address as well as the research design, the population, sample, instrumentation, process for informed consent, how data will be collected, and my position as the researcher.

Restatement of Problem and Purpose

There is a clear and evident divide between the school experiences of African American students and Caucasian students (Griner & Stewart, 2012; Milner, 2010). When speaking about African Americans it is important to look through a critical lens to get a full understanding of the direct or indirect impact that race could have on their lives and the relationship building practices of their Caucasian teachers. This requires an understanding of the power struggle that began in the times of the early colonies and continues to exist today (Fanon 1952; Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Spring, 2018). Such struggles for the African American population have occurred not only in education but in their lives outside of school as well. However, one must be careful not to view African Americans as a monolith. Though this same struggle may not be felt by all African Americans, it has spurred many movements to fight for equality and equity (Douglass, 1845; Epperly et al., 2019; Fairclough, 1960; Groves, 1951; Huggins, 1976; Jones & Hagopian, 2020; King, 1947; Peralta, 2016; Russo, 1994). Despite these battles there is still an unconscious bias that exists that continues to create a separate and unequal educational experience for African American students (Watkins, 2005). This study sought to add to the body of knowledge regarding the practices engaged in by Caucasian teachers who have successfully gained the trust of African American students.

> Unfortunately, many teachers enter the urban environment without any real understanding of their students' lives outside of school. And even those who know about certain challenges might not have the tools to help. In order to significantly impact young people's life trajectories - from the classroom to the block- we need to broaden our conceptualization of education and refine our academic partnerships. (Watson, 2012, p. 5)

It is through understanding these conflicts that people (specifically Caucasian educators) began to recognize the adversity that African Americans have endured in the past and presently experience. It is through this understanding that educators who make up the dominant category of the teaching profession were able to build and maintain these relationships. Research by Watson and Milner has shown how minority voices can be enriched if the focus remained on uplifting one another based on the unique qualities of race (Milner, 2010; Watson, 2012).

There has been a substantial amount of research on how teachers were able to bridge this educational gap through culturally responsive teaching practices to assure students felt welcome and supported in their classrooms and academic lives (Gay, 2013). The best way to do this is through building trusting relationships with ones' students. According to Romero, "Schools are social systems and the level of trust and quality of the relationships in them is dynamically intertwined with learning. Trust plays a vital role in student achievement" (Romero, 2015, p. 219). Not only will trusting relationships help to build greater academic success for students but it will also positively impact the behaviors and climate of the classroom as well (Amemiya et al., 2020).

Paradigm and Framework

This study took a radical humanism lens, meaning a call to action to make positive change in the field of education. Researchers have stated that "radical humanism involves

undoing the fictional coherence of social science logics and refusing modernity's claim to establish institutional norms that generate forms of knowledge centered on the Global North" (Clarke, 2021, pp. 32-33). The research is intended to contribute to scholarship on how Caucasian teachers at the high school level were able to bridge the cultural divide to build trusting relationships with their African American high school students. This investigation explored the experiences of these educators who were able to build these relationships to determine what constituted building rapport and what was at the heart of these alliances. To properly critique this area a conceptual framework was utilized through the participatory/collaborative approach paradigm.

In a participatory/collaborative approach the researcher was able to take on a joint approach with the participants. Although the views of the participant were critical to discerning the portraits of the participants, it was also important for me as the researcher to ensure the honesty and accuracy of my research to determine what was shared in the final product. This type of research paradigm allowed the research to "join forces with stakeholders to conduct research toward some form of social action" (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 78).

Research Questions

1. How do Caucasian teachers describe their efforts to build lasting relationships with their African American high school students?
2. How do the teachers describe their efforts to bridge cultural gaps to build those relationships?
3. How do teachers describe the approaches to building and maintain relationships with their students?

4. Do teachers perceive a power gap when building relationships with students of different ethnicities?

Research Methods and Design

This study was best conducted through a qualitative methodology. Qualitative studies can give the accounts of a person's decisions and behaviors to shed new light on the study in question. The only way to understand how to build a relationship of trust within the high school classroom "is to get an understanding of the latent process of power - observe, listen to what is said… examine the words and their meaning" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 25). Though there are many avenues in which to use a qualitative method, the best method for this study was using portraiture which is a subsection of ethnography. It is through this design that the question of how these relationships were built was answered.

Ethnography "seeks to answer anthropological questions concerning the ways of life of living human beings" (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 165). This type of study focused on the *what* and the *how* of human interactions and the relationships that they make. When using this type of methodology, the study was done using thick descriptions. Through these thick descriptions the researcher was able to derive cultural interpretations that described what they had heard and seen based on the cultural group's view of reality (Lapan et al., 2012). This type of methodology usually gets its data from the following sources: "participant observation, field notes, unstructured/structured interviews with people from the identified site" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 31).

Ethnographic research often focuses on learning what is going on within a particular culture. To do this, there needed to be both first level description and thick description. Within the first level description there was a focus on "the scene, the parameters/boundaries of the research group, and the overt characteristics of group members" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.

186). Once this has been determined the researcher was able to move to a thick description. This is done through interviews and field notes where both informal conversations and observations are documented. Once the data were collected it had to be synthesized (Richards & Morse, 2013) using both the emic (voices of the community) and etic (analysis of the researcher) perspectives (Lapan et al., 2012).

The subcategory of ethnography that this study used was portraiture. “One of the ways in which it is distinct from other research methodologies is in its focus on ‘goodness’; documenting what is strong, resilient, and worthy in a given situation, resisting the more typical social science preoccupation with weakness and pathology” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 19). The study had the focus of goodness. It is important to note that some stories have documented the struggles of participants to initially build relationships with their African American high school students. Its goal was to capture the full scope of experiences of the participating teachers, both positive and negative.

This type of methodology was written for divergent groups and was intentionally inclusive to those groups. It is about “seeking to explore and understand…this individual’s story, hoping to capture more universal themes” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 22). To do this the researcher had be able to depict an abundant, extensive and deep-seated illustration that spoke to an audience beyond academia (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016).

This type of qualitative method blended the use of science and art to illustrate the distinctive depth of the dimensions of the human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture utilized the context, voice, and relationships that people make to capture the complexities that make up their unique human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). For this reason, the portrait of each participant was varied based on the individual’s knowledge and

experiences. As the researcher, I listened for a story that illustrated the complexities and depth that were needed to create and maintain a trusting relationship between people of different racial backgrounds (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Population and Sample

The population interviewed was a distinct group of individuals. It included four instructors who self-identify as Caucasian high school teachers in a public high school who were identified by members of the Black Student Union as educators who were able to successfully build trusting relationships with African American students. If there were more educators who wanted to participate in the study the researcher had determine if there was enough time to conduct both interviews and observations of additional educators. If not, the researcher kept their name and information in case another participant was unable to complete the study. I intended to utilize two separate campuses for this study. Both campuses were Title I schools with low-income students, however, one campus had a higher demographic of African American learners than the other. My hope was to recruit both a male and female Caucasian educator from each site to ensure all voices and types of relationships could be documented; however, the highest priority was to include participants identified by the Black Student Union as trusting educators on their campus.

When reaching out to the Black Student Unions I began by reaching out to their Black Student Union club sponsor through email to set up a video/audio phone call or in person meeting to discuss the research study proposition. During the initial meeting I explained the research proposal, the proposed cooperation of the students who comprised membership in the Black Student Union and what I hoped to gain from their participation.

From there, the sponsor and I set up a time after school during non-instructional time for me to meet with the Black Student Union's elected officials to present my research proposal.

These officials then took the information from my research proposal and presented it to the rest of the group. The students then voted on whether they wanted to participate in the study or not at their next group meeting which also took place during non-instructional time. I attended both meetings in person, and when the group had collectively decided to participate they informed me in person the day of the meeting.

Once the club had approved of the study, they sent home the consent forms/parent permission forms to be signed by participating members (Appendix A). I then went in once more after school to explain the requirements of the survey with the students. They had the opportunity at this time to ask questions before filling out the survey. The survey asked the members of the Black Student Union to select up to five teachers on their campus that they believed fit the description of a Caucasian educator who was able to build trusting relationships with African American high school students on their campus. There were no clear-cut confines when it came to the classes taught, and number of years of experience for the teachers who were selected by the Black Student Union. Once all data had been gathered and participants had been chosen and agreed to participate in the study the survey information was erased.

From there purposeful sampling was utilized to determine who the best candidates were to participate in the portraiture study. The participants were determined based on the number of Black Student Union members who indicated them as a trusted teacher on campus. Additionally, I determined the prospective participants based on the information they shared in their initial questionnaire. If a participant wanted to participate in the study but was not chosen a personal phone call was made to notify the participant that they were not included in the study. Once potential participants had been selected an emailed explanation of the study as well as a survey went out to all parties selected to gauge interest on who was willing to collaborate on this

project. The survey asked for information included the teacher's name, years of service, courses taught, schools taught at, education level, and educational philosophy.

Who will be selected was determined in large part by the participants' willingness and availability to participate in the study for both interviews and observations. The researcher also considered all information that was given through the initial survey when choosing participants for this study. From there a minimum of four teachers were selected from two different sites. "This should provide ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis" (Creswell, 2013, p. 155).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

I intended to ensure that the data that were collected was done so using sound data collection procedures. In the case of a portraiture, individual interviews were the primary means used in collecting and analyzing the data. Through the analysis of the interview transcripts, I planned to gain insights concerning the trust that has been built between a Caucasian teacher and African American high school students through the stories, artifacts, and observations that took place. The process of building trust is unique to the individuals who created that atmosphere and because of that it is important to allow the participants time to speak freely throughout the interview. This means that during the interviews my role was more of an active listener than it was questioning their stories.

Despite the importance of being an active listener throughout the process, it was also important to provide some structure throughout the interview process. I intended to ensure that the data that were collected were analyzed using sound data collection procedures (Appendices A, B, and C). The questions can be found in these protocols and were centered around the primary research questions for the study.

Doing this ensured that I asked meaningful and relevant questions that illustrated the rich and distinctive dynamics that go into creating trust within the classroom. The use of a protocol ensured that the interviews were focused and semi-structured and respectful of the time devoted to this study by participants. It was also helpful to ensure that I was able to gather the necessary details for a rich and thorough portrait of the trust being built. Each interview lasted up to 60 minutes in length. All the interviews began with open-ended questions that were related to the research question. These were then followed up with probing questions based on the participant's answers.

These interviews and observations would best be utilized in person so that I can get a full picture of the students and teachers participating. This would better illustrate their thoughts and feelings throughout the interview process because of having looked at the body language of the teacher participants as well as ensure that I listened to their thoughts. While the interviews were conducted in person, they were recorded over Zoom (zoom.us) to facilitate the production of interview transcripts using Grain.

In addition to interviewing the participants, I also observed them in their classrooms. This allowed me to see what teacher behaviors and or verbal actions the participants view as important to them; and in viewing this it painted a more descriptive illustration into their thoughts and ideologies (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Throughout this process I maintained a journal that contained my thoughts, reflections, and observations as I moved through the interview, observation, and coding process. This journal helped me to keep my personal positionality separate from my researcher voice.

This study consisted of three interviews, each with a specific focus. The framework of the first interview consisted of questions that allowed me to get to know the participants better as

individuals. This interview helped to set the foundation of my relationship with the participants in which they felt more comfortable to share their stories with me so that I was able to illustrate a descriptive portrait of who they were and their experiences.

The second interview focused on the topic of trust. It is during this interview that I was able to have each participant paint the picture of what trust looked like/meant to them. By understanding how they viewed trust it would be easier to understand how they were able to build that trust with their students of color.

The third interview focused more on the lived experiences of the participants, and how they built/maintained student/teacher relationships based on different backgrounds and experiences. During these interview questions past failures were examined to see how teachers have grown to understand methods and strategies to further build and enhance these relationships. If requested by participants, the interview could be collapsed into the second interview with a follow-up option if necessary to clarify any information. Throughout all these interviews I was focused on capturing the full scope of experiences of the participating teachers, both positive and negative.

