Reimagining schools: A descriptive analysis of effective practices for educating marginalized students

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Reimagining Schools: A Descriptive Analysis of Effective Practices for Educating Marginalized Students

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family. A special thanks to my husband and friend, Kenya, who had to read every draft, listen to every thought or idea, and encourage me tirelessly. He prays for me, challenges me, and keeps me grounded. He allows me to pursue my dreams and become who I believe God has called me to be. He has been my rock!

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The hand of God and his favor has followed me all the days of my life. He is a good, good father, friend, confidant, creative genius, way-maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, and my light. I honor Him for never giving up on me and thank Him for blessing me, beyond measure.

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Abstract

Educational equity is the most imperative civil rights issue we face today. While the demands and interjections of social movements have strengthened many practices, structures, and laws related to educational equity, the ultimate shift in the tide has yet to be fully realized. Quality education is still not fully accessible to marginalized populations, specifically Black students who are also considered low socioeconomic status. The educational system in the United States has historically imposed segregation, discrimination, and other various forms of oppression as a means to limit educational access for people of color. The results of such depravities are evidenced by the achievement gap, which is merely a symptom of a more substantial issue, the opportunity gap. The opportunity gap results in further issues that affect communities of color, specifically related to quality of life and overall level of educational attainment. Education, or the lack thereof, has major implications on communities and society as a whole. Such implications include generational poverty; increases in criminalization and incarceration rates; and a lack of opportunities for community development, business growth, and sustainable commerce. The “same old” approach to education has not, and does not, work for Black, as well as other racially and ethnically marginalized, children because the system was never designed for them to succeed. A new approach to educating our children is needed; one that is effective, equitable, and culturally relevant. This analysis will identify and define the cultural norms and values, instructional best practices, and success factors used in institutions that are successfully educating marginalized students in order to inform educators and educational pedagogues how to be successful with these students. The purpose of this study was to analyze effective practices and strategies, from a whole-school perspective, that would inform educational leaders.
and teachers on successfully educating African American students that are low-socioeconomic status. The data collected from 11 interviews, a focus group including three parents, and over 15 hours of participant observations, led to the development of a new theory, the E3 Strategy: Engagement, Experience, and Exposure. This strategy provides guidance and direction for district and building leaders alike.

*Keywords*: culturally relevant pedagogy, marginalized, post traumatic slave syndrome, educational equity, equitable, minoritized, racialized, education, culture, education, success, thriving quotient
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The education system in the United States is replete with systemic policies and structural practices that are biased and racially positioned against marginalized students. Darling-Hammonds (2000a) postulates, “Despite the rhetoric of American equality, the schooling experiences of African American and other minority students in the United States continue to be substantially separate and unequal” (p. 263). Separate and unequal education is foundational to the many disparities facing minoritized youth. As evidenced by the achievement gap, and other factors discussed later in this chapter, the United States education system has historically and still currently failed to provide equitable educational benefits to African American children. Valenzuela (1999) makes a distinction between education and schooling and describes schooling as “a subtractive process” (p. 3). She argues that “schooling” strips minoritized youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them more susceptible to academic failure (Valenzuela, 1999). Schooling, as it will be referred to in this dissertation, is not defined drastically different than the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of “instruction in school” (Merriam-Webster online, 2019). However, here I expound upon this definition noting inherent deficits concerning students of color. By using the term schooling, instead of education, I have created a distinction between what is actually happening in the majority of educational institutions in the United States (schooling), as opposed to what society has accepted (education). In her book We Want to Do More Than Survive, Dr. Bettina Love (2019) refers to schooling as “the educational survival complex”, (p. 27). Dr. Love (2019) defines the educational survival complex as the educational system built on the suffering of students of color “in which students are left learning to merely survive, learning how schools mimic the world they live in, thus
making schools a training site for a life of exhaustion” (p. 27). In mimicking the world, schools prepare marginalized students to live in a state of inferiority and acceptance of the conditions of racism, inequality, poverty, and segregation. Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, and Garrison-Wade (2008) suggest, “The [Education] system creates expectations and evaluates outcomes based upon ideas, beliefs, and values generally accepted by the dominant culture of the school” (p. 47). The modern system of education was created to teach and preserve the social beliefs and cultural practices of the dominant culture; however, there are historic and ongoing denials of the benefits of being educated. Valenzuela (1999) suggests that schools are organized in ways that “fractures student cultural and ethnic identities, and creates social, cultural and linguistic divisions between students, and between students and staff” (p. 5). As a result, this system has and continues to fail a subset of America’s population, specifically Black students.

**Problem**

While there is an overall rise in underachievement in schools throughout the nation, the greater magnitude of this elevation is observed in urban centers, among African American student populations, specifically from low socioeconomic communities (Ladson-Billings, 2013b; Welner & Carter, 2013). Knowing this information, creates a clear picture of a subset of the American population that continues to receive a separate and unequal education from the majority population. The results of this situation include ongoing educational disparities, as evidenced by differences in the achievement gap, increased unemployment, and other inequities later in life (Welner & Carter, 2013; McKinsey & Company, 2009; Rooks, 2017; Darling-Hammonds, 2001). In a research study of the achievement gap, McKinsey & Company (2009) found
On average, Black and Latino students are roughly two to three years of learning behind white students of the same age. This racial gap exists regardless of how it is measured, including both achievement (e.g., test score) and attainment (e.g., graduation rate) measures. (p. 9)

Some of the most pressing issues facing our urban schools is segregation and educational inequity, which results in unequal access to high quality teachers, a lack of resources, and lower funding. Darling-Hammonds (2000a) asserts that while the U.S. education system attempts to implement new standards, reform curriculum and increased accountability measures to offer “educational equity,” the same disparities or inequalities persist (Darling-Hammonds, 2000a). She further cites a lack of hiring and maintaining quality teachers, lack of resources, and high-quality curriculum as some of the retained inequalities (Darling-Hammonds, 2000a). While schools may, at times, physically appear to be integrated, as was intended by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, the actuality of segregation still exists with significantly underfunded schools of low-income Black children.

America’s education system continues to be separate and unequal. Schools educating larger populations of students of color have substantially less resources than schools with a majority White population (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Resource differences seen in schools with greater populations of children include higher-quality teachers, robust curriculum, engaging learning activities, newer facilities, and advanced equipment, such as technology and laboratory learning spaces. Darling-Hammonds (2001) discusses that the achievement gap, the disproportionate outcomes of standardized tests between students of color and their White counterparts is symptomatic of a larger problem of unequal opportunity, or the opportunity gap (p. 210). The achievement gap widens as a result of opportunities not being afforded to students
of color and is compounded by tracking programs, low-quality teachers assigned to high-need schools, and marginalized populations being segregated into schools. Brownstein (2014) names minority students as the majority in public schools for the first time in American History (p. 2) and discusses the mass implications of the country not “getting it right” for Black and Brown children: “These minority young people are the nation’s future workers, consumers, and taxpayers”. Teacher experience and quality, quality curriculum, and resource allocation are big barriers to closing the achievement gap (Darling-Hammonds, 2001). These disparities are paramount to a widening opportunity gap that exists primarily in schools with large low-socioeconomic and marginalized populations.

The education, or lack thereof, of African Americans is a heated topic that predates the civil rights movement, including the U.S Supreme Court ruling to desegregate schools as the result of Brown v. Board of Education, enacted in 1954. While there were other situations which saw attention and concern given, much of the research starts with Brown v. Board of Education (1954) when schools were legally mandated to racially integrate in order to offer equal access to education for all, as the focal point, or pinning, of African American education. The discussion of educational rights began well before the civil rights era of the 1940-1970s. Rights to the education of African Americans was discussed and denied throughout most of their existence in the United States. This denial started when they were enslaved and continued through the era in which they were sharecroppers, when they may have been “free” but still had no educational rights or protections by the law.