The location of these interviews was determined by the participants to ensure they felt comfortable during this time. The portraits that these interviews illustrated was based on the individual participants' background and experiences. They were able to depict the ways in which they built student/teacher relationships despite the differences in backgrounds and ethnicities.

I planned to field test these interviews with educators whom I know personally. I arranged to hold three different interviews with teachers who will not be a part of the study in the manner proposed above. This helped me to establish my interview questions as well as potential follow-up questions that could occur.

During the study, I planned to conduct observations of each participant on three separate occasions for a total of up to six hours. The observations took place on two different campuses: both campuses were a lower socioeconomic status and one that had a higher demographic of African American students. These observations were conducted to examine how the teacher participants interacted with their students in the classroom.

Informed Consent

Prior to conducting any interviews with the participants, participants were asked to confirm their informed consent, following approval of the proposed study by the Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board. With this information, each participant as well as the members from the Black Student Union also signed the appropriate documents (Appendices F, G, and H).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data collection for this project took three to four months. During this time, up to three interviews were conducted with each participant in a location of their choosing. Additionally, I spent time observing the participants in their school settings to see their skills in action. The steps for this data analysis can be found in Appendix E.

The data were analyzed using Dedoose software. This software is web based and easily accessible. Despite this accessibility it is also secure and protected. In addition, it has qualitative data management that works with coding and analysis utilizing complex filtering to help developing themes emerge.

Once data were collected from interviews, observations, and field notes the evidence was reviewed to find patterns. “The finding of patterns – happens in a deductive manner, or from the top down, and in an inductive manner, from the bottom up. Deductive research tends to be theory testing” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 177). Deductive research was utilized when testing the hypothesis

to determine if the practices employed at each site were similar or different from the other. Additionally, I drew on the existing codes for building trust that had been illustrated in prior research during the initial readings to determine patterns. In doing this I was able to utilize a constant comparative method by consistently comparing new data to these categories (Lapan et al., 2012).

To ensure the data were analyzed appropriately I conducted multiple readings of the transcriptions of the interviews, my notes, and my reflections. As I re-read and listened to the interviews once again, I took notes in a journal about what I noticed regarding the participants' body language throughout the interview and the feelings that I had as they explained their narratives on building and maintaining trust. An inductive approach was employed to review the data and identify patterns and themes that were coded. Doing this allowed for a determination of similarities and differences as I compared the portraits of the different participants.

Building Rapport

To best illustrate stories from my participants it was important to build a rapport with them early on. According to Wannat (2008) the level of collaboration between the participants and the researcher was dependent on what they perceived the benefits of this study to be, as well as the level of trust involved. Trust is a multidimensional frame that most commonly included the following characteristics: benevolence, competence, vulnerability, and integrity (Ream et al., 2014; Romero, 2015; Schoorman et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

It was also important to encourage openness in the interview responses by encouraging a sense of safe vulnerability in their responses. My willingness to be vulnerable and open with my participants helped to serve as a model. This meant that I had to be open to answering all questions that they had about the study or myself prior to interviews/observations to help put them at ease while they participated in this study. This showed them that I am competent in my

research and that I can help take their stories and translate them into effective strategies and methods to share. This also helped my participants to put their faith in my abilities to share their stories (Cohen, 2016).

This vulnerability and competence lead into benevolence because the participants were able to understand that I protected their well-being throughout the course of the study (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). This approach fostered a sense of integrity and an understanding that I was reliable and fair throughout the course of the study. This allowed them to recognize that I conducted this study based on the positive influence they had on their campus and that the information they shared was spread in a positive light. (Romero, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Positionality

It is important to note the limitations that were put on this study based on my personal experiences. For this reason, it is important to point out that my husband and children are both bi-racial. This factor influenced the way that I see certain aspects of the study, however, it must be noted that my story and that of my families did not interfere with the individual stories being told by the participants. In order to ensure this, I needed to be able to take off my hat as a wife and mother and put on a researcher's hat to approach this study as a scholar. To do that I kept a personal journal throughout the course of the study. In this journal I wrote my personal observations, thoughts, and perspectives on what I witnessed and discussed with the participants. By doing this I was able to keep my mother/wife perspectives separate from the scholarly notes utilized throughout the study.

In addition to my family history, it was important to note that I have had a long-held perspective of the inequity that plagues people of color (specifically African Americans) both in the education system as well as in everyday life. I have seen these inequities from the time of my

adolescence with some of my best friends (who are African American), through my relationship with my husband, and in my teaching career. Once again, the personal journal was utilized to keep these perspectives separate from the scholarly voice that were used throughout the study.

Since becoming an educator all my teaching has taken place in Title I schools where most of the population within the school walls are people of color (LatinX and African American) with low socioeconomic families. This has further shaped my positionality on the subject because these schools are where my heart lies and where I hope to see the most educational change. As stated above, the use of the personal journal has helped to keep these viewpoints separate from my investigator stance.

Summary

Throughout this chapter it was explained why portraiture was the best method for exploring the research questions identified in my study. The research participants included Caucasian teachers who were selected using purposive methods and snowball sampling. There were no specific criteria for the teachers to meet to be selected for the study, other than having the ability to build and maintain these relationships with their students. The stories that were depicted through portraiture were the lived experiences of the chosen participants. These stories were collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol that I designed. To ensure trustworthiness of the study I utilized member checking, thick descriptions of the interviews, and triangulation data.

In Chapter 4 I presented the findings of my study. The voices of my participants were heard and illustrated through the re-telling of their stories. Throughout the process my voice was that of the researcher and the portraitist who was illustrating these stories. Through these portraits I hope to illuminate the experiences of my participants on how to build and maintain trust.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Caucasian educators are able to build trusting relationships with their African American high school students. This chapter is broken down into six sections and contains four portraits which consist of four educators (two male, two female) from two different educational sites. All participants are self-identified as Caucasian educators who teach at Title I public schools and were recognized by members of the Black Student Union on their respective campuses. The first section gives an overview of the data collection process followed by an explanation of how the data were analyzed. Following the analysis will be the portraits of the four participants who were identified for the study. The order of the presentation of portraits is site specific. Each site will include a male and female portrait.

Sample

This study had four participants who each engaged in three interviews, lasting up to one hour each, as well as six hours of observation. These participants are separated based on the different sites at which they teach. In each of these sections there will be a description of both the male and female participants from each site and they will be labeled as such in their portrait (Male and Female).

Recruitment efforts to find these participants were described in chapter three. While choosing participants an effort was made to ensure that there were not only educators represented for each gender, but also for the various content areas taught. I was successful in this endeavor and each site has both a male and female teacher participant who teach in different content areas on campus. All the teachers recruited are self-identified as Caucasian educators and were appointed by the Black Student Union on their respective campuses.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary source of data for this research study comes from the twelve interviews that were conducted. Each participant took part in three interviews that lasted up to one hour each. These interviews were conducted in person using the online platform Zoom to video/audio record the interviews with permission from the participants. I then utilized the Grain application to transcribe these interviews. Once the transcriptions were completed I relistened to the interviews to ensure that the transcriptions provided were accurate; edits were made as necessary. After each interview I utilized my research journal to take notes about my initial reactions to the interviews as well as my personal thoughts on the matters discussed. Once my personal thoughts were reflected in my research journal I then relistened to the interviews for a third time to ensure the transcriptions were accurate. Immediately after listening to and re-watching the interviews I began the coding process using Dedoose technology to analyze the emerging codes.

Each interview transcript was uploaded to Dedoose and manually coded using the software. After the initial coding of each interview, I then compared the notes in my research journal to the codes found in Dedoose to see if the findings matched my initial sentiments. This allowed me to look at the converging themes and repetitive codes that were emerging with each participant as well as the contradicting themes of the individual participants. In portraiture the data is analyzed through the identification of these themes and the repetitive nature through which they are found. Using the varied modes of video analysis, transcription coding, and research journal notes I was able to create a foothold for these impending themes.

I read through the transcripts multiple times to ensure the coding was accurate. Once these codes were completed, I returned to my research journal to reflect on my deeper thoughts about what I have learned from the teacher participants. To focus my reflections, I utilized three

guiding questions for my journal entries. These questions included: What was learned from the participant? Were these insights expected or unexpected and why? What was surprising to hear from the interview? This approach allowed me to position myself as a portraitist so that I could look at the different experiences of the teacher participants within the varied sites. Doing this allowed the portraiture methodology to come to life as well as to keep my research separate from my own personal thoughts and biases. The findings in the next section are the portraits of the participants which will be presented by site and separated by gender to tell the story of how each individual teacher is able to build and maintain the relationships they have created with their students across ethnic barriers.

The purpose of this research study was to uncover the ways in which teachers of Caucasian descent are able to build and maintain a trusting relationship with African American high school students despite their different backgrounds and histories. Their stories are written in a way to showcase their individual narratives, their perspectives, and perceptions on the topic (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Throughout the depictions of the various portraits my voice will be used as the researcher and will be present throughout. This added depiction of the researcher's voice adds depth and nuances to the stories illustrated by the participants. Throughout each of the shared stories by teacher participants I often found myself recounting stories of my own or recalling moments from my own history that were similar both as an educator and as a Teacher Instructional Leader on campus. This study has further refined my ideals that I have a part to play in improving the educational experience of African American students.

Portraiture methodology was the best approach to capture these experiences because it allowed me to engage in depth with the participants to learn their anecdotes, struggles, and achievements as educators. Through portraiture I was able to both hear the teacher's stories

firsthand as well as to see their actions in person when they were interacting with their students. This breathes life into their words and shows the depths through which their convictions lie when working with African American learners. In addition, portraiture was the best method for this study because it allowed me to capture my own reflections with the responses to the stories of each teacher participant.

Once all the data were analyzed I utilized a member checking process with my portraits to authenticate the results. The portraits of each teacher participant were emailed directly to them once the portraits were finalized. These portraits included not only the comments they made during the interviews from the transcripts, but it also included my own reflections to their illustrations. By sending the teacher participants their completed portraits as well as the transcripts from their interviews I was able to show them that I am trustworthy. Each participant was thankful and positive to have the opportunity to have participated in the research study.

Site 1:

Site Description

Located in South Phoenix the first school site is nestled amongst a suburb that is surrounded by golf courses, apartment buildings/neighborhoods, and some local businesses. While the school is located in the heart of an affluent area, the school itself is a Title I campus due to the high number of students who come from low-income families. Many of the students who attend this school are bussed in from different cities in the region. Despite the transient atmosphere that inundates the student body the students within these walls seem happy to be on campus and have chosen this school specifically despite the distance that needs to be traveled to attend.

As one pulls up to the school site, the pride that is held for this campus cannot be missed. Signs and flyers reveal the delight that the school holds for its sports teams and fine arts

programs. Both groups have awards that have been given and those accomplishments are highlighted both outside and inside the school facilities, suggesting that all groups are celebrated on this campus.

Walking through the halls it is clear that this campus has a diverse group of learners. The various groups of students can be seen interacting in different groups throughout the hallway before and in between class periods, each seeming to be comfortable in their own skin. Campus security can be seen amongst the throng of students, occasionally speaking with various groups while keeping a varied eye on the student population. It can be inferred that they have a rapport with the students on campus based on the body language and conversations that could be overheard.

In addition to security both teachers and administrators can be seen in the hall in the morning, in between classes, and after school. Each group is taking a role to ensure the safety and security of the students. These added measures from all groups on campus seem to help students to feel welcome on and gives the impression that students are cared for while at school. Though the demographic of the staff seems to be mostly Caucasian there is diversity as well. This shows that divergence amongst the staff is important to the school community. Despite the efforts noted above by the school's staff to be visible in the halls and to work on building rapport with these students gaining their trust as a newcomer is not easily done.

When I first met with the Black Student Union on this campus it was my belief that students would be excited to be a part of a research study to bring positive changes to education while highlighting some Caucasian educators on campus that they trust. However, it became clear after my initial meeting with the group that gaining this trust myself would be easier said than done.

My first struggle came from the inability to meet with the Black Student Union as a whole, as well as to gain participation for the study. Even though their charter includes up to 70 members, there were only about 20-30 students present during each of my meetings with the group. This came in large part due to the late bus that was continuously cancelled at the end of the school day when the group was meeting. As stated above many students on this campus are bussed in from across the state to this school and without access to a bus home students were unable to stay after for extracurriculars such as Black Student Union.

During my initial meeting with the group, it became clear that the members present did not have the same excitement as I did for this particular research study. While there were many who stated that they would like to participate in some type of research study to make changes for African American learners this study was not the one they had in mind. There were many who voiced concerns that they would be unable to name a Caucasian teacher on campus that they trust while others were unsure if their parents would be okay with them participating. Along with those concerns there were also students in the group who made it clear that they did not trust my motives for conducting such a study. Phrases such as “crazy White lady” and “What does she think she is going to do, save us?” were echoed in the room as I handed out the permission forms for students to bring home to parents. Even the BSU sponsor asked me if I would be willing to change the focus of my study to focus on what is missing in White teachers’ ability to build relationships as opposed to focusing on the ones who can.

Despite these setbacks, there were those in the group that believed in what I was doing and approached me after my presentation to offer their assistance. It was through the combined efforts of myself, the students, as well as a few other teachers and administrators on campus that

we were able to speak with enough members of the club to gain sufficient support and participation to complete the study.

My second struggle came with obtaining the parent permission slips of the students who agreed to participate. Though they were eager to give me the names of teachers on campus that they believed were deserving, they were also apathetic about returning the signed permission forms in a timely manner. This is not unusual for the age group and was something that I had planned for. In order to alleviate this hardship, I spoke to many parents on the phone to explain the study so that the students were able to return with a signed permission slip the next day and then participate in the study. Obtaining permission this way meant that I had multiple days of gathering the anonymous surveys from students as I began to have them complete the surveys once their permission slips were returned as opposed to as a whole group.

Once all was said and done, I was able to get 20 students to participate. Combined, those students nominated 17 teachers on the campus and of those 17 teachers there were two who were suggested by a majority of the students surveyed. These teachers, according to the Black Student Union, can build trusting relationships across ethnic backgrounds more thoroughly than others. These teacher's portraits are described below.

Female Participant

The first educator who was recommended by the Black Student Union is a veteran special education teacher with 11 years of experience. She has taught in three public school districts during her career and currently teaches both co-taught and Basic Geometry at her site (Basic Geometry is a special education course). Despite being a veteran of her craft, she is the first to admit that she has still has a lot of learning to do both in how she teaches and in how she interacts with students, illustrating that she is a lifelong learner who believes in continued development and improvement.

During both the interviews and observations, the passion and enthusiasm that she has for her craft and for her students is evident. Her classroom is well kept, and the desks are lined up in a way that is both functional and intimate for the group. The walls hold paintings that depict the school's mascot, showcasing the pride she holds for her campus, as well as motivational posters and educational signs pertaining to mathematics. Despite being a math class, she also includes a word wall with important words and phrases that the students are able to reference throughout the period to enhance their knowledge on the topic.

In spite of the dedication she holds for her craft, teaching was not her first choice in professions, participant one stated that "It actually wasn't in my plan. I was a single mom in my mid to late 20s…I needed to finish my degree in applied psychology, and I thought I was going to be a nuclear medicine tech." Even though teaching was not in her original plan it is where she feels she belongs. This qualifies not only for her profession, but also for her current work site. When asked why she chose to teach on her current campus she stated that she had an out of body experience when being offered the job,

> I literally spent a year praying for my purpose and my pride... I was just trying to find my place in this world, trying to find my people... After being here for like, a month, I absolutely knew without a shadow of a doubt that this is where I'm meant to be.

Building relationships with her students is at the top of her list when it comes to ensuring student success. The best way that she has found to build these relationships is by being real with her students and showing empathy. This could be seen during the warmup when she would have one on one conversations with her students about what they had done over the weekend or about their families. These conversations showed that the students have opened up to her about their

personal lives. Being real with her students means many things for this teachers' classroom. It means holding students to high standards/expectations and adhering to what she says she will do both positive and negative. Doing this allows her to be seen as genuine and gives transparency to the decisions she has made, which builds trust amongst her students.

> They have to know that when you say, 'I'm going to call your parents' you're going to call their parents. They have to know that if they're doing something that is not conducive for their learning or the learning of other students, that there's going to be a consequence for it.

Doing this ensures that the students know what to expect from her which leads to academic trust both for the students and herself. This also allows her to create systems within her classroom so that students know what to expect daily. These routines and procedures help students feel safe and secure knowing that they can depend on her to be consistent.

Another way that she is able to be real with her students is by acknowledging and showing pride in their differences. These differences include not only what makes them unique as individuals but also their race,

> I think it's important to acknowledge race. I think it's important to acknowledge differences… I've had one of the students tell me recently, 'you're one of the few teachers that doesn't pretend like they don't see race', it's important to acknowledge it.

While working on her campus it has been made apparent to her that a lot of students do not have these types of conversations with their teachers. She believes that it is important to acknowledge these differences because without that recognition she believes that the students would not be able to fully open up.

In addition to acknowledging their differences as learners, she also acknowledges their differences when it comes to individual student success. “It is completely different for each of them. I have different expectations, and different hopes, and I have different desires for every single one of them.” She also noted that she makes sure to ask her students questions not only about the academics they are learning but also about their personal lives to ensure they feel heard and cared for. For her students this can happen before, during, or after class. During an observation it was made clear that she has created a space where students feel comfortable opening up not only to her but also to each other within the classroom. During the lesson students were unafraid to ask for help not only from their teacher but from each other as well. This shows that they have built a community within the classroom where they trust one another

This ability to be real with her students lends her the capacity to empathize with these learners as well, even those who come from a different ethnic background. Because she acknowledges the differences between herself and her students and acknowledges race, she is given the opportunity to build relationships amongst those differences. She does this by not disregarding her students’ concerns or interests and instead takes an active role to learn about the importance of varied topics amongst her students. One example of this comes from a young lady who was having a bad hair day in her classroom and instead of brushing off her student’s concerns she went out of her way to help lessen the burden for this young lady.

> A student in my first hour was having a hair issue one day and nobody could take any notes or do anything until she was calmed. And what that involved was she needed somebody to braid her hair. So, as we went through the notes, I stood behind her desk and braided her hair as we went through things… I think it would have been really easy to be dismissive because we’ve all had hair days, and I

> think that I recognized her anxiety that a bad hair day for her was not the same as a bad hair day for me; and she needed that fixed before she can move on with her day. And just so you know, she approved of my braid which is amazing because African American hair is different. And having to incorporate her hair into her weave and make sure that it was seamless with the incorporation, uh, she cared way more about that than she did about Geometry. So just being able to fix that and move on was, I think, good for the whole class.

This is just one example of how this educator is able to take the needs of her students, that are different than her own needs into consideration so that all her students feel important and heard.

She attributes the ability to empathize and make her students feel welcome to showing them dignity in the classroom. She noted that a lot of teachers talk about respect, but she chooses to focus on building dignity instead. She defined dignity as being "able to keep their self-worth. I think what dignity comes down to is being able to have and keep your self-value and self-worth." One of the reasons that she has chosen to focus on dignity as opposed to respect is due in large parts to the teachings of Brene Brown.

Brown has researched vulnerability and shame for the last 25 years. The teacher reminisced on a seminar she heard from Brown, stating that after the 2001 attacks of 9-11 many people have lived in a perpetual state of fear. Participant one believes that this has greatly impacted students today because it has impacted how the adults in the students' lives react to certain situations. "We've very short. I think that as a society you can see where the divide comes in and its us against them…And I think that all that comes from a sense of fear." It is because of this shortness that she has focused on improving how she communicates with her students to ensure that they feel heard and dignified while in her care. While she admits that she

is not perfect at this yet, she has made an effort to take a second look at how she responds and reacts to certain situations that she may not fully understand.

Another reason that she can empathize so well with her African American learners is because she has experienced a form of prejudice in her lifetime when she lived in St. Thomas. It is through her lived experience as well as her ability to reflect on herself and her practice that has allowed her to have empathy and an understanding of what her students experience. She shared that while living in St. Thomas she, for the first time in her life, understood what it meant to be judged by the color of her skin and not the content of her character. Because of that experience she is constantly reflecting on her own actions and interactions with her students to ensure that they feel valued and to try to uncover any biases that could be present in her demeanor.

In addition to her own experiences, she also reflects on what happens in the classroom and community to improve herself as an educator,

> I think that it's important, and I haven't always been good at that, but I'm trying to work on making sure there is a reset button. That your [student's] actions from yesterday, I'm not going to hold against you for four weeks... Let's learn from it and move on.

These personal self-reflections allow her to improve her craft on an individual and personal level for her students.

These reflections are not only based on her personal life but also on her teaching craft as well. She shared that in one of her old districts she requested to be a part of cultural and diversity training for the district because of the inequities she saw on campus. She reflected on two experiences that brought these inequities to life for her. The first was at one of her old schools when she realized a majority of her students in special education were African American males.

"My last school had 5% African Americans. And at one point I had a resource class… and I opened the door, and I looked in the classroom and realized 80% of my class was minorities." It was the realization of the disparities between the demographics of the school and the demographics of the Special Education program that truly brought this realization to life for her.

The second experience came from watching a basketball game at her current school site.

> I got to go to a basketball game, and I was pointing out the differences from my last school to this school and the whole bench at our school was African American students and the whole bench at the other school was all White…And it was glaring differences and just the way they were treated by the refs also. They got fourteen as many fouls as the other team did, and I kept trying to see if they were actual fouls…It was really bizarre and quite frankly very uncomfortable watching.

She reflected on these observations with her students who both attended and played in the game. She noted that by talking with her students it brought the inequities into a starker reality for her than she had thought of previously. Having these types of conversations with her students also allows her to build trust.

It is through building this safe and secure space for her students that she is able to empathize and be real with them. She believes that these traits are the foundation to building trusting relationships with her students, especially those of different ethnic backgrounds. Through these relationships she hopes that she can help the students to build their confidence and improve their intrinsic motivation to learn and adapt in this world.

Male Participant

The male teacher from site number one is also a veteran teacher who has been in education for 26 years. Throughout his career he has served as a classroom teacher for 12 years

and administration for 14 years. The male participant teaches History and an elective course. When walking into his classroom you can tell that he takes great pride in its appearance and comfortability of his students. His desks are set up to face each other in a debate style construct and students are welcome to sit wherever they feel most successful. There are books that line the walls as well as posters depicting important people from history and pop culture. Similar to the female participant at this site teaching was not his first choice as a profession.

> It was actually my wife who suggested that I go into teaching. I was unhappy in the position after college…and I was coaching youth baseball just for fun, and volunteering at church…and she said you love working with kids so much, and you got so much useless information stuffed in your head, you hate what you're doing, why don't you go back and get your teaching certificate and teach? And that coupled with growing up the son of a college history professor seemed like a perfect fit and thank goodness she was right.

Also, like the female participant the passion and enthusiasm that he holds while teaching these students is evident in both his words and actions.

He attributes his abilities to build relationships with all students to his capacity to be real with his students about who he is as an individual. He was upfront during our first interview to share that he is not a fan of school and in fact he stated that he has hated school since his first day of kindergarten.

> It goes back to growing up in my dad's house. He wanted me to behave in a certain way and he was the hard charging young up and coming professor and he wanted his son to be much the same…and I'm like that's not who I am.