Being against the law for enslaved African Americans to learn to read or write, Williams (2005) recounts stories of enslaved men and women:
Despite laws and customs, slave states prohibited enslaved people from learning to read and write, a small percentage managed, through ingenuity and will, to acquire a degree of literacy in the antebellum period. Access to the written word, whether scriptural or political, revealed a world beyond bondage in which African Americans could imagine themselves free to think and behave as they choose. Literacy provided the means to write a pass to freedom, to learn of abolitionist activities, or to read the Bible. Because it most often happened in secret, the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship and created a private life for those who were owned by others. Once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom. (p. 7)

Slaves who attempted to educate themselves, if caught, suffered psychological and physical consequences up to, and including, death. While the narratives did not always explicitly indicate how or where the learning happened, it was of utmost secrecy, and took cunning ingenuity to achieve. Williams (2005) posits:

Accounts of such efforts make it evident that even in slavery, with its violence, insults, and punishing labor, many African Americans yearned to become literate, to have access to the news and ideas that otherwise would have been beyond their reach. For similar reasons, southern White elites continued their efforts to place literacy itself beyond the reach of African Americans. (p. 11)

Enslaved persons sought after literacy at all risk because they understood the power in becoming literate despite the threats of violence, beating, or even death. This insertion is critical and is reflected in this quote by African American poet, Maya Angelou: “I have great respect for the past. If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going” (as cited
in Johnson, 2014, p. 35). This not only speaks to the importance of knowing one’s history but elevates the profound affect that the history of a people can have on its present and future attainment. The accepted system of denial has had, and continues to have, a devastating influence on the education of African Americans, specifically, the continued presumption of incompetence held by educators and the systematic racism embedded in the entirety of the modern education system.

Even considering that there is little research on the measures of academic progress of African American students prior to integration, some consider the desegregation of schools as having a perceived negative impact (Brownstein, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Bell, 1980), as evidenced by the persistence of the educational achievement gap of African Americans compared to the majority population. The economic and social histories of a people/group have a lasting impression on them; moreover, these histories are the root cause of the achievement gap among African Americans and other marginalized groups (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018). African American achievement overall has lagged that of White students from as early as the 1970s, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (1995, p. 3). Prior to raising the issues of educational equity and desegregation, the African American community experienced a consistent denial of access to education, which still plagues the community today.

The continued, systemic, racialized practices and beliefs that are widely held regarding the lack of academic ability of the African American people have cemented the foundation of white supremacy. White supremacy ensured the education of Black people illegal and punishable by death for enslaved persons. This has had a lasting, systemic impact on the achievement of people of color and continues to present itself in today’s classroom, as an assumption of inferiority, underachievement, and an inability to learn.
Smith (2016) proposes a framework for describing the ideology of white supremacy, in which there are three pillars consisting of (a) colonialism by way of genocide of Native Americans, (b) capitalism by way of slavery of African Americans and Latinos, and (c) war by way of Orientalism of Asian Americans (p. 67). These pillars, as their primary function, maintain supremacy of Whiteness. Smith (2016) argues that capitalism, by way of slavery, is still present and has merely changed forms over time, from chattel slavery to sharecropping to the current excessive imprisonment of Black people. Education for marginalized people threatens the very foundation of this pillar and could cause the dismantling of white supremacy. White supremacy is at the helm of unequal access to education and the opportunity gap. This has resulted in the educational achievement gap between White students and students of color. Ladson-Billings (2013) refers to the achievement gap as a historic debt, owed to African Americans, one that speaks to the historic and systematic denial of equal rights, educational equity, segregated practices, dehumanization, and marginalization of Black people from the founding of this nation to the present. She also argues that

the achievement gap language suggests that each individual is responsible for his or her own educational circumstance and Black and Brown students need to “catch up” to their White counterparts without acknowledging the ways that catching up is made near impossible by the many structural barriers society has imposed on them. (p. 105)

African Americans have been subjected to both legal and illegal measures of racism, discrimination, and segregation, which has resulted in unequal opportunities, causing poverty and lending to bigger issues such as unemployment, underemployment, incarceration, health disparities, increased high school dropout rates, and discrimination, to name a few. Royal (2012)
argues that these conditions are a result of blame-the-victim ideology that repose in the continued use of achievement gap terminology:

The term “achievement gap” is inaccurate because it blames the historically marginalized, under-served victims of poor schooling and holds whiteness and wealth as models of excellence. And, as with all misnomers, the thinking that undergirds the achievement gap only speaks of academic outcomes, not the conditions that led to those outcomes, nor does it acknowledge that the outcomes are a consequence of those conditions. (p. 1)

The use of this term serves to validate the poor education provided to African American children, ascribes to the inferiority of Black children, and diverts attention away from the conditions within which they are required to learn.

Education in America has been at the forefront of conversation for decades, and more specifically as it relates to Black students, especially considering those of low socioeconomic status. Over the past 20 years, as the conversation has shifted towards educational accountability, including the need for increasing academic achievement, as a means to remain competitive in global markets of business, science, math, and technology, American education has drastically emphasized the necessity of standardized testing, while ignoring the systemic inequalities and biased educational policies within the system. Freire (2005) likens America’s education system to a bank, where “education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72), in lieu of students learning the “why” of the concepts being taught. Darling-Hammond (2001) argues, “the education reform movement in the United States has focused increasingly on the development of new standards for students” (p. 263) but fails to address the inequalities that exists to provide quality staffing and resources for
all. The focus on standards is a reaction to the achievement gap, the symptom, as opposed to a solution to remedy the problem of “schooling” in America, the opportunity gap, and continued segregation of schools. The achievement gap is not an African American problem, but one that affects the whole country (Bowman, et al., 2018).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to analyze the phenomenon of successfully educating low socioeconomic, African American students, in efforts to uncover effective strategies, instruction, and cultural practices that exist in those learning spaces. More specifically, it will provide an analysis of creative, intentional, and perhaps, culturally relevant best practices currently being used to successfully educate children within this demographic. Further, the research project will provide insight and guidance for educators and educational leaders, specifically those serving in environments with a large population of marginalized students. The identified practices and strategies will serve as a catalyst for new ways of educating and improving student success. I will examine what key practices, both instructional and non-instructional, and other strategies used in an urban K-12 school inspire student success.

Defining the idea of “success” sought after in the main research question is critical to finding these answers. Rather than defining success as simply academic ability or a score on a standardized test, it is crucial to consider that success also includes attributes associated with continued growth and development in adulthood. Additionally, I will explore the influence of the school leader, the school community, and other stakeholders on school culture, and subsequently, student success. I will further explore the day-to-day decisions made by leaders of these institutions. Research literature is detailed with theoretical frameworks, examples, and findings that support academic achievement related to pedagogical shifts, mindset changes, and efforts to
dismantle historical barriers to educational access and equity. This qualitative study seeks to construct a model or theory grounded in the data, which will uncover effective strategies, cultural nuances, and structures that produce success in communities of African American, low socioeconomic students, considering the school as the unit of study. The grounded theory and its methods of initial coding, memoing, theoretical sampling, and focused coding will guide the collection and analysis of the data to generate a theory that explains “how to” and “what” is necessary for successfully educating this population. This research contributes to the field by identifying and defining the habits, efforts, expectations, processes, and beliefs held in schools that are thriving with this population and offering a model for duplication.

Definition of Terms

Before presenting the conceptual framework for analyzing the education of African American students in more detail, and expounding on the literature about this topic, it is necessary to define and operationalize a few terms to support this discussion. Language is important in portraying information in an effective way. These definitions are proposed here to clarify the otherwise assumptions we operate with about specific language and its meanings. These terms will receive more attention throughout the dissertation.

**Culture.** Culture is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as the “customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time” (Merriam-Webster online, 2019). These social forms and material traits refer to language, greeting, rituals and values. Merriam-Webster further defines culture as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. In this conversation, I would like to reference both definitions as they
are similar in form and general composition; however, while the former is a more commonly known definition, I would point my focus on the second definition as we discuss the history of education and the generational impact of slavery and subsequently segregation, inequality, and discrimination, on education in the Black community.

**Low socioeconomic status.** Low socioeconomic status describes the financial status of a family whose income reflect about twice the federal poverty level. These families are making just enough to meet their basic needs. This also includes measures of other factors; as defined by Jessup (2012), “Students’ SES is traditionally defined as a combination of family income, parental educational attainment, parental occupational status, and household or family income” (p. 4). Jessup (2012) offered an expanded definition of SES which includes additional household members, neighborhood, and school resources.

**Marginalized.** Marginalized (Alakhunova, Diallo, Martin del Campo & Tallarico, 2015) is defined as “both a condition and a process that prevents individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life enjoyed by the wider society” (p. 2). Like minoritized, it describes a subpopulation that is positioned in the margins of society or deemed inferior due to characteristics or classification such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and other classifications. For our purposes, we will focus on people of color who have been marginalized throughout history in the United States of America.