He uses this experience and his displeasure for school to show his students who he is as an individual and to connect with his students in a way that shows he understands their academic struggles.

Because of his distaste for school, he has chosen to have more of a laid-back classroom atmosphere and demeanor that mostly focuses on teacher led direct instruction. He emphasized that he does this to prepare students for college after high school because that is the type of instruction that they will be receiving postsecondary. While observing his lessons it is clear that his style works and keeps his students engaged. Despite having Power Points to project the information of his lessons, participant two does not need them.

Being the son of a history professor, participant two has no doubt learned about the strife and struggles of those who have suffered throughout history his entire life. This shines through in not only his teaching style but also in him as an individual. His careful planning and explanation of history proves this in his ability to adapt his lessons so that everyone understands the history being told. The knowledge and passion that he has for the subject is sown into all his lectures. He even shared that his emphasis on this type of instruction is one way that he works to fight against the inequities that he sees on campus.

When asked about the inequities that he has witnessed on his current campus he mentioned the Volvo effect. This term is used to critique standardized testing as it gives a positive boost to students from more affluent backgrounds. Referencing this effect, he is bringing awareness to the fact that a lot of students on this campus have come from less affluent schools and with families who may not be able to be as present due to their economic status. Through his teaching he is hoping to give these students the best educational experience they can get while preparing them for life after high school that allows them to feel successful.

Participant two's view on success is individualized to the students he serves. Going a step further he wants his students to be able to determine what success means to them individually.

> For me success is growth. Growth as an individual, growth as a student… It's the B kid that earns an A. It's the C kid that earns a B. It's the D kid that earns a C. It's the F kid that passes and does it because they've grown. To me, that is success for them. For them its individual.

In addition to his individualized view of his students, the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom also allows him to give his students the ability to gain trust and respect by following his classroom mantra. The mantra that he lives by in his classroom is *Courtesy is expected and respect is earned*. He stated that,

> I'm not one of those teachers that's going to stand in front of them and say 'you will respect me' or demand respect. I'll either earn it or I don't…and I tell them that it's their job to do the same with me.

He tries to build these beliefs into his classroom by encouraging students to be courteous of one another's' thoughts and feelings while still pushing them beyond their comfort levels.

He does this by leading a lot of Socratic forums and pushing his students to think more critically about the world around them stating that "this isn't history from the eyes of a White guy. We're going to take various things into account here." This could be seen during the observation when he compared the imperialism of America to the student's focus on various social media platforms. Basing history on the lived experiences of his students allows the content to be more authentic for them and therefore more impactful. This approach seems to resonate with his students, illustrating his ability to build trust towards him as an educator.

The example of this that stood out the most as an observer was when he showed the Martin Luther King Jr. *I Have a Dream* speech to the class. While the class watched the speech he stood to the side and was visibly emotional. While the speech was playing an African American student turned to her friend in the class, pointing to participant two and stated "that is what makes him such a great teacher, you can tell that he cares, like truly cares so much about this kind of stuff. It's truly moving." That instance alone shows the impact that he has on his class and his ability to build these relationships of trust both academic and personal.

This relationship could further be illustrated during one of our interviews when we were interrupted by an African American male student who was visibly upset. When participant two went to speak with the student, the student stated that he did not want to be bothered by anyone and that he only trusted to be in participant two's classroom at that time. The trust and compassion were evident throughout their interaction.

While in the classroom participant two tries to be as open and honest with his students as he can be to help push and motivate them to be their best.

> Getting them to realize that I do care as much as they do if not more, and share with them personal experiences, open up as much as I can and not just as a student myself or as a teacher but also as a father, a child in college/Jr. High/High School…Just letting them know that in the long run that they're not alone in here. That is my job, to help them across the finish line.

It is his belief that by showing the students that he cares and by being honest about who he is that the students will be able to see him as an individual and want to work harder because of this.

He equates his ability to show his students that he is a real person by being vulnerable with them.

> Through the transparency I am trying to build their trust, because ultimately, they've got to trust that which I'm trying to do; and just as they want me to see them as an individual, I need them to see me as an individual and not equate me to their prior history teachers or not equate me to their other middle aged White male teachers or other teachers on this campus.

He believes that by being vulnerable and showing the students who is he is allows him to build their confidence in him as an educator and as a person. This further allows him to give his students more freedom within the classroom which both builds trust and respect for all.

He takes this vulnerability a step further by sharing arduous stories about his life when he experienced adversity and alienation. He shared that there have been times in his life where he felt that he did not belong, calling himself a runner, "I'm a runner in terms of, I will run from safety, I will leave you before you leave me. So, I have a tendency to alienate myself from the group and so I'll do that." This feeling of alienation has further helped him to empathize with his African American learners because he can recognize what it feels like not to belong.

Opening up further, participant two was willing to talk about his own vulnerabilities, and how sharing these trying experience has helped him to build closer bonds with his students. "I'm very open and honest with them about that which I faced about flunking out of college, about going through rehab as many times as I have, about being addicted to alcohol. I'm not ashamed." Bearing open these vulnerabilities allows his students to see him for who he truly is; a human being who has failed in his life but never stops trying. Sharing this information opens a line of communication and respect between him and his students. Being open with his students in this way allows him to teach in a more holistic fashion.

In addition to being real and vulnerable with his students, participant two has made it clear that he cares about his students both inside and outside the school. He stated,

> I really strive to take care of every kid, even the ones I don't like; and I'll admit that there are some that drive me absolutely nuts. But I will work harder, probably, for them, because there's a reason, they're driving me nuts.

This was illustrated once again by the student who came in during the meeting. Participant two later shared his experiences with that student.

> It's funny because honestly, he's my biggest pain in the ass, but I don't want him in anybody else's class because he'll wear you out and he wears me out. But there's so much there that hasn't come out yet.

These abilities to build relationships are seen not only by the students but by faculty as well. He attributes this ability to not only his years of teaching but also his years of administrative work.

> I think a lot of it is built upon the reputation of me in the twelve years as an assistant principal here and that I was equitable with people. It was a situation that I was unaware of, and other individuals brought it to my attention… That I was good in handling kids in difficult situations. When they made errors, the focus was on how are we going to rectify this? How are we going to change the behavior?...Those experiences and then lending itself to how we can change this behavior so you don't have to feel this way again or another adult doesn't have to be stern with you… I've always been somebody that attempts to take care of those that I'm around at least in the school setting.

His ability to care as much as he does stems from being reflective in not only his life but in his practice as well.

He began the practice of reflecting when he was a part of his high school football team and has continued to hone this ability to be reflective to this day,

> the first day of freshman football our coach said, did you give me your best today? Only you guys know deep down inside if you have me your best… in essence he taught us self-reflection. So every day I look back and said 'did I do my best today?' and if the answer is no, how can I make a difference tomorrow?

His ability to reflect also pushes him to continuously learn.

On multiple occasions during both interviews and observations it was noted that participant two was always reading a new book to help him grow as both an educator and person. He shared that he prefers to read historical texts. "I'm more aware of community as opposed to here's the latest sociological study… I want to know more." He not only reads historical texts, but he also keeps up on important news and cultures to better relate his teaching to his students, "I'm constantly reading and I get on my phone, constantly looking for stories to read, news stories, and honestly, I like pop culture; and can I name all the Kardashians and their significant others? Yeah." His passion for learning and drive to further himself is what sets participant two ahead of the pack.

Site 2:

Site Description

Located in the heart of the city of Tempe this public high school is surrounded by office buildings, neighborhoods, highways, and a bustling city life. As one drives up to campus it is clear that there is a lot going on around the school as busy streets intersect on all sides. However, once within the school walls the community that this school has built amongst the throngs of city

dwellers is unmistakable. The honor that this site holds is evident in when you look at the walls. Even walking towards the building, this campus holds something special. Different from site one this school is not completely indoors. Students are able to walk from one building to the next for classes with one large open area in the heart of the school for students to mingle in.

When walking into the school students can be seen talking and smiling with security staff in the early mornings while other groups of students can be seen conversing amongst themselves. The individuals working in the front office are friendly and cordial to everyone they meet, making sure that everyone feels welcome. Staff members are equally helpful and kind, ensuring that everyone who enters their school can leave with a good experience even during tough conversations.

Similar to site one this campus has a transient atmosphere as they have a lot of students through open enrollment. In addition to having students come to campus from differing locations they also have an ever-changing staff. In previous years there has been a lot of turnovers within these school walls. Campus staff has stated that they believe this is due to changing demands of the profession as well as administration. However, those who remain are dedicated to this campus and to their students. The staff that is currently working at this campus is there by choice and loves what they do. This was clear by the genuine smiles that could be seen while walking the campus.

When meeting with the Black Student Union on this campus I was apprehensive due to my experience at site one, however, I tried to put aside those nerves to try to make this meeting more advantageous. From the moment I entered the meeting room I had a feeling that this group would be different. The Black Student Union on this campus is smaller than the one at site one but their group seemed more intimate and connected than the one prior.

It was clear that their sponsor had been in contact with them about why I was coming to meet with them, and they all seemed eager to listen to what I had to say. As I explained the purpose of my study and what I hoped to gain from them all students were silent and listening intently, the enthusiasm from their sponsor for this study did not go unnoticed either. Once I finished explaining students immediately came to life. They began talking animatedly with one another about which teachers they believe they wanted to recommend and why. To try to stem some of the mishaps that I had on the first campus I had students who were interested in participating in the study call their parents from the meeting so that I could explain it to them then and there. From there I told them that a permission slip would be coming home and to have them sign it and return it as soon as possible. I let the group know I would be back in one weeks' time to conduct the surveys.

When I returned the students were prepared and excited to recommend and appoint teachers on their campus that they believed thrived in building relationships with African American learners. Some even requested to recommend more than five because of the vast number of teachers on their campus that they believed made a difference. The feeling of elation coming from these students was infectious and far different than my first experience at site one. Some students even thanked me for caring enough to conduct this type of study.

In total 15 students participated in the study at site two and 10 teachers were recommended as Caucasian educators they believed made a difference in the lives of African American students. Of those 10 teachers there were two teachers, a male and a female, who were recommended by a majority of the Black Student Union. It is those voices that you will see below depicted in the portraits.

Female Participant

The dance room at this site is like nothing I have seen before. The walls are surrounded by mirrors and in some spaces of the room there are posters that show various dance and yoga positions. These are put in place so that students can correct their stance, participant three shared that "for yoga, we take a lot of pictures at the beginning, and then they put their pictures next to each other so you can see your own growth. I think that's the biggest thing for me is I want them to genuinely see their accomplishments and see how it lead up to this." In one corner of the room there is a small desk surrounded by photos of students and past performances. There is even a portable chalkboard in the room that depicts the lessons being learned for the week.

Looking around the room it is clear that a lot of care has gone into the planning of this classroom so that students feel welcome. Each day in this classroom, despite the different classes being taught they both begin in the same way. Students set up their spaces and line up for attendance. Once participant three walks through and takes attendance students begin their work. This portion looks different depending on if it is dance or yoga.

For the yoga students this means grabbing their *intentions* cards and returning to their space. The *intentions* cards are completed at the beginning of each week, on these cards' students write their goals for the week and each day of the week they look over those goals to take notice of what they have achieved. While they do this participant three walks around and collects all the cell phones from her students. It is my experience that students generally have a hard time being separated from their phones. Despite that, these students willingly hand over their cell phones, showing that this is an expectation and routine to which they are accustomed. It also demonstrates the trust that they have for their teacher to keep their phones safe.

Once phones are collected students begin their warmup with their teacher and work through the yoga lesson, moving through various poses and positions. As they tackle new moves

participant three walks around giving adjustments to students as needed. She shared that students are not afraid to ask for help, stating that "they're pretty good for advocating for themselves because I feel we create kind of a more open environment for them." At the end of class students meditate at their stations, allowing their bodies to rest. To end class all students circle up in the center, giving positive affirmations and discussing the progress of the class, showing that they have a team mentality.

Dance is very similar in that before warmups begin, students willingly give their cell phones over to participant three for safe keeping during class. During the day of my observation I was able to witness two different types of dance lessons. The fusion class was a fast-paced lesson that went through many different steps of a new dance routine that the students were learning. Throughout the lesson students were focused on their teacher's movements and were unafraid to ask questions and for help on positions; not just to their teacher but to one another as well. This shows the comfortability that they have with one another. Similarly, at the end of the class they ended with a circle up where students were able to discuss what went well and what they wanted to improve on for next time, showing a growth mindset mentality.

In the second dance class there were two students leading the lesson. It was later disclosed that the students came up with the choreography of this dance and were teaching it to their class. Each student in the class has the opportunity to do this, and on the day of the observation I was able to witness just that. Participant three joined her students in learning the routine that the other students were teaching the class, showing that she believes in their abilities. When class was over, they once again circled up. This time around the group was able to talk to the students who led the lesson, letting them know what they did well and how they could

improve on their lesson for the future. Once again, this willingness to be open shows that these students can take constructive criticism to improve their abilities in the future.

Having students teach the dance lessons is not the only way that she has tried to enhance her students' belief in themselves. She has also brought in past alumni students to showcase their abilities and successes for the current students.

> I brought in a guest artist one time, and she's actually an alumni, and she happens to be dancing with Rhianna in the Superbowl… we brought her in and she got to teach both our classes [two dance teachers]. And the kids were like, oh my gosh. But she started here, this school is where she started; and so, bringing some outside people, especially alumni, I feel like they respond really well to that. Like, okay, we can become this. That's not so far out of reach, right? So, I think bringing them to either an external location so that they can experience things outside of school or bringing people in has been really helpful with motivating them to push themselves further than where they're at.

Doing these types of activities with her students has allowed participant three to show her students what is possible for their futures.

Though participant three does work hard to motivate her students she admits that her classroom is not immune to problem behaviors,

> we get defiance sometimes… I get a lot of kids who just make up a lot of excuses for themselves and then they just don't do anything. I'll admit there's a few kids that I really feel like I just have not gotten through, and I continue to try.

Despite these struggles, participant three has a burning desire to push her students and to create an open space where they feel comfortable enough to make mistakes and flourish.

This desire seems to stem not only for her lifelong passion for teaching but also from her past experiences as a student herself.

> Probably since first or second grade I knew that I wanted to be a teacher… but teaching dance in high school specifically was when I was in high school, and I felt like I didn't have a teacher that I trust, that I felt like I wasn't in a safe environment to learn. So, then I wanted to be that for other kids.

It became clear during the observations that she has been able to create that type of environment for many of her students. While participant three shared that "I can definitely tell my kids trust me when they come to me about things that aren't necessarily related to my curriculum." It became even more clear to me as an observer when they shared vulnerable moments with her even while I, an unknown person to them, was sitting with them, stating that "If you trust her then I trust her". They trust her enough to trust those that she invites into her classroom as well.

Despite the clear level of trust, she holds with some of her students, she was open to admit that these relationships were something she had to build up to, stating that "I feel like there's a lot of students who come in here who do not trust me at all." In her seventh year of teaching at this site she feels she has been able to establish her role better by participating with the students in ice breaker activities, as well as being a part of the dances and yoga moves to show them that she can be vulnerable as well which helps her to build a rapport with her students.

Participant three also seems to be very attentive to her students, being able to notice if they seem off either physically or emotionally. She is lucky, in the stance that she is able to take a few minutes before or after class while students are dressing out to have one on one

conversations with students if she notices something is off. She even uses this time to speak with students if she feels that their trust has been broken in any way.

> It could have been something unintentional that I said or the way that they perceived what I said. And that's just about having a conversation. I think generally, I don't really let things go for that long, so if I notice that the dynamics between myself and a student is not how it typically is, then I usually address it pretty early on.

She shared that maintaining this level of trust in the dance classroom is especially important because throughout the dance class there are a lot of life lessons being learned. Without the trust and comfortability students will only be able to get small amounts of the lesson.

Participant three shared that another way she has tried to build relationships and improve on her students' trust is by incorporating their cultures within the lesson, sharing that this is more easily done in dance than yoga because of the ability to incorporate different types of music into the lessons.

> I'll have music that's in different languages of from different time period or understanding things like that… We typically talk about where did this come from? Or understanding there's a cultural background in it as well…Sometimes when students run the lessons, they'll do different things from their culture that they know. They want to show this… so I give them the opportunity to do that.

While giving her students the ability to teach and learn about different cultures she did share that this has not always gone smoothly.

She shared that she has witnessed racism on her campus, and specifically in her classroom when certain types of music are being played.

> There's definitely some walls up between students of different races and it becomes really negative. I think sometimes when students are speaking Spanish, certain kids will be very aggressively put off by that and then they will say something. There have been a few instances where I've played Spanish music in here and students have said like 'What is that? I'm not Mexican. Why would I listen to that?'

In these instances, she shares that she can see the walls that her students are putting up between one another. Participant three believes that in these instances it is important to incorporate whole group and small group discussions to help alleviate the tensions, believing it comes from a lack of understanding on the student's part.

Along these same lines participant three also shared that she has experienced a lack of trust from her African American students when it comes to hip hop dances.

> When I was teaching beginning dance my first couple of years here, I think I struggled a bit… specifically when we were doing the hip hop unit. I think students were very forthcoming about saying 'You're White, so can you even do that?' Just not fully trusting that I would be able to lead them through something.

Instead of ignoring her students' concerns she had individual and group conversations with her students, asking them why they doubted her abilities and building relationships from that doubt.

> If they're doubting because they've had poor experiences in the past and they are like, well, you're not really authentic in a sense. So then in talking we discuss 'where does this come from? Of you doubting specifically when it comes to what we're learning right now [hip hop] versus what we learned before. Allowing them

> to be like ‘okay well there’s stuff that you can teach me…making it more of an exchange.

Doing this shows the students that although she is the teacher, she does not hold herself above her students and truly believes that she has just enough to learn from them as they do from her. This type of exchange builds trust within her students and allows them to build a rapport with one another built on mutual trust and respect.

Building this type of environment within her classroom allows students who come to feel comfortable enough with her to talk about more serious instances as well. During one of our interviews, she shared that she has had students come to her to discuss instances where they have felt stereotyped by teachers on campus, as well as other open conversations about what is going on in the world. Participant three believes that having these open conversations with her students allows her to learn more about them and their backgrounds and beliefs. She shared that she has gotten to learn about

> feelings that they have about certain things whether it’s political because of this or even having those open conversations and allowing those open conversations in my classroom about when there has been police brutality. We’ll have some conversations about that and giving them a space to express their opinions based on specifically like they feel this way because they’re African American.

Participant three attributes her abilities to having these types of conversations on her upbringing and her relationships with her coworkers on campus. She shared that she grew up in a very open family, and despite that open family she still felt as though she did not belong as a student in her high school. In addition to that she has an African American coworker on campus she works very closely with, with whom she can learn a lot from.

> We've talked a lot about different things and experiences. I think that has helped me tremendously. She's really awesome because she's very open about things and so I feel like if I ever do have questions, she's definitely a person I can talk to with a non judgement. Like, I'm not asking you a question because I'm judging. I'm asking because I need to understand that kind of thing, so that's been helpful.

It is participant three's belief that it is important for her to continuously learn and be open to understanding different experiences. This could be observed with how she interacted with her coworkers and students.

These behaviors and mannerisms have made it clear that participant three feels a sense of belonging on her campus. She builds on this sense of belonging by continuing to learn from her students and making them they feel welcome in her classroom and with each other. Building these relationships with her students seems to be at the top of her list of importance as a teacher. She has even learned new ways of building these relationships with her students when she is serving as the student council sponsor.

It is clear through all these interactions that participant three makes an effort to get to know her students on a personal level beyond school. Doing this allows her to notice nuances of differences within her students so that she can speak with them and help them through tough times. Though she admits that she can still improve in this area she prides herself on her ability to make students feel welcome and safe in her classroom.

Male Participant

Teaching upper-level math is no small feat, especially in the academic climate that educators are currently facing. There are many students who come into math classes with a mindset that they will not do well or that they are not academically inclined to the subject. However, that does not deter participant four from pushing his students to do their best in a

subject that many struggle with. When you walk into his classroom you can tell that purposeful planning has gone into each day, each lesson, and each student.

The layout of the classroom is designed for optimal student success. Students are grouped by tables and the lessons are catered to ensure there is a fair mix of both teacher led and student led instruction. Class usually begins by having students complete the bell ringer that is on the board. Students know that once the bell ringer has been explained they are expected to go to the respective boards in the classroom and complete the work with their groups. It is clear that this expectation has been taught and that students know what to expect each day in their class. This dependability helps to build academic trust. As student are working the teacher is walking around, helping them as necessary with purposeful questions to help guide their thinking. Allowing the students to showcase their reasoning in this way improves their confidence in themselves and allows them to build their academic trust with not only their teacher but with their peers as well.

The remainder of his lessons are conducted through a combination of teacher led and student led instruction. Throughout the observation it became clear that students had a routine down for this class. When asked about how long it took to prepare students in this way participant four stated,

> it was hard to get them to follow through initially at the beginning of the year. But once it was modeled and the students became comfortable they began to thrive with this type of instruction. It is all about being purposeful in the design of the lesson.

When speaking with the participant about his practice it was clear that he always has one goal in mind and that is to build relationships with everyone. Admittedly he has had trouble

doing this with certain groups of students on campus, but those challenges do not deter him from doing his best to meet his student's needs. He starts this exercise by greeting his students at the door each day by name and working to remember facts about their lives so that he can build in conversations with them each day. In addition, it was noted throughout the observation that he would have one on one conversations with most students during the class about their lives outside of school. When asked about this he stated that "I make it my mission to talk to every kid at least once a week so that they know someone is here who cares for them." During the observation it was clear that he was doing just that. As he helped students to understand their next steps in the lesson he would also have conversations about their personal lives outside of the classroom.

It is his belief that when building these relationships, it is important to be consistent, "once they believe in your consistency, once they know that you're going to be there, once they know that you're not going to change or betray their trust then they start opening up." He works hard to be consistent with all his students. This means holding firm to the high standards he holds his students to, as well as in how he treats each of them. He believes that,

> trust from student to me is built through me showing up every day, going through similar routines and procedures, being predictable in discipline and in expectations. So not changing up how I treat kids, all kids are treated the same, and so eventually there's a trust that built.

Despite treating the students the same he also understands the importance of individualizing his relationships with his students.

Individualizing relationships means that he takes the time to get to know his students' lives both inside and outside school. Doing this he feels he is better able to understand the

interactions with his students and how they may react to certain scenarios. He shared a story about a student he taught who was consistently late to his first period class. Because of this student's tardiness he tried to learn about his home life and once he did, he was able to create a scenario in which this student was able to be successful despite his difficulties.

> I had a senior in my junior level class. He was in my first hour. For the first two or three weeks he showed up late every single day. So, kind of like I do now…I tried to get to know him, tried to get to know him, tried to get to know him. Every day that he was late I would just talk to him. Not about him being late but just talk to him. Like, what's going on? How's your day going? What struggles are you having? And he opened up a little bit, but eventually towards the end of the progress period, I talked to him one day because he came in two minutes before the bell, and he was visibly upset. I asked him what's going on and he just unloaded. He had been kicked out of his mom's house and was living in another kid's house. He was trying to figure out how to get food stamps…and I'm just like whoa that's a lot… and I was like, how can I make things easier for you.