**Minoritized.** Minoritized will be used in this discussion as a replacement verb for the commonly used noun “minority.” Minoritized is defined by Smith (2016), as “groups that are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality, and gender and as a result of social constructs have less power or representation compared to other members or groups in society” (p. 1). Minority has commonly held beliefs or connotes negative images of being less than the
larger population. Minority has been used to categorize people of color in relation to the dominant or White culture. However, minority signified less than in number or value. Smith (2006) suggests that people are forced into being minoritized.

**Schooling.** Schooling is a “subtractive process” of learning that strips away social and cultural resources from marginalized youth (Valenzuela, 1999) and prepares them to acclimate to a society in which poor Black youth suffer and merely survive (Love, 2019).

**Success.** Success is the ability to be productive and achieve, whether by standard formal measures or other measures. Success reflects such characteristics as leadership, innovation, critical thinking, cultural identity, and social-emotional health and safety. Success for African American children from low-socioeconomic background is not always about earning high scores on standardized tests although these students are more than capable of such achievement. I further suggest that the success and ability of marginalized children should not be measured or quantified using the same standards created to prove their inferiority, such as standardized tests, isolation, inequality, and unequal opportunity, which is at the crux of the education system in American.

**Thriving.** While quite difficult to define the term success, which is so widely categorized in different ways and spaces, it is essential for the unpacking this phenomenon. To aid in understanding and creating a usable standard for success, I will incorporate the explanation of thriving as described by Dr. Laurie Schriener (2010). Thriving as defined by Dr. Laurie Schriener’s Thriving Quotient, thriving consists of five components: (a) making personal connections to you learning, (b) investing a lot of effort, (c) having a confident hope in the future, (d) relating to others with different backgrounds, (e) feeling a sense of belonging.
There are years of history, under-documented I might add, to attest to the ability of African American’s to achieve with or without America’s formal education system. Those achievements are evident from as early as 1700’s. Examples of such successful individuals include Benjamin Banneker, a scientist and architect of Washington D.C.; Jean DuSable, the founder of Chicago; former slave, Frederick Douglas, an author, abolitionist, and orator; George Washington Carver, a scientist and inventor; and Madame C.J. Walker, the first self-made African American millionaire, businesswoman, and philanthropist. There are many others through the present day, who by all standards of measure, were successful—some with and some without formal education. There are a plethora of other inventions, scientific discoveries, and academic achievements which can be attributed to both enslaved and freed African descendants.

To further define or clarify how success is quantified, the abilities of marginalized children should not be measured using the same standards created to prove them inferior, such as standardized tests, isolation, inequality, and unequal opportunity. Therefore, this research will not perpetuate the trap of an inequitable educational system; rather, it will consider thriving as the measure of success. While I acknowledge that formal learning is important and is the essence of education, what and how we measure it can be widely debated.

**Significance of Study**

Often, the research focuses on the problem, rather than inform educators of the solutions or counter stories that show what works in educating African American children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. While much research has been devoted to describing the problems surrounding the education of African American children—such as the achievement gap, high school dropout rates, college admissions and retention, unemployment, and incarceration—educators and scholars acknowledge that efforts must shift from admiring the problem, to finding
real and long-term solutions (Kimmons, 2012). Leaders, teachers, and staff need practical strategies, fresh ideas, and effective tools to improve the educational experience and attainment of African American students, which in turn will support the educational success of all children. Further, parents and communities whose children attend low-achieving schools are looking for answers, because their children deserve a high-quality education, too. This work briefly reviews the historic disparities and inequalities that have plagued the education of Black children throughout American history.

Later in this chapter, the conceptual framework will be discussed in more detail. However, the work of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Dr. Joy DeGruy provides a lens with which we will view and analyze this phenomenon. These theories paired as a framework brings a unique perspective, by engaging the historical backdrop of unequal, biased education in the United States with creative opportunities to heal, restore value, and honor the African American culture. Dr. Joy DeGruy’s theoretical framework points to the need for healing from the trauma yielded by chattel slavery of African descendants and the long-term consequences it has had on the African American community. Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings’ crafted culturally relevant pedagogy, a theoretical framework that looks at “ways that teachers can systematically incorporate a student’s culture into the classroom as authorized and official knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

The goal of this research is to uncover and analyze best practice strategies, operations, and functions of learning spaces that are successfully educating African American, low socioeconomic students and what makes them successful. In addition to an analysis of practices, I would also like to identify the culture, beliefs, and interactions of the staff, teachers, students, and parents within these schools. Douglas, et al. (2008) reminds us that, “More than in any of
time in U.S. history, Black students are being educated by people who are not of their racial or cultural background” (p. 48). Hearing and recording the stories of persons within these educational communities provides context for these seemingly obscure settings in which low-socioeconomic, minoritized students thrive. Results of this study will provide a launching pad to guide educators to replicate the success of similar students throughout the country and further extend the counter stories until it becomes the new “norm” over time. The practices and reflections of the educators who are successful with students in this demographic provides foundation for the work at hand. Further, educational leaders will be equipped with strategies, cultural practices, tools/measures, and other competencies that will allow a shift from the traditional schooling approach to educating all students of color and enact a new way to fortify academic success.

**Research Question**

A central, guiding question is essential for the context of this research. This study attempts to answer the following question:

- In educational spaces that successfully educate African American, low socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?

This question as well as the two sub-questions below will foster an in-depth investigation into the “how”, “what”, and “why” of the phenomenon of successfully educating low socioeconomic Black children.

a) What practices are common within learning spaces in which marginalized students are successful? How do these practices influence the culture of the school?
b) How do the students’ understanding of their cultural history shape or incite their learning?

c) What metrics are used to determine student success in these spaces?

d) What decisions are leaders (principals, teacher leaders, and others with leadership influence) making in these spaces that contribute to student success?

e) How does the relationship among school leaders and stakeholders (students, teachers, and community) influence school culture and student achievement?

Summary

Education in the United States of America is a civil right, and now a requirement by law of all its citizenry, referred to as compulsory education. However, America has a history that continues to deny certain populations from fulfilling this legal requirement. New laws enacted in the United States of America since the founding of this country propose language that seem to offer rights to all; however, the foundation of the social systems in this country was grounded in white supremacy, and therefore rejected the rights of minoritized groups, namely African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. That foundation is realized presently as evidence of the ongoing achievement and opportunity gaps between White students and other minoritized populations, continued school segregation despite the laws, and unequal and unfair treatment of certain groups of people in this nation. This systematic denial of access to quality education for marginalized youth is influenced by the system of white supremacy, the belief that White people are inherently and genetically superior to people of color, specifically African Americans. White supremacy is foundational to the institution of chattel slavery, inequality, racist beliefs, and perpetuated inferiority of Black folks, and the ongoing dehumanization of the descendants of African enslaved people (Smith, 2016). More extensive review on the intersection between
economic; social and cultural conditions of African American students; African American history; and educational equity, access, and achievement are explored in Chapter Two.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His Education makes it necessary.

---Carter G. Woodson

Introduction

Understanding the history or origin of a problem (or injustice) is crucial in order to dismantle it. Through reviewing literature around the [mis]education of Black children in America, further historical underpinnings of educational opportunity in the Black community and the intersection of segregation, poverty, and educational inequality are revealed. Finally, some exemplars and learning spaces achieving success with this population are outlined. By reviewing the literature that exists, the extreme lack, or gap, that still remains in literature becomes a gap for which this research will add to. Considering such literature makes the case for why this research is necessary to uncover the most effective ways to educate marginalized youth, more specifically, low socioeconomic, Black children.

The literature is bursting with information about the low achievement of Black children, slavery, and its aftermath; the history of the education of Black people; and the many reasons for its maintenance, including white supremacy, legal segregation, poverty, and inequality. Likewise, I have highlighted the positive movements for eradicating and dismantling the miseducation of marginalized children. However, the aim of this analysis is to identify and define a model and its components that will support and ensure the educational success of African American children, including the resulting tools of measurement which indicate their
success. The following research question will guide the basis of this research and helps guide my interest in the literature:

- In educational spaces that successfully educate African American, low socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?

This question gives rise to other questions that will help me drill down into the phenomenon. I’ve crafted additional questions to help dissect this phenomenon with greater specificity and contrive possible indicators to look-for and listen for during the data collection process. These sub-questions will help guide my thinking, questioning, and observation of the phenomenon:

- What practices are common within learning spaces in which marginalized students are successful? How do these practices influence the culture of the school?
- How do the students’ understanding of their cultural history shape or affect their learning?
- What are the metrics used to determine student success in these spaces?
- What decisions are leaders (principals, teacher leaders, and others with leadership influence) making in these spaces that contribute to student success?
- How does the relationship among school leaders and stakeholders (students, teachers, and community) influence school culture and student achievement?