He shared that after their conversation they had worked out a plan where the student would come in during lunch to complete what he missed on days he was late. During this time participant four would provide food for the student which built up their trust and allowed the student to be successful and graduate on time despite his trying history. Without opening up the teacher would not have been able to have helped this student in the way he did. It was in this teacher's ability to not give up and get to know his students that allowed his student to feel comfortable enough to open up.

It is not just in understanding the students' lives that he individualizes these relationships, but it is also in how he views their success, "Each kid is different. Every kid comes in with different baggage. Every kid comes in with different positives… negatives. Every kid has a different lived experience…and I celebrate with kids for different things." He shared that success for one student could be scoring high on an exam, while for another it could be coming to class on time. He tries to know his students well enough that he can celebrate these successes with them no matter how big or small they may seem on the outside.

During the interviews it became clear that like the other participants he feels a huge sense of belonging both with his students and at his work site. In his eighth year of education, he has only taught at one school despite the high levels of turnover he has seen on his campus,

> We've had a lot of turnovers, but what keeps me coming back is wanting to help kids. That's really what it is. I get way more satisfaction helping kids in this environment…I just get way more out of it emotionally.

It is this sense of belonging that has allowed him to remain at his site working to improve the lives of the students he serves.

He attributes part of these feelings to how he was raised, sharing that the demographics of the school are very similar to his own high school and friends when he was growing up.

> I was raised in a primarily Hispanic town… I'd probably say 90 plus percent of my school was Hispanic. So, I was the minority. And so, when I went over to my friend's houses, there were foods, customs, and cultural things like parties and big families…Growing up in a White home and in a Hispanic neighborhood I feel like I kind of got to know those types of people, those types of cultures, those expectations, and those norms.

It is because of these experiences and shared culture that participant four believes he can more easily build relationships with his Hispanic and White students. However, that reflection does not deter him from actively building relationships with all his students.

Despite not coming as easily he still works hard to understand his African American students' cultures and customs despite not having the same capacity to understand them in the same way as these other demographics on his campus. He believes the best way to do this is through asking questions, listening, and being open to learning about what he does not understand. He shared two instances where he was able to improve his knowledge on African American culture. One was by speaking with one of his African American students about their hair. This student shared the importance of having their hair kept clean and styled. While listening to the explanation participant three shared that while listening and absorbing the information, he made a mental note to pay more attention to African American hair in the future because it was such an important aspect of his student's lives and culture.

Another example of this came from his work on the dress code committee for the district. Students of African American descent who were members of the Black Student Union on one of the district campuses came to speak to the committee about the importance of being able to showcase their culture through dress. He admits that prior to this meeting he did have a bias of certain types of dress such as durags [close-fitting cloth tied around the top of the head to protect hair], but after listening to the students speak his perspective changed.

> They spoke so eloquently to explain how they feel about it, how their families feel about it, and I learned so much. It was so empowering and insightful. To a point where it's like, wow, I didn't even understand how big of an ignorance I had.

It is in his ability to listen and absorb new information to improve himself both as a person and a teacher that allows him to grow and strengthen his relationships with these students.

Along with listening to his students and working to understand their home lives he also works to continue his education and knowledge of the unknown. He shared that he has been lucky enough to attend seminars on Culturally Responsive Teaching and Understanding Biases. He noted that while at the training he was able to go through certain scenarios.

> He [the trainer] has us close our eyes and then he would say a phrase, a description of somebody, and then he would have to share certain things that we came up with in our brain, like what is going on [in the scenario], who is the person, what is their background? And that was pretty powerful. The way that just that simple exercise is just brining awareness to how you see people and how you interpret certain interactions.

It was thanks to these trainings that he was able to be more self-reflective of his practice as an educator and how he interacts with his students. It has been one way that he is able to continue to grow and learn.

In addition to trainings, he has also been sponsors for a few different groups on his campus. These clubs include Key club, Math club, Coffee club, Skate club, and the one that he has learned the most from, culture and society club. They started the club "when we were in COVID 19, and they started the club because they wanted to talk about what's going on in the community and nationally." He shared that in addition to talking about what was happening in the world they were also able to have different people from within the school community come in to speak with the group. By being able to be a part of these conversations he was able to gain a better understanding of what was happening and how that was impacting his African American

students. This led to a deeper empathy for their lived experiences and a deeper level of trust amongst the students in the club.

It is through his lived experiences, his continued learning/training, his ability to empathize and communicate with his students that has allowed him to grow as an educator and to be someone that can meet the needs of his students both academically and personally. His passion can be seen through his words and in his actions with his students. His tireless capacity to always work for what is best for his students is what allows him to build these relationships despite different ethnic backgrounds and lived experiences. It is his willingness to adapt his curriculum to meet his students needs and to understand his students that allow them to feel comfortable enough to learn and grow from him.

Conclusion

Despite understanding the difficulties that African American students face both inside and outside the school walls, the teachers who participated in this study seem to emphatically understand the needs of their students. For each of these teachers their ability to understand their students' hardships stems from their own experiences of feeling as though they do not belong and understanding the sting of indifference. However, it also comes from their continued education and growth as a teacher.

These educators have worked hard to get to know and understand their students as individuals despite their race or background. This hard work means working to understand their students in a new way, so that they can better understand the cultural differences that separates them as well as pushing past any biases they may hold. It means pushing past barriers to get to know these students for who they are and to help them thrive in the process.

Despite teaching different subject areas, different grades, having different teaching styles, and even teaching at different school sites, these educators all have something in common. Each

of them has a passion for their craft that takes them beyond the everyday school life. These individuals work hard to continue to learn and grow, not just about their craft but about how they can better reach their students as well.

Each of them also, despite their varied teaching philosophies has a laid-back atmosphere that surrounds them which allows their students to feel more at ease with them and allows them to open up. Part of this comes from the teachers being authentic and open with their students but it also comes with vulnerability. It is like participant four said, "vulnerability is a byproduct of trust…So respect is a foundation to trust, then vulnerability could be the product of that trust." When these teachers are open and vulnerable with their students, they are showing them that they are instilling trust within them and that feeling is often reciprocated.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn from the experiences of four Caucasian educators who were recommended by the Black Student Union about how they can build trusting relationships with African American high school students. Through the use of portraiture this chapter will illustrate the primary themes that emerged in the four teacher portraits that were conducted.

Even though the selected teachers had different content areas that they taught, different teaching styles and philosophies, and different experiences they all share a common thread; and that is their ability to build trusting relationships with the African American students on their respective campuses. Some of the similarities that arose between these educators were their ability to learn about their students individually and take genuine interest in their success both academically and otherwise. Through portraiture it is intentional to focus on the goodness that these participants put out (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) while still discussing the hardships. As the portraitist I will be sharing the lessons that can be gained from each portrait and how their lived experiences can create impactful recommendations for future studies and teacher education.

Summary of Findings

Question One: How do Caucasian teachers describe their efforts to build lasting relationships with their African American high school students?

The ways in which these Caucasian teachers describe their efforts to build lasting relationships with their African American high school students include getting to know their students on an individual level, showing them that they care, and being honest and dependable. Part of being honest means acknowledging the differences in their lived experiences. Despite

their different methods for doing so, the teachers who participated in this study have made getting to know their students, showing they care, and being honest a part of their everyday practice.

Getting to know students on a more intricate level is essential to building relationships. This means not just teaching students the content but also listening to students about their individual struggles and triumphs as well. As stated previously, "the best educators are able to teach this generation because of their ability to reach them, listen to them, and learn with them (Watson, 2012, p. 11). The teachers in the study described their ability to learn about their students as an intentional practice. The way in which they were able to accomplish this was dependent upon the individual teacher. For all, this was done through being willing to listen and learn from their student's experiences and perspectives.

In some instances, this is done by taking time during the school day to talk to students and ask questions about what was going on in their lives outside of school. For others, this meant being a part of student led groups on campus and being a part of their conversations in that way. Despite the method through which the teachers were able to learn about their students, the important aspect of this practice is building trust so that students are willing to share these aspects of their lives. When teachers understand their students in these ways, they have the opportunity to incorporate their students interests into the lessons (Milner et al., 2019). The research has shown that building this type of rapport with students and getting to know them on an individual level can impact a students academic and social success (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Howard, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2010).

Another way in which these Caucasian teachers described their ability to build relationships with their African American high school students is by showing them that they care

about them beyond the classroom. Having a student feel cared for means allowing them to feel heard and respected (Milner et al., 2019). When this occurs, students feel confident enough in their abilities to take chances (Legette et al., 2020). When showing students that they care, the teachers who participated in this study did so in different ways.

For instance, participants one, three and four showed their students that they cared by having one on one conversations and asking questions about their students to better learn about their cultures. In each instance all four participants opened up about welcoming students into their classrooms for lunch and oftentimes providing food for them when they are unable to provide it for themselves. Whereas for participant two his ability to build these relationships was more so shown in his ability to showcase his knowledge and understanding of his student's culture in the lessons he taught and, in his ability, to tie these lessons back to their lived experiences. Whatever route was taken, it was clear through the observations that the students in these classrooms feel heard, welcomed, and cared for.

The final way in which these Caucasian teachers described their ability to build relationships with African American learners was through being honest and dependable. The research has shown that it is important for teachers to be "open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to curiosities of the students" (Freire, 1998, p. 49). Each of these teachers shared instances in which they had been vulnerable with their students, sharing parts of their lives that were failures, parts of their lives that were struggles, and parts of their lives that were joyous. For participant three this even meant being vulnerable through dance. Going beyond this though, they also shared instances of their lives where they felt alienated or like they did not belong. In the book, Start Where You Are But Don't Stay There by H. Richard Milner IV a White educator named Mr. Hall shared that "once his students realized that he had had difficult times similar to

their own, they became more receptive in the classroom" (Milner, 2010, p. 53). The teachers who participated in this study shared similar anecdotes when they discussed their experiences.

Sharing these moments with their students has allowed the students to see their teachers as more than just educators and instead as individuals. Therefore, strengthening the trusting connection that they have with them. These instances also allow them to understand what their students go through, allowing them to bridge the topic of race with these students.

Question Two: How can teachers describe their efforts to bridge cultural gaps to build those relationships?

The teachers in this study described their efforts to bridge cultural gaps by having hard conversations about race, as well as incorporating what they learned about their students into the lessons. It is no secret that students have a better understanding of the learning taking place when they can see themselves in the lessons. This was discussed by Haberman (1991) when contrasting the views of the pedagogy of poverty with good teaching, stating that "it is no surprise that the kinds of instruction students have access to breaks along racial fault lines" (p. 291). Each of the participants in this study have made an effort to understand the lives and interests of their students, thus enabling them to create more meaningful and authentic lessons. Milner explained the importance of bringing students' lived experiences to the classroom,

> Research demonstrates that all students… become disengaged, disinterested, and disconnected from lessons and learning opportunities when they do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum and related opportunities to learn. (2010, p. 6)

Additionally, the participants in the study are not colorblind and do not pretend to not see the various races that they teach. I remember that while reading literature on the topic it was

clear that “too many educators gloss over race as an important area of consideration” (Milner, 2010, p. 7). Instead of glossing over race these educators have made it a part of their continued education to learn more about these differences and to have the hard conversations with their students, even if this means critical reflections on their part. Participant two does this by not only having conversations with his students during history lessons, but also by teaching the various points of view of those who were oppressed throughout history. Participants one and three do this by participating in continued education that teaches them about being culturally responsive, and participant three does this through her conversations with coworkers and students.

Another way that these teachers are able to bridge this gap is through reflection. “Thinking critically about practice, of today or yesterday, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow’s practice. Even theoretical discourse itself, necessary as it is to critical reflection, must be concrete enough to be clearly identifiable with practice” (Freire, 1998, p. 44). Each of the participants engage in daily/weekly reflections of their teaching practices and conversations with students in order to continue to grow and learn as not just teachers but people. While some have admitted that these reflections can be hard to accept due to recognizing bias or a lack of understanding they each emphasize the importance of this practice when it comes to growing as an educator.

Questions Three: How do teachers describe how to build and maintain relationships with their students?

While building the relationship with their students comes from getting to know them on an individual level and showing that they care, maintaining that relationship means both parties continuing to put in work. This means continuing to have conversations with students and being willing to participate in personal critical reflections.

> Critical theorist Michael Apple stresses that those of us in education must continue to question what knowledge is, how it is constructed and validated, and who decides the worth, value, and meanings of knowledge and knowledge construction. (Milner, 2010, p. 4)

Part of this comes from teachers' ability to reflect on the lessons they have taught and the interactions they have with their students as stated above. Another part of this comes from taking those reflections and making varied changes to their practices to adapt to what they learned through reflection.

Another way that these Caucasian teachers described being able to maintain these relationships with their students of differing ethnic backgrounds is through being vulnerable with their students, not being "afraid or unwilling to admit when she is wrong or out of step with her own teaching philosophy" (Watson, 2012, p. 37). Each of the participating teachers shared an instance in which they recognized a bias or misunderstanding of their students' culture. It was their ability to recognize this fault within themselves which allowed them to grow as educators.

Question Four: Do teachers perceive a power gap when building relationships with students of different ethnicities?

When asked about the power dynamics of the classroom each of the participating teachers recognized that there is a balance of power within the classroom, however, their beliefs about this power struggle varied. Participants two, three and four (both male participants) recognized that there is a privilege that comes from being a teacher, however, they do not view this leadership as having more power than their students. Instead, they view it as a way to allow students to feel more comfortable discussing important topics with them. "When teachers act as a guide instead of the classroom knowledge authority, students take on a more active role in

constructing knowledge they encounter" (Milner et al., 2019, p. 76). They all emphasized that they do not feel the need to get into a power struggle with their students because they feel it is important to understand their students' struggles and point of view.

Another view of power dynamics came from participant one who stated that she believes the power dynamics of the classroom can hinder student-teacher relationships. She stated this because she believed it would make students less willing to come forward prior to the relationships being built. In some instances, she believed it could make it harder to build relationships with her students because of the experiences they have had in the past with teachers. However, she does not let this viewpoint hinder her ability to try to push past these dynamics and paint a new picture for her students.

This power gap can even be taken a step further when looking at the constructs of the two school sites that were evaluated during this research study. Both schools were Title I schools, meaning that there were more students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds which creates a power gap and adds to the education debt taking place. Ladson-Billings asserts that, "we must ask ourselves why the funding inequities map so neatly and regularly onto the racial and ethnic realities of our schools" (2021, p. 67). This means that these teachers had to look at not only the power dynamics of the student-teacher relationship, but also the power dynamics of being a Caucasian teacher to their African American students.

This adds a layer to the influence these teachers will be able to have. It furthers the chasm between the teacher and student due to the lack of understanding of one another's lived experience. However, as stated above, one of the ways that these teachers have been able to bridge this void is by acknowledging these differences with their students and by working to better understand their students' experiences and culture.

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study imply that it is important for teachers, no matter their background, to build trusting relationships with their students. This is especially important when you consider that over 80% of teachers across America are self-identified as Caucasian while the minority student population is continuing to grow (Ladson-Billings, 2021). If teachers are unable or unwilling to meet their students needs, no matter how different from their own, then there will be a dramatic reduction in the success of learners across the country.

These issues can already be seen in the inequities of educational practices in discipline and special education referrals. There is an overabundance of African American students who are referred to both special education and given discipline referrals more than their Caucasian counterparts each school year (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Hones & Hagopian, 2020; Noguera, 2016).

Through building positive student-teacher relationships teachers should be able to correct these procedures. Showing their students that they care and believe in their abilities can help students to feel more confident in their academic knowledge and can lead to less off task behaviors and more student success (Legette et al., 2020; Milner et al., 2019).

The individual experiences of each teacher participant demonstrated their ability to build relationships that crossed ethnic lines and the positive effects it has had not only on their classroom practices but also on the students themselves. Though each teacher was able to build relationships with their students, the way in which they built these relationships were not monolithic. That being said, the procedures and logistics of how these relationships were built can be recreated by others. When planning for implementation it is important for each teacher to find a method that works for them as an individual. Without doing this the relationships that are being forged will not be genuine and will not last.

Another related implication of this study needs to be the locations in which this study took place. Both schools in which the teachers participated were Title I schools, meaning a majority of the students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of the teachers who choose to teach at these schools have a desire to work with minority or at-risk students. This data may look differently when looking at teachers who work at more affluent schools with less of a minority population. As stated previously, "research has found that both children of color and White children develop a 'White Bias' by the time they enter kindergarten" (Banks, 1995, p. 392). This type of bias could be more prevalent in a more affluent school with a higher Caucasian population.

Throughout this study the stories of the participants, both individually and collectively were able to add the to depth of understanding for which Caucasian teachers are able to bridge ethnic divides to build relationships with their African American students. It is important for both educators and students to create an open dialogue about the importance of building these types of relationships. This means that campuses across the nation, whether they have a majority or minority of African American students on their campus, must help teachers to find ways to build and maintain these relationships with their students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study occurred while there was a lot of turmoil surrounding race in the nation. The results of the study should be viewed as just the beginning of understanding the important implications of building trusting relationships between Caucasian teachers and not only African American students, but students of other minority demographics as well. Given that the preponderance of research is in the elementary school setting additional research regarding teacher-student relationships in the secondary school setting is recommended.

Another future study could look at the different ways in which Caucasian teachers are able to build relationships with other minority groups such as Latin American students, Native American students, Asian American students, or immigrant communities. Another important facet to look at for future research is the impact that colorism can have on building relationships between teachers and students.

Similarly, another important study would be to look at how Caucasian teachers in more affluent schools or private/charter schools are able to build relationships with African American students. With the differing degrees in demographics on their campus this could lead to different techniques and practices when it comes to building and maintaining relationships.

Because education is a mirror of the society in which it is in another important area of study will be to look at proposed legislation that would have the effect of prohibiting or discouraging discussions of race, oppression, or gender. These new laws could impact a teachers ability to understand their students of differing background which could inhibit their abilities to build relationships. In turn this could impact the academic and personal student success across the country.

Finally, while the participants were able to shed some light on how they can build relationships with students of differing backgrounds it is important to note that this is only one perspective. Relationships are built on two parts and this study only gives one half of that equation. Another study could look at minority students to see their views and opinions on how these types of relationships are built and maintained, adding another layer of depth to the discussion of trust.

Concluding Remarks

As Caucasian teachers it can be overwhelming and intimidating to try to step over ethnic boundaries because it causes you to become vulnerable in ways you may not be ready for. This

can be especially true when looking at the history of racist thoughts throughout not only American history but also the history of schooling as well (Spring, 2018). The importance of ensuring that these students feel cared for, important, and valued can lead to a level of success and acceptance that was not thought of as possible prior. The power to create this type of systemic change comes at the individual level. Teachers and students must be willing to step over these boundaries together, to put aside their perceived biases and work together to create a more sustainable future for all.

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Appendix A: Black Student Union Survey Protocol

Introduction: My name is Amber McClendon. I am one of the English/Special Education teachers in the district. I am currently working on my dissertation for my Doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University. My topic of research for my study is how Caucasian teachers can build trusting relationships with their African American high school students. It is my opinion that the best way to find teachers who are able to build these types of relationships is by speaking with the Black Student Union on campuses. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you do not have to participate if you do not want to. With your help I will be able to locate the teachers on this campus who are able to build and maintain these relationships. What I hope to get from you all is an anonymous list of three to five teachers on your campus that you feel meet the criteria of a trusted Caucasian teacher. Thank you for your time and consideration in participating in this study. What questions do you have about the study or your potential participation?

Appendix B: Survey Questions for BSU Members

Please list up to five Caucasian teachers on this campus with whom you have a trusting relationship with. You have the option to give a reason for your recommendation though this is not mandatory. You can list as few or as many Caucasian teachers as you would like as long as they meet the criteria for being able to build a trusting relationship.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

Introduction: My name is Amber McClendon. I am one of the English/Special Education teachers in the district. I am currently working on my dissertation for my Doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University. My topic of research for my study is how Caucasian teachers can build trusting relationships with their African American high school students. I was able to meet with the Black Student Union on your campus and you were named as one of the teachers who can build and maintain these relationships. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you do not have to participate if you do not want to, however, I am hoping that you would participate in my study. Your voice in how you can develop, build and maintain these relationships could improve the quality of education for the African American students in our district and beyond. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews that could last up to one hour (60 minutes) each. In addition to the interviews, I hope to observe you while teaching in your classroom for up to six hours. Thank you for your time and consideration in joining my study. What questions do you have about the study or your potential participation?

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Research Questions

1. How do Caucasian teachers describe their efforts to build lasting relationships with their African American high school students?

2. How can teachers describe their efforts to bridge cultural gaps to build those relationships?

3. How do teachers describe how to build and maintain relationships with their students?

4. Do teachers perceive a power gap when building relationships with students of different ethnicities?

Interview #1: Get to Know the Participant and Understand their teaching philosophy:

1) What inspired you to become a teacher?
    a) What made you choose to teach high school specifically?
2) During your teaching career what types of schools have you taught at (public, private, charter, title I, etc.)?
    a) Do you have a preference? Why or why not?
    b) Why did you choose the school you currently teach at?
3) Can you walk me through a typical day in your class?
    a) What are your expectations/routines?
    b) Describe your classroom management system?
    c) What curriculum do you incorporate to align with African American culture/pop culture/relevance for the African American experience.
        i) For example, Freshman PLC at my school tried to justify To Kill a Mockingbird for racial awareness, and while it does address racial prejudice, it is essentially a narrative written from the perspective of a Caucasian woman.
4) How would you describe your teaching style or philosophy?
5) How would you describe your classroom climate?
    a) Does this climate change in different periods?
6) How do you motivate your students to perform at their best?
    a) Do you believe there should be more intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic and how would you cultivate that?
    b) What do you have in place ahead of time to encourage students to be motivated, engaged and on task that would help to facilitate a beneficial teacher-student relationship?
7) How would you handle a student you found difficult to teach?
    a) What behaviors do you see currently in the classroom?

b) Are these behaviors different than what you have seen in the past?
    i) Have these witnessed behaviors created a bias for you?
c) What do you do at the time you spot a positive or negative student reaction to your direction/guidance? What obligations do you have?

8) How do you communicate and build relationships with parents?
    a) Do you know where your students are from?
    b) How much do you know about their home life? Have you taken steps to learn about their home life?
9) Do you coach or sponsor any clubs on campus? If so, which ones?
10) In your opinion, what personality traits do teachers need to be successful?
    a) Do you think these align with the qualities students look for in their teachers?
11) Do you incorporate social-emotional learning into your classroom? If so, how?
12) Do you have any questions for me?

Interview #2: Questions about Trust in the classroom

1) How would you define trust?
2) How can trust be seen in the classroom?
    a) What is the difference between academic trust and personal trust?
    b) How does this look differently at the beginning of the school year vs. the end?
    c) Why is trust important in the classroom?
3) Do you believe trust and respect go hand in hand or are they two separate things?
4) What is the relationship between trust and vulnerability?
5) Can you tell me about a time that you had to earn a student's trust? How did you do this?
6) Do you believe power dynamics play a role in building trust? If so, please explain how. If not, please explain why not.
    a) Teacher-Student
7) How would you repair trust in your classroom?
    a) Can you tell me about a time when you had to repair trust?
8) How do you measure the success of your students?
    a) Is this the same for everyone?
9) Why is it important as a teacher to gain your students' trust and vice versa?
10) Do you perceive differences in your African American students from other cultures/backgrounds?
    a) Do you feel intimidated by your African American students?
11) Do you have any questions for me?