The guiding research question is used when reviewing the literature to present information and knowledge around what is already known about this topic, further fostering an in-depth discussion about key knowledge and insights shared by other researchers. This chapter provides themes, conclusions, and information related to this phenomenon to serve as the
foundation to this conversation. Dissecting this research helps to acknowledge the gap in the literature (or research) about the phenomenon, which is what this research will address.

**Conceptual Framework**

This examination and analysis of effective education for African American children is bolstered by the work of two researchers, Dr. Joy DeGruy and Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings. The intent of this work is to make sense of, and uncover, the phenomenon of educational success among African American children, to inject competence and effective strategies for educating them, and change the educational narrative and its influence on their futures. The lens with which I approach this research and analysis is bi-focal, in that it is tinted with the work of two researchers, Dr. Joy DeGruy and Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings. Two theories will provide a lens for researching this phenomenon, including Post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) crafted by Dr. Joy DeGruy and culturally relevant pedagogy crafted by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings.

Gloria Ladson-Billings crafted culturally relevant pedagogy, a theoretical perspective that looks at “ways that teachers can systematically incorporate a student’s culture into the classroom as authorized and official knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). PTSS lays the framework that is foundational to this research. PTSS explains the etiology, or condition, of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities throughout the United States and the diaspora. This theory reveals behavioral conditions that exists because of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants, as a result of centuries of chattel slavery (DeGruy, 2017).

At the intersection of these two theories, we come face to face with the impact, ramifications, and residue of the brutal and horrific abuse endured during chattel slavery and the subsequent treatment of Black people for centuries in this country. This understanding further
frames the current state of trauma in the Black community. PTSS and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) make up the framework that act as bookends to explain the preceding injury and trauma that has plagued the education of students of color. These frameworks provide a potential resolution for the miseducation of Black children; and helps us make meaning about why the phenomenon is not widespread across the United States. I have coupled PTSS with CRP, which is the intentional inclusion of Black culture in teaching and learning in a way that requires careful thought, celebration, and value of student culture. This theory acknowledges this culture as official knowledge, honoring strength and heritage of that culture in an academic setting, in order to improve student achievement. These two theories render a problem-solution or a kind of cause-effect-solution lens from which to approach the work.

Post traumatic slave syndrome. PTSS has, at its foundation, the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic criterion established for post-traumatic stress disorder and meets and exceeds all of the conditions set forth, over a period of centuries. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5) includes Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a new category, called trauma- and stressor-related disorders. The DSM-5 lists eight criterion (A-H), of which one or more symptoms must be present in order to have a diagnosis of PTSD. All the conditions included in this classification require exposure to a traumatic or stressful event as a diagnostic criterion. Dr. DeGruy’s research shows the existence of these conditions or criterion in descendants of Africans brought to America during chattel slavery. Based on a history of chattel slavery in the United States of America, the persistent and continued racial oppression, and the generational and constant violation of a people based on their race alone, is the genesis of the repeated trauma, endured for generations, leading to PTSS.
DeGruy (2005) argues that slavery and its aftermath have left “slavery’s children” in a state of societal vulnerability due in part to the dehumanization of African descendants in our country, and the widespread, unsupported belief that Black people are dangerous, violent and inherently “bad, dishonest and untrustworthy”. This has left a stain on the conscience of American and, more importantly, has had an adverse effect of the psyche of Black people for generations. DeGruy (2005) posits:

The American slavery experience was based exclusively on the notion of racial inferiority. Yet Europeans concluded that black Africans were fitted by a natural act of God to the position of permanent bondage. It was this relegation to lesser humanity that allowed the institution of chattel slavery to be intrinsically linked to violence, and it was through violence, aggression, and dehumanization that the institution of slavery was enacted, legislated, and perpetuated by Europeans. (p. 35)

Trauma can lead to intense, long-term consequences, including emotional, physical and psychological. Further, trauma has the ability to change the way victims think, respond or react, behave, and even how they perceive the world. Dr. DeGruy (2017) describes trauma as an injury caused by an outside, usually violent force, event, or experience. Dr. DeGruy’s research addresses the lasting effects of the condition of generational chattel slavery and the subsequent, ongoing oppressive treatment aimed at Black people, and explores the epigenetics of Post traumatic slave syndrome by looking at three specific behaviors that have transcended generations. DeGruy (2005) defines these three behaviors in her book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, as vacant esteem, ever present anger, and racial socialization.

**Vacant esteem.** Vacant esteem is “the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger
When defining vacant esteem, the first tenet, Dr. DeGruy differentiates between self-esteem, belief about one’s worth, and self-confidence, beliefs about one’s competence. She defines vacant esteem as a “state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society” (p. 108). She further explains that vacant esteem is the net result of three spheres of influence—society, community, and family (DeGruy, 2017, p. 108). These spheres of influence impact differing areas of life. When these influences promote and reinforce negative, limiting, and disparaging identities that confine us, they can produce vacant esteem (DeGruy, 2017).

Popular images and negative beliefs associated with Black people and inferior treatment experienced by them reinforces the belief that we have no value. The limitations imposed upon African Americans during slavery, and post slavery, have left a residual feeling of worthlessness. Trauma, stress, and other environmental experiences can be stored in the genetic or biological memory of a person for generations, defined as epigenetics. By understanding the change one traumatic event can cause over the course of a person's life, one can easily hypothesize the extreme ramifications that can be caused to a group of people as a result of repeated and ongoing generational trauma.

*Ever present anger.* The second tenet, ever present anger, is considered the most pronounced of these behavioral tenets, in which anger seems to lie just below the surface, waiting to emerge and be expressed (DeGruy, 2017). This behavior results as a response to having goals of securing safety, a future for your family, and membership in a society to which one belongs, repeatedly blocked.

The stereotypes of phrases such as “angry Black man” and “angry Black woman” are birthed from the perceived overreaction of Black people, which can be directly attributed to ever-
present anger as a result of PSST. DeGruy (2017), quotes Dr. James R. Samuel’s explanation of anger as follows:

In its simplest form anger is the normal emotional response to a blocked goal. Ever-present anger behavior manifest as a result. Often, if a person’s goal remains blocked over time, they will begin to consider the possibility of failure and so experience fear, and when we are fearful, we lash out in anger. (p. 113)

While anger which arises out of seemingly small incidences, may seem extreme, it is a result of an ever-present threat of failure in the minds of Black people, due to persistent and enduring hardship and limit, based on their race and others’ perception. This injury is experienced physically, emotionally, psychologically, or spiritually. Traumas upset our physical and emotional stability and psychological well-being. If a trauma is severe enough, it can distort our attitudes and beliefs. Such distortions often result in dysfunctional behaviors, which can in turn produce unwanted consequences. Since even one traumatic experience can result in distorted attitudes, dysfunctional behaviors, and unwanted consequences, this pattern is magnified exponentially when a person repeatedly experiences severe trauma and is amplified when the trauma is a result of actions inflicted by fellow human beings.

The other caveat to mention is, not only have African descendants, or African Americans, experienced trauma as a result of the most vicious, barbarous, and inhumane treatment, there has been no palpable efforts to make amends nor acknowledgement of wrong-doing; rather, the trauma continues through discrimination, wide-spread criminalization in the media, unequal access, and other new forms of slavery or oppression. The ongoing oppressive nature of America towards African descendants continues to foster what DeGruy (2017) asserts, “The inability to
influence events and social conditions that significantly affect one’s own life can give rise to feelings of futility and despondency as well as anxiety” (p. 81).

*Racist socialization.* The third behavior exhibited by African Americans is that of racist socialization. I find myself guilty of ascribing to this behavior and, in many instances bear witness to this paradox. Racist socialization, which is perhaps the most detrimental, as it is the adoption of a white supremacist value system, is described as “a belief that white and all things associated with whiteness are superior; and that black and all things associated with blackness are inferior” (DeGruy, 2017, p. 116). This further solidifies the emotions of self-hatred and self-loathing. While these tenets help to explain behavioral phenomena common in African Americans, the goal of the theory of PTSS is to create a pathway for healing the injury inflicted due to slavery, both for African Americans and Caucasian American people. Racist socialization is explained best in the following statement by DeGruy (2005):

One of the most insidious and pervasive symptoms of Post traumatic slave syndrome is our adoption of the slave master’s value system. At this value system’s foundation is the belief that white and all things associated with whiteness are superior; and that [B]lack and all things associated with blackness are inferior. Through the centuries of slavery and the decades of institutionalized oppression that followed, many African Americans have been socialized to be something akin to white racists. Many of us have adopted the attitudes and views of a white, racist America. Many of us see ourselves, and our community through white lens. (p. 116)

The dehumanization of African descendants in slavery, and the further criminalization of African Americans, is evidenced in today’s media propaganda by the shooting and killing of unarmed Black men and the portrayal of Black people as inherently violent, on welfare, and uneducated.
The commonly ascribed belief that African American is synonymous with violence and inferiority is further perpetuated by a disproportionate number of Black men imprisoned and, most important to this research, the resolute denial of equal, and equitable, educational opportunities, resulting in the achievement gap. These actions cause injury in both majority and minority communities, but manifests differently. For Black folks, it can manifest as self-hate, inequalities, lack of opportunity, fulfillment of stereotypes, heightened imprisonment, oppression, and poverty. For White people this often manifests as white privilege, racism, or white supremacy, and the erroneous idea that they are genetically superior, while people of color are genetically inferior, specifically those of African descent (DeGruy 2017).

These three behaviors have been socially inherited from one generation to the next. Dr. DeGruy (2005) suggests that it is through epigenetics that these behaviors are passed down. She (2005) states, “The children lived and learned behaviors and attitudes of their often injured and struggling parents. The legacy of trauma is also passed down through extended family, and community” (p. 103). This means alterations in the behavioral and psychological traits of a person or a people group, can be influenced by multiple generations. Knowing this, one must question, “What might happen if that person experiences, and re-experiences through lineage, this trauma for prolonged periods, and over hundreds of years?” Dr. DeGruy views these behaviors as adaptations resulting from the trauma experienced in chattel slavery that have been passed down trans-generationally, as well as the re-injury that continues, due to ongoing oppression currently experienced by African Americans (DeGruy, 2017).

**Culturally relevant pedagogy.** Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is a theoretical frame that combines anthropology and sociolinguistics in an attempt to bridge a students’ home culture with a students’ school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). CRP includes three major
components: (a) student must attain academic achievement/success, (b) students must develop or maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must develop a sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This theoretical model addresses student achievement but also promotes student acceptance of their cultural heritage and to think critically about racial inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Ladson-Billings intends this theoretical perspective to address concerns of educating teachers to experience success with African American students. In many schools in American, the dilemma for African American students becomes one of negotiating the academic demands of school while demonstrating cultural competence. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural competence. (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 476). Akin to the racist socialization in Dr. DeGruy’s theory, Black students often associate smartness and achievement to whiteness. Teachers of culturally relevant pedagogy must undo the effects of racist socialization by having high academic expectations while integrating cultural relevance, awareness, and honoring the history of the children they teach in the curriculum.

Educators who employ CRP must consider what to teach but also to the un-teach. These educators are intentional to integrate the student’s culture into the classroom learning and instruction; and hold broad propositions of (a) concepts of self and others, (b) structured social relationships, and (c) conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). She describes the concept of self and others as belief in the student’s ability to achieve, by utilizing teaching and learning as a process of becoming and seeing themselves as members of the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Social relations is comprised of leaning into a relationship with students and being connected (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Ladson-Billings (1995b) relates to developing a collaborative, responsible community of learners among the students, with fluid teacher-student
relationships. And finally, conceptions of knowledge are best described as knowledge that is shared, recycled, constructed, and viewed critically, with a teacher that builds bridges, scaffolds, and facilitates learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Employing this ideology supports teachers in successfully educating these students.

CRP considers the implications of transgenerational underachievement and unequal access to education based on the absence of student culture in classrooms; and further examines the education, lives, and futures of Black youth. These two theories provide a backdrop, and framework, for this research, a lens through which to guide the observation, construction, and understanding of this phenomenon. Ladson-Billings (1995a) posits that “all students need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy” (p. 160). CRP outlines an intentional practice of equipping or empowering students to develop; maintain; and experience academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness to challenge the status quo. This theoretical model is grounded in using education practice and pedagogy to empower African American children in ways that will help them successful navigate “current social inequities and hostile classroom environments” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). CRP honors and integrates the culture of African American students within the classroom in ways that affirms languages, music, fashion, and other cultural elements. Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggests that “culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161), which enhances learning and promotes success.

The intersection of PTSS and CRP uncovers the pathology and sustained injury of ongoing, systematic stigmas, and underachievement of Black youth perpetrated by a racist system. Both DeGruy and Ladson-Billings address transgenerational, systematic oppression, and trauma that has occurred with African Americans, or African descendants, in the United States of
America. Dr. DeGruy (2017) defines PTSS as “a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today” (p. 105) coupled with the belief or idea that societal benefits are not accessible to them. CRP considers the need for change in teaching practices that would embrace a students’ culture and require teachers to commit to becoming culturally competent.

PTSS considers the social and behavioral implications of transgenerational trauma, based on American chattel slavery of Africans and their descendants, and the influence of this enslavement on the lives, education, and cultural norms of Black people. PTSS explains the cultural nuanced behavior and, in some cases, belief systems of African Americans as a result of atrocities committed against enslaved Africans and their descendants over multiple generations. Trauma becomes an inheritance passed from generation to generation. Dr. DeGruy (2017) explains:

The individuals and families that survived the slave experience reared their children while simultaneously struggling with their own psychological injuries, and they often exhibited the typical symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The children lived and learned the behaviors and attitudes of their often injured and struggling parents. (p. 103)

This is supported by the science of epigenetics, which substantiates that environmental trauma can influence genetic memory and behavior. These behaviors and attitudes are then reinforced by an ongoing re-injury against Black people through racism, bias, segregation and other forms of discrimination.
History of Education for Black People in the United States

African Americans have suffered a long, oppressive, brutal history in the United States with legalized involuntary enslavement as their entry point. The transatlantic slave trade of Africans marks the starting point of the oppression for Black people in the United States, which has had a ripple effect throughout every facet of life—political, health, employment, financial, community-identity, education, justice system, housing, home-ownership, and many others.

While this review of literature focuses primarily on the educational aspects of oppression, it would be irresponsible not to mention the myriad topics affected by racism, segregation, and discrimination. The issue of educational oppression in the United States has existed since the onset of slavery, over 300 years ago. To expose the absurdity of this, Dumas (2016) explains:

In fact, our nation has been just fine with not providing educational opportunities for Black people since the very beginning. During the years of chattel slavery, it was illegal in many places to teach a Black person to read or write, and countless Black people were killed, or had their fingers chopped off as punishment for learning anyway. When Black people began to build schools, white people often burned them to the ground. And for the past 100 years, federal and state legislators, local officials, and predominantly white citizens’ groups have used various strategies to ensure that Black children are deprived of equitable education funding, and do not gain access to the more highly resourced public schools their children attend. (Dumas, 2016)

The denial of education to Black children today is still “alive and well”. While the repercussions of Black education look different now, the punishment is still quite haunting. Rather than being killed outright for obtaining education, the education provided continues to stifle the Black community, resulting in housing segregation, unfunded or underfunded schools,
inadequate or unqualified teachers, low test scores, and disproportionate number of suspensions or expulsions of Black children over any other racial group—all of this leading to a life of suffering throughout adulthood, resulting in generational cycles of struggle that present in repeated outcomes, such as discrimination, lack of opportunities, crime, etc. The historical foundation of education in this country has at its core discriminatory, anti-Black, oppressive ideology of practices and systems, which are far reaching and impresses upon the educational system of the present. Rooks (2017) reminds us:

Up to 75 percent of Whites support school-integration efforts and say they would be comfortable sending their children to schools that were up to 50 percent Black. The numbers, however, decrease when whites are asked about how to achieve racial integration. They do not support busing or any program that would deny their children access to the school of their choice. (p. 13)

This is an age-old example of interest convergence (D. Bell, 1980), in which the benefits experienced by African Americans are merely a by-product of decisions made solely towards the interest of Caucasians. The lives of African Americans are still significantly affected by the ideology of white supremacy and its resulting systems and structures.

Education and educational outcomes are multifaceted in their influence on one’s life. An uneducated person will struggle to be gainfully employed, leading to homelessness, health complications, food and nutritional lack, potential crime (for purposes of survival), and other such atrocities. The system of education in the United States was designed and implemented during a time when enslaved African descendants were considered as property for purchase like cattle and therefore perceived as lower intellectually. Education was not designed for African Americans nor to be used by or benefit them in any way. Providing an opportunity to learn was a
threat to the entire economic system of slavery, which speaks to the agenda of white supremacy, which can still be observed today. Further, education equals freedom. The more educated someone is, the freer they become and the more difficult it is to control them. It was a conscious choice to not educate the Black community to preserve the system of white supremacy.

Delpit (1988) refers to it as a “culture of power,” in which those in power controls what needs to be learned, and how intelligence is determined, based on a set of codes or rules that are established, guarded, and accessed by those in power. Those in power then essentially create the rules, language, and standard for success with no requirement to share it. This creates a power structure within education, that leaves Black children in the margins of education, not on the front lines. Most teachers in this country are members of the culture of power, which forces non-members to guess, assimilate, and strip themselves of their own culture, knowledge and values. It is fair to mention here that this gives White children an automatic advantage as members of the culture of power. In reference to well-intentioned White teachers who claim to “want the same for everyone else’s children as they want for theirs,” Delpit (1988) argues that, “to provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it” (p. 285). While well intentioned, this points to the lack of cultural competence or awareness held by many white teachers.

**Brown v. Board of Education: The Aftermath and the Unintended Consequences**

Before Brown vs Board of Education in 1954, schools in America were de facto separate and unequal. African American students attended all Black schools and received a quality education; however, it was imbued with low funding, lack of access to resources and materials provided to their white counterparts, and long-standing discriminatory behavior and beliefs about
African American achievement and humanity. Jenkins (2019) recounts her educational experience prior to integration:

As a young girl in Bainbridge, Ga, I attended a segregated school two years before the 1954 Brown ruling. My teachers and school administrators lived in our neighborhood and knew my parents. These educators had high expectations for us and were daily role models. I had rich, balanced educational experiences rooted in strong cultural awareness. Then we moved to Sacramento, Ca. It was 1960, and my parents were warned that the segregated schools were inferior to the integrated schools and that I would probably have to repeat the eighth grade. It was true that my segregated school didn’t have the modern facilities and equipment available to white students on the other side of the tracks, but I breezed through ninth grade and performed equally well in high school. (p. 4)

While the laws to end segregation should have created equal learning experiences, and a more equitable educational opportunity, there was no consideration given to the impact that teachers have on students. White teachers’ beliefs and mental models about Black students were aligned with the common belief of inferiority. Black students, who were originally being educated by Black teachers who believed in them, likened them, and lived in their communities, would no longer have a teacher who believed in their abilities to succeed, shared similar cultural understandings, or even looked like them. This change was destructive and continues to be because “the educational philosophies of Black educators generally reflected the collective ethos of a Black community that believed education was the key to enhancing the life chances of their children” (Tillman, 2004, p. 281). However, Black teachers were fired in mass. After all, since Black children weren’t seen as academically equal enough to learn alongside White children for so many years, there was no way that Black educators could be seen as adequate enough to teach
White children---they were only seen as adequate enough to teach children of their own racial background:

The displacement of Black educators after the Brown v. Board of Education decision was an extraordinary social injustice. The wholesale firing of Black educators threatened the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children. (Tillman, 2004, p. 280)

Consequences of this mass firing is still realized today. During her speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, Linda Brown Thompson (2004) reads a letter sent to Black teachers teaching in the all Black schools, notifying them of termination due to integration. The letter written by the superintendent of schools says, in part,

Due to the present uncertainty about enrollment next year in schools for negro children, it is not possible at this time to offer you employment for next year. If the Supreme Court should rule that segregation in the elementary grades is unconstitutional our Board will proceed on the assumption that the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ negro teachers next year for White children. (Tillman, 2004, p. 280)

Black teachers could not teach in integrated schools, because that would mean that they would teach White students. The unintended consequences of Brown v. Board of Education have left a lasting impression on African Americans in the teacher workforce that can still be seen today, and their absence is felt by Black students who go through their K-12 and postsecondary careers without ever seeing someone who looks like them. As a result, “Black students are overwhelmingly taught by non-Black teachers, which reflects a lack of diversity in the teacher workforce” (Grissom and Redding, 2016, p. 15). The all-White academies, erected in the 1960’s and 1970’s, educated over a half-million White students; were supported by local public school
districts with “donations” and protected by the local sheriff's department to keep Blacks from violent opposition (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Legally forced school integration, like that of the rulings of Brown v. Board of Education (1954), or Brown II “with all deliberate speed,” did not address the perception of African Americans cognitive capacity, nor the lingering effects of Jim Crow laws. In fact, the Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, “came at a time when the Court had almost no other choice but to rule in favor of the plaintiffs. Brown is not just one case, but rather the accumulation of a series of cases over a more than 100-year period,” according to Ladson-Billings (2004, p. 4). The law passed not because it was the right thing to do for children of color, but it had been before the court’s multiple times, and now the world was watching “America’s democracy.” Forced integration did nothing to stop the unequal and inequitable treatment experienced by Black students in integrated schools.

According to Ladson-Billings (2004), Jack Greenburg, an NAACP defense lawyer said in response to the aftermath of the Brown decision, “We knew there would be resistance, but we were unprepared for the depth of the hatred and violence aimed at Black people in the South” (p. 5). Integration was not a welcomed change in many parts of the United States of America and took years to accomplish after it was enacted by law in 1954. Additionally, White flight, the mass exodus of White students from public schools, which only perpetuated continue segregation, is the calculated reaction of White people as a response of integration in the 1950’s. However, in all Black schools before the 1954 decision, students received a quality education by qualified and highly trained Black teachers, but did not receive equal resources, facilities, or support. Many Southern Black teachers attended Northern universities that made them, in many cases, more qualified than their White counterparts, but it was against the law for them to teach
White children; they were therefore relegated to teach in all Black schools only (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Education for all had become a staple in the tapestry of America as early as 1852 when the state of Massachusetts became the first to pass Compulsory Education Law (FindLaw, 2019). It is not surprising that states like Mississippi were the last to pass this law in 1917. I mention this not merely for rhetoric but to highlight the fact that compulsory education, an expectation that all children must be educated up to at least primary schools, had been signed into law in all states within the U.S. almost 40 years before Brown v. Board of Education was decided.

However, the access to, or the quality of, education wasn’t prioritized above the separation of racial groups. The benefits of being an American, such as gainful employment, home and land ownership, providing for your family, and other such freedoms were not extended to people of color. Though slavery had been abolished by law, new forms of subservience arose such as sharecropping, chain gangs or prison labor, Jim Crow laws, race science, and more specifically segregated schools. Ladson-Billings (2004) makes a distinction in the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, that the decision is comprised of two phases or rulings: Brown I would constitute the passing of the law that states that segregation is unconstitutional, overturning the separate but equal ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson of 1896, bolstered by the argument of Black inferiority; however, Brown II refers to the mandate for local school districts to implement desegregation with “all deliberate speed” (Ladson-Billings, 2014). In reference to testimony given by Professor Herbert Wechsler, an outstanding lawyer and civil rights advocate, Bell (1980) indicates that he doubts the validity of said testimony used in determining that segregation caused injury to Black children, since evidence as to such harm was both inadequate and conflicting. Laws alone, or the argument used to pass a law, doesn’t get us to equality. For
African Americans to truly experience racial equality, yielded by decisions such as Brown v. Board of Education of 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and affirmative action, Whites must be willing to halt or give up the privileges of their Whiteness to some degree (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

In a reflection of the state of education 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education, Ladson-Billings (2004) writes, “Brown has taken on a mythic quality that actually distorts the way many Americans have come to understand its genesis and function in the society. This notion of progress is coupled with a view of America as a nation endowed with inherent ‘goodness and exceptionality’” (p. 3). She goes on to argue that Brown is more a testament of the context of our nation’s racial and moral conscience, as opposed to its altruistic nature. Brown is applauded as a landmark decision for setting things “right” with the education of Black students however, it has not fixed the problem it aimed to fix. It missed the boat on “fixing” educational inequality and access for African American children and has yielded some unintended consequences that further advances the issues of equity and access, discussed later in this chapter.

In a speech commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, Linda Brown Thompson (2004), whose father was the lead plaintiff in the case, recalls to the audience, “In Topeka, the issue was not so much integrating public schools to improve the quality of instruction’, but rather the inaccessibility of the neighborhood schools. Black people were able to live all over town but could not expect to send their children to the schools closest to home.” The Brown v. Board of Education case was originally filed because Black parents wanted to have the right to send their children to the school closest to their home, not because the teaching in all Black schools was inferior. However, the Supreme Court’s argument was presented as though
segregated schools causes psychological damage to Black students and breaks a young person’s morale (Thompson, 2018) although this was not the original intent of the Black community at the start of this fight.

Many school districts in the South did not implement the Brown v. Board of Education decision until several years after the ruling; in fact, as a result of the required implementation of Brown II, resistant Southern communities instituted all-White private academies to avoid the mandate of integration (Ladson-Billings, 2014). And while the Brown decision ultimately allowed African American children equal access to any public school, it did not produce integration as intended. Bell (1980) purports, “Demographic patterns, white flight, and the inability of the courts to effect the necessary degree of social reform render further progress in implementing Brown almost impossible” (p. 518). While the civil rights movement pushed for equality, and fought for a century, Ladson-Billings (2014) proposes “despite making the right decision [in Brown vs Board], the justices and the plaintiffs and other champions of social justice and equality did not (and indeed, could not) anticipate the depth of white fear and resentment toward the decision and the limitations such a decision would have in a racist context” (p. 5).

The Brown v. Board of Education case can be arguably seen as a model opportunity of interest convergence. Interest convergence, coined by Bell (1980) is defined as the interests of Black people in achieving racial equality, or having any other benefit, will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of White people. Tons of cases had been brought to the attention of the court that outlined issues of inequality and the unjust treatment of African Americans for at least 100 years before Brown v. Board of Education (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Dudziak 1988), but scholars have asked, why in 1954 was there finally a decision in favor of desegregation in the U.S.? The Brown decision yielded benefits for the U.S. that were
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considered substantially more important than the rights for the country’s Black children. Dudziak (1995) posits:

In the years following World War II, racial discrimination in the United States received increasing attention from other countries. Newspapers throughout the world carried stories about discrimination against non-white visiting foreign dignitaries, as well as against American [B]lacks. At a time when the U.S. hoped to reshape the postwar world in its own image, the international attention given to racial segregation was troublesome and embarrassing. The focus of American foreign policy at this point was to promote democracy and to “contain” communism. However, the international focus on U.S. racial problems meant that the image of American democracy was tarnished. The apparent contradictions between American political ideology and practice led to particular foreign policy difficulties with countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. U.S. government officials realized that their ability to sell democracy to the Third World was seriously hampered by continuing racial injustice at home. Accordingly, efforts to promote civil rights within the United States were consistent with, and important to, the more central U.S. mission of fighting world communism. (p. 106)

Suddenly, the decision to integrate was in the best interest of the country, not because the Black citizenry had the right of expectation, but because America was fighting communism and attempting to convince the international community that their democracy was the ideal for civilized societies. Because this decision was based on interest convergence alone, the inherent principles of equality and equity... White America rejected it. The Supreme Court, which represented the interest of the people and ensured the fulfillment of the law, had disappointed those for which it was established to protect, namely White Anglo-Saxon Protestant citizens.
Looking through the lens of critical race theory, Ladson-Billings (2014) suggests a couple possible remedies or solutions to combat the overall failed implementation of Brown v. Board of Education. Ladson-Billings (2014) purports the following: (a) the allowance of the choice of segregation for White schools with imposed financial sanctions for such a choice, and then direct those funds to low-income schools, or (b) base educational funding and quality on citizenry, instead of community membership. Realizing that these solutions would not be taken seriously in the United States, she finally suggests cultural transformation, or the process of changing the outlook of education: “[Education] is no longer the great equalizer that benefits the status or well-being of poor or disadvantaged people” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 13). Changing the outlook or outcome of education helps to even the playing field for marginalized people and shift the power structure, since the way success is defined and achieved has begun to change.

**Exemplars of Educational Success for African Americans**

The literature definitively documents the woes of being an African American in the United States, academically, economically, and politically because of our “Blackness”; and has described Blackness as synonymous of inferior and poor. Black people, since the founding of this country, have been discredited, discriminated against, disenfranchised, dehumanized, and devalued. Much of African and African American history has been viewed and told through a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant perspective (Chawane, 2016). Their advantaged history is taught unapologetically in schools around the United States and is taught as true, right, and normal. This dismisses the culture and heritage of other groups. Chawane (2016) asserts, “When Africans view themselves as centered or central in their own history, they see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginal and on the periphery of political or economic experience” (p. 78). Growing up in this system of education, a child might ask himself, “Can
there be any good from Africa; or can African Americans be smart, noble, successful, or excellent?” This system strips Black children of cultural pride, positive self-image, and positions them as intellectually disengaged, ill-equipped, and deficient from the start. This is evidence by a history of marginalization described by the Black-White academic achievement gap, public school suspension and expulsion rates among Black children, rising imprisonment of Black men, low-income rates, and increasing unemployment rates among African Americans in this country. Brownstein (2014) implies that the successful education of young Black people is not just an issue for the Black community, but it affects the entire country.

The United States public school system has failed at educating African American children (Darling-Hammonds, 2000b; Ladson-Billings, 2013a; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Some may argue that Black people have significantly benefited from Brown v. Board of Education. Other changes in U.S. society have contributed to the success of Black people, such as (Brownstein, 2014) an increase in African American degree attainment by eight times that of the 1950’s, substantial growth in the African American middle-class, and improvements in health disparities. While these increases are accurate, they completely overshadow the countless disparities in multiple areas among African Americans and the widening gap between African Americans and Whites in these areas. The traditional system of education views African American children from a deficit perspective. Everything from the historical views of Black children to their culture, from the language of these children and their self-expression is corrected, banned, criticized, and stigmatized in schools. Black language in schools became a barrier to achievement due to its perceptual representation to teachers and how they have reacted to it (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003).
In Rooks (2017) book, titled *Cutting School: Privatization, Segregation, and the End of Public Education*, she argues that segregation is a long standing and ever present practice in America’s education system, evidenced by charters, educational vouchers, and the like, which directly impedes the achievement of Black students. Rooks (2017) argues that these privatization efforts are the results of what Carter G. Woodson, an African American author, calls “experimentation,” and famed educator of the Westside preparatory School in Chicago, Marva Collins called “guinea pigging” Black children. The idea that the education of Black children is based solely around doing what they are told to do in order to function in the dominant culture while, at the same time, neglecting to acknowledge or honor the cultural, communal, or heritage of those being educated. There are several examples of learning spaces that have yielded success for poor Black children, such as Marva Collin’s Westside Preparatory School in Chicago; Chris Bischof’s Eastside Preparatory in East Palo Alto, California.; Council of Independent Black Institutions, Laurinburg Institute, North Carolina; Pine Forge Academy, Pennsylvania; Piney Woods, Mississippi; Redemption Christian Academy, New York; and North Stars Academy in New Jersey.

In an interview on the talk show *Prolepsis: Back to the Future*, Dr. Saunders (2014) addresses the future of education for success of African American males in the year 2020, where she posits that the classroom of the future mirrors the work environment with a 12-month calendar, international connected learning, and multiple learning modalities. Dr. Saunders (2014) suggests the need to move away from an agrarian model, but maintain the individualized plans and practices present in the current system, and teacher looping. She also speaks to social services that will address the mental, health, physical, and future needs of students, such as a life plan. Dr. Saunders (2014) explains that “it really takes a community that sees school differently,”
by providing not only academic education, but a life education such as mentorships and support and social services to that will address the mental, health, physical, and future needs of students, such as a life plan. The biggest lesson that is needed is “whatever adults do for children is born out of what they belief about the possibilities of those children” (Saunders, 2014). The adults must take accountability for the children in the system and plan and organize for that future. We have not yet arrived at this future projection, but there are some schools that have figured it out.

**Reforms, Fads, and Gimmicks**

School Reform language is used to describe a variety of efforts of the government, federal and state, and districts and schools. These reforms come and go, like a fad of the year. As the federal government raises the level of so-called accountability for schools, more and more schools are turning to these reform gimmicks to solve the looming problem of underachievement, specifically in segregated Brown and Black communities. The implementation of the federal mandates is realized differently in each state. While these communities are not the only districts in need of improvement, Vang (2017) found that some 55 White districts were eligible for the state-takeover due to financial distress and the state implemented an emergency manager, who enacted state-takeover in three of the state’s largest majority Black districts. Not only did this “state-takeover” reform effort result in greater debt, school closures, and charter management in the cities of Detroit, Muskegon, and Highland Park, these reforms seemed to aim disproportionately at schools that rest within districts with large minoritized populations (Dumas, 2016). Detroit fits the standard for state-takeover as “nearly 83% of Detroit residents are Black, and a slightly higher percentage of children in Detroit schools are Black” (Dumas, 2016). Ladson-Billings (2004) suggests that we approach symptoms, instead of dealing with the disease: “Desegregating schools is a limited way of
dealing with segregation as an institution” (p. 6). The example of the three Michigan school districts, echoes a national trend seen throughout U.S. history, a theory described by Dubois called anti-Blackness, which Dumas later draws upon when looking at anti-Blackness in schools. In reference to the expert testimony of Professor David Krech, professor of psychology, provided during the Brown decision of Negro’s inferiority, Ladson-Billings (2004) writes, “The ability to pathologize the plaintiff instead of addressing the underlying pathology---white supremacy---of the defendant severely limited the ruling and its implementation throughout the land” (p. 5).

Other reform efforts for public school systems include charter schools, operated by charter management organizations (CMOs). When Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans (Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015) KIPP Schools, a CMO was called in to restructure the district. KIPP completely stripped New Orleans schools of the community’s culture and legacy. This transition had anti-Black sentiment in the recruitment and hiring of inexperienced White teachers, renaming previously community named schools, and closing the public schools. Several forms of anti-blackness exist in schools today, such as Black students are more likely to be punished for the same infractions as their counterparts, and punished more harshly; Black students are less likely to be considered for gifted and talented programs; curricula used to teach Black children are unlikely to adequately or appropriately reflect Black history and cultural contributions (Dumas, 2016).

**Effects of Poverty on Learning**

Jensen (2009) defines poverty as a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body, and soul. He further identifies six types of poverty in existence: situational, generational, absolute, relative, urban, and rural (Jensen, 2009). Results of poverty affect a students’ ability to learn in multiple ways,
including both genetic factors and environmental factors. Jensen (2009) suggests that environmental factors or stressors can cause cells to turn on or turn off features at the cellular level that hinders learning, memory, aggression, immunity, etc. His research shows that children in poverty experience more stressors than that of their peers not in poverty; consistent stressors can change the brain’s development, structure, and complexity of the brain: “Even when low-income parents do everything they can for their children, their limited resources put kids at a huge disadvantage. The growing human brain desperately needs coherent, novel, challenging input, or it will scale back its growth trajectory” (Jensen, 2009, p. 37). The good news is brains can change.

While race and income are two very different factors, class biases are closely entwined with racial and ethnic inequities. The intersection between poverty and racism holds the key to understanding why the achievement gap exists (Bowman, et al., 2018). Poverty is a result of not having equal, quality educational opportunities. These burdens have caused a “cultural residue” that has results in both social and economic disadvantages for Blacks as well as Whites (Bowman, et al., 2018), that effect the economic viability of the African American community and the nation. The expanding gap between low- and high-income families is reflected in the outside-of-school “enrichment” activities---such as music lessons, travel, and summer programs---afforded or not to the children in these families (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). These outside activities contribute to the background knowledge, vocabulary, and diversity of thinking that our young people bring to school with them.

Duncan and Murnane (2014) name a few challenges caused by the income disparity, but perhaps the most important as it relates to learning is the challenge of attracting and retaining good teachers. This has a direct effect on a student ability to learn when they don’t have qualified
teachers in front of them to provide consistent high-quality learning experiences in schools; or have myriad substitutes coming and going with little to no plan of teaching, choosing managing the class long enough to survive the day instead. Income disparity has a direct correlation to lower reading and math achievement, college graduation rates, along with increases in stress and mental health, as well as physical health complications (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). It is important that all children receive a quality education, but especially those that are low-income. Improving educational outcomes for children growing up in low-income families is critical to the nation’s future and requires a combination of policies that support low-income families and measure to improve the quality of schools that low-income children attend (Duncan & Murnane, 2014).

**Opportunity and Achievement Gap: Cause and Effect**

In 2001, the federal government enacted No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act into law, which focused on improving academic achievement of the disadvantaged by requiring an increase in test scores in failing schools, hiring highly qualified teachers, as well as language instruction for English language learners. With this legislation, the government believed in the “notion that publicizing detailed information on school-specific test performance and linking that performance to the possibility of meaningful sanction can improve the focus and productivity of public schools” (Dee & Jacob, 2010, p. 149). Dee and Jacob (2010) found that NCLB had a positive impact on math achievement at the lower grades, among disadvantaged students; but found no impact at all on reading achievement. They also found that this change in accountability caused teachers to shift their focus and instructional time away from science and social studies content to reading and math. NCLB also requires that states introduce “sanctions and rewards” based on their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status. It mandates explicit and
increasingly more severe sanctions (from implementing public-school choice to replacing staff and even school restructuring) for persistently low-performing schools that receive Title I aid. Dee and Jacob (2010) also found that achievement growth, as a result of No Child Left Behind, was limited to a group, such as among fourth graders.

**Achievement gap.** The achievement gap is determined by taking the difference in achievement levels between any two specific social categories, namely racial categories, as measured by the SAT, which measures aptitude, or the ACT which measures one’s ability to learn (Anderson, 2010). In examining the research around the achievement gap, Anderson (2010) identifies four factors that affect student scores on the ACT and SAT: (a) student characteristics (high school GPA, attendance patterns, courses taken in high school, participation in extracurricular activities, etc.); (b) family characteristics (family structure, in home, parents’ level of education, mobility, etc.); (c) school-based characteristics (instructional strategies, class size, expectations, curriculum, staff-collegiality, etc.); and (d) socio-cultural factors (cultural attitudes, racism, differential social “privileges,” etc.). While the research points to student characteristics as the most influential factor, Anderson (2010) argues that this factor is impacted by many other factors:

On the surface in order to most effectively reduce the SAT/ACT achievement gap, educators should be encouraging students to take the high school core classes, and then help students excel in these classes. However, there are a number of reasons that this cannot be the end of the story. Most educators argue that their ability to help students excel in these classes is impacted by the other characteristics: student non-academic behaviors, family characteristics, socio-cultural factors, and school-based characteristics. Only the last area is within their direct control… Ironically, much of
the research is contradictory. There are various reasons for this: First, these various factors are not independent, and thus, their individual impacts are difficult to separate. For example, student academic behaviors (such as high school attendance and grades) are impacted by non-academic behaviors, which in turn, are impacted by family characteristics AND by school-based characteristics in complex and interactive ways. (p. 4-5)

The factor that schools can control would lie within the school-based characteristics, such as instructional strategies, class size, expectations, curriculum, and staff-collegiality. Anderson (2010) further challenges that the commonality between these multiple factors can be simplified to the relationships and interactions that students share with others. Teachers have to create significant relationships with students in order to evoke change to their achievement, which dove-tails into believing in them, holding high expectations, and providing opportunities to achieve.

With the current re-segregation of schools, the achievement gap between Black and White students continues to persist. Bowman, et al. (2018) state, “The achievement gap is a problem not only for African American students and their families and communities; it affects the well-being of the entire country” (p. 1). McKinsey & Company (2009) reports, “The persistence of the educational achievement gap imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession” (p. 6). According to Duncan and Murname (2014), increasing gaps in academic achievement and educational attainments have paralleled growth in income inequality. These gaps perpetuate a cycle of inequality and underachievement both in school and in life beyond secondary school. Ladson-Billings (2000) pushes us to consider the outcomes of school success: “Those who do not succeed in school are becoming part of a
growing underclass, cut off from productive engagement in society” (p. 265). There are national and even global ramifications if the achievement gap continues to persist. This gap is further extended when considering minoritized populations in poverty.

The long-term effects of the persistent achievement gap was seen in 2018 when Amazon began looking for a second national headquarters. Detroit, fondly remembered as the “Motor City,” is the largest metropolitan city in Michigan, located on the east side of the state. Its economy tanked with the crash of the automobile industry. When Amazon announced an open bid process for cities around the nation to locate the second North American headquarters, Detroit jumped in line to be considered; this would do wonders for this city to bolster their climbing economy and rebuild. In an interview with Detroit News, Detroit City organizers talked about why their request for proposal was denied by the Amazon (Williams, Ferretti