Interview #3: Questions specific to African American students:

1) What have you done to break the ethnic barriers in your classroom?
    a) Was it successful or not?

    b) How do you know?
2) Are you aware of/ have you experienced any barriers/obstacles (e.g., societal, education policy, discipline guidelines, etc.) that interfere with your ability to create and sustain beneficial teacher-student relationships with the African American students in your classroom?
3) How would you describe your ability to build relationships with your African American students?
    a) Does this differ from your other students? If so, how?
4) In our first interview you told me about how you are the ___ coach/sponsor. Does this role aid you in your ability to build relationships with your African American learners? How/how not?
5) In our second interview you stated the role of power dynamics in building relationships as ____. Do you believe that this holds true when it comes to your African American learners as well? Please elaborate.
6) Have you ever struggled to build a relationship in your classroom with one of your African American learners?
    a) How did you overcome this struggle? Or if not, how did you cope with it?
7) Have you used self-reflection techniques to understand any unconscious bias in the past that you had to overcome in the classroom?
    a) If so, how did you overcome it?
8) Think about a situation-either socially, professionally, or as a student-when you didn't feel part of the school environment or classroom. Describe how you experienced feelings of alienation. What strategies or changes would have minimized your feelings of alienation from the situation? How can you apply this experience to your relationship with your African American students?
9) Have you spoken with anyone or done continuous learning to better understand the African American experience?
    a) Which/what sources of cultural knowledge of your African American students.
        i) For example: Individual research, speaking to or reading about teachers who have been successful in developing beneficial relationships with African American high school students, speaking with parents or other members of the school community with open-ended questions to gain insights into their expectations' of African American high school students, etc.
10) Can you discuss/identify situations or experiences that cause you to consider cultural responsiveness toward the verbal or behavioral actions of your African American students? Reflect and consider beliefs and assumptions that shaped your perception.
11) Why do you believe the BSU chose you as one of the teachers on campus who are able to build these relationships?

12) In your opinion, does racial inequality affect education on your school's campus? Please explain.
    a) How do you help your African American students overcome this?
13) Have you ever witnessed racism at your school?
    a) How did you handle it?
14) Do you have any artifacts from students you would like to share?

Table I indicates alignment between the research questions, sources of information, and data analysis procedures

Table I

Research Questions, Sources of Information, and Corresponding Data Analysis

Research Questions	Sources of Information	Corresponding Data Analysis
How do Caucasian teachers describe their efforts to build lasting relationships with their African American high school students?	Interview 2: - Q10 Interview 3: - Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q14	- Descriptive - Coding of transcribed data followed by theme development.
How can teachers describe their efforts to bridge cultural gaps to build those relationships?	Interview 1: - Q3C, Q8B Interview 3: - Q2, Q4, Q9, Q11	- Descriptive - Coding of transcribed data followed by theme development.
How do teachers describe how to build and maintain relationships with their students?	Interview 2: - Q2, Q5, Q7, Q9 Interview 3: - Q7, Q10	- Descriptive - Coding of transcribed data followed by theme development.
Do teachers perceive a power gap when building relationships with students of different ethnicities?	Interview 1: - Q7 Interview 2: - Q6, Q10 Interview 3: - Q1, Q5, Q7, Q12, Q13	- Descriptive - Coding of transcribed data followed by theme development.

Appendix E: Data Analysis Procedure

Steps	Rationale	Procedure
Review of research journal	To discover emerging themes or patterns.	Reflection on researcher's first impressions, thoughts, and experiences with the participants during the interviews.
Open Coding	Develop emerging themes	Guided by 4 primary research questions.
Triangulation	Looking for convergence of the emerging themes	Review of notes and interview transcripts.
Values coding	Looking for possible sub themes	Review of notes and interview transcripts. Trying to find similar values, beliefs, or experiences.
Axial coding	To discover any larger concepts amongst the emerging themes.	Review of codes; grouping the codes.
Development of emergent themes	Generating hypotheses that give the data shape and form (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997)	Review of repetitive codes
Creation of individual portraits	To look for recurring themes within the individual	Creating a separate log for each participant.
Triangulation	Revisit emerging themes	Review of notes, interviews, transcripts, and coding notes.
Compilation of individual portraits	To create an aesthetically pleasing portrait that depicts the whole individual (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997)	Review individual portraits and create connections between them.
Member Check	To create and demonstrate credibility and trustworthiness	Sending the individual portraits to each participant for review.

Appendix F: Black Student Union Parent Permission

Parent Permission Form

Study Title: Portraiture: Bridging the Cultural Divide: How Caucasian teachers can build trusting relationships with African American High School students.

Principal Investigator: Amber McClendon

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study. Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary and your child does not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to allow your child to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate.

The purpose of this research is to gain understanding from a student's perspective on which Caucasian teachers on campus can develop and maintain trusting relationships with their African American high school students. The students who participate will be asked to complete an anonymous survey naming three to five educators on campus with whom they feel a trusting connection with. This study will be completed on campus during non-instructional time. The study will be conducted in a private room and students will complete an anonymous survey. The initial presentation of the project could last between 10 and 15 minutes. After the initial presentation there will be additional day for approved students to complete their survey that could last 5 to 10 minutes each. Student and faculty/staff names will be given a pseudonym in the written portion of the dissertation.

The requirements of the study are as follows:

- Students must be a member of the Black Student Union during the 2022-2023 school year.
- Participation in the study is voluntary
- Students 17 and under will be required to provide assent and have a parent sign a parental consent form.
- Students 18 and over will be required to read and sign a consent form.
- Confidentiality is of utmost importance.
- No student or teacher names will be used during the writing process.
- All student surveys will be anonymous and no name will be assigned.
- Students may opt out of the research at any time.
- All survey information will be kept in a password protected, encrypted, cloud-based server.

- The researcher will not share anything with the administration to the extent that she is lawfully permitted to do so. ARS 13-3620 requires that teachers report suspected neglect or abuse.
- Participation in this research will not affect the grade of a student in any class.
- Surveys will be completed at school during non-instructional times.

There are no expected risks to your child as a result of participating in this study. Your child will not benefit directly from participating in this study.

Your child's response will be assigned a code number and no name will be attached to it. Only the research team will have access to these files. Your child's name will not be in the transcript or my notes. The survey information will be destroyed upon completion of dissertation and confirmation of doctorate.

The information that your child gives in this study will be kept confidential. Your child's name will not be collected or linked to their answers.

The information that your child provides in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Amber McClendon at 602-432-7985 or by email at alv46@nau.edu.

For questions about your child's rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Research Protection Program at 928-523-9551 or online at http://nau.edu/Research/Compliance/Human-Research/Welcome/.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to allow my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to give permission for my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form**.**

Printed name of parent/LAR	**Signature of parent/LAR**	**Date**

Printed name of subject	Relationship to subject	Date

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Black Student Union Student Consent

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Bridging the Cultural Divide: How Caucasian teachers can build trusting relationships with African American High School students.
Principal Investigator: Amber McClendon

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Study Purpose

The purpose of my study is to understand how Caucasian teachers are able to build trusting relationships with African American students in the high school setting. Most of the teaching staff across America are self-reported as White and female. This is important to building rapport not only within the classroom but across the school as well. It is also important for the training of teachers and administrators in the appropriate ways to build and maintain lasting relationships with all students regardless of their backgrounds.

Study Duration:

This study will last for 3-4 months, however, the participants involved will be between 30-60 minutes for an initial introduction to the project and completing the anonymous survey to help find participants.

Survey:

If you participate in this research you will be asked to:
1. Complete this informed consent form.
2. Listen to a proposal of the study
3. Complete an anonymous online survey selecting 5 Caucasian teachers on your campus that you feel a trusting relationship with.

Participant Qualifications:

You are eligible to participate in this research if you:
1. Are a member of the Black Student Union.
2. Obtain parent permission and agree to be a part of the study.

Risks:

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study.
Participants might have difficulty naming up to five teachers who they feel a trusting connections with. Participants have the right to select any number of teachers, to stop participation at any time, or refuse to answer any question. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you.

Benefits:
You will not benefit directly from participating in this study. If you decide to participate, your reflection on teachers on your campus could lead to a deeper understanding of how to make schools more equitable for students of color. A copy of the completed study will be provided if requested.

The potential benefits to on the outcomes of this study are contributing to the best practices and a new understanding of what building trusting relationships means in the high school environment.

Confidentiality of Information
Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted and password protected. Your name and signed Consent documents will be kept in a separate locked location. The school that you attend will not be identified.

Your responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

You will not be identified in any report or publication of this study. Even though we will tell all participants in the study that the comments made during the focus group should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside the group.

The information that you give in the study will be anonymous. Your name will not be collected or linked to your answers.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Information collected about you will not be used or shared for future research studies.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact.

I can be reached at alv46@nau.edu if you have any questions.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Research Protection Program at 928-523-9551 or online at http://nau.edu/Research/Compliance/Human-Research/Welcome/.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject	**Signature of subject**	**Date**

Appendix H: Teacher Participant Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Bridging the Cultural Divide: How Caucasian teachers can build trusting relationships with African American High School students.

Principal Investigator: Amber McClendon

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Study Purpose

The purpose of my study is to understand how Caucasian teachers are able to build trusting relationships with African American students in the high school setting. Most of the teaching staff across America are self-reported as White and female. With these differing backgrounds how are teachers able to build and maintain a strong rapport with their students? Do they utilize specific techniques? Is it a part of their classroom management plan? Or does it have to do with the individual teacher? This is important to building rapport not only within the classroom but across the school as well. It is also important for the training of teachers and administrators in the appropriate ways to build and maintain lasting relationships with all students regardless of their backgrounds/ethnicities.

Study Duration:

This study will last for 3-4 months, however, the participants involved will be asked to participate in up to 180 minutes of interviews, broken up into three sessions that can each last up to 60 minutes. In addition to being interviewed, participants will be observed while teaching for up to six hours. This observation can be done in one session or broken up into two-three sessions. During the interviews participants will be asked to share artifacts from past students to exhibit the relationships they have built.

Survey:

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Complete this informed consent form.
2. Participate in three interview sessions that can each last up to 60-minutes.
3. Be observed for up to six hours.

4. Share artifacts from students that showcase the bond built between you.

Participant Qualifications:

You are eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. A Caucasian high school teacher.
2. Teaching at a Public school
3. Identified by the Black Student Union

Risks:

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

Participants might have some difficulty answering questions. Participants have the right to skip any questions, stop participation at any time, or refuse to answer any question. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you.

Benefits:

You will not benefit directly from participating in this study. If you decide to participate, your reflection on how you build trusting relationships with African American high school students could lead to a deeper understanding of how to make schools more equitable for students of color. A copy of the completed study will be provided upon requested.

The potential benefits to on the outcomes of this study are contributing to the best practices and a new understanding of what building trusting relationships means in the high school environment.

Additionally, participants who complete the study will be eligible for a $50 Visa gift card.

Confidentiality of Information

Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted and password protected. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names. The school where you work will not be identified.

Your responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

Interviews will be videotaped using Zoom in order to accurately transcribe the data. Upon completion of the study all data will be deleted. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes.

The information that you give in the study will be anonymous. Your name will not be collected or linked to your answers.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Information that identifies you will only be used for future research or shared with another researcher after obtaining your consent. This will take place if future researchers would like to conduct a follow-up study on how you are able to build these relationships.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact.

I can be reached at alv46@nau.edu if you have any questions.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Research Protection Program at 928-523-9551 or online at http://nau.edu/Research/Compliance/Human-Research/Welcome/.

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I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form**.**

Printed name of subject	**Signature of subject**	**Date**

AGREEMENT TO BE AUDIORECORDED

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

AGREEMENT TO BE VIDEORECORDED

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Some studies may require signature of PI or research staff. This is an optional section.

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Signature:_____ Date: _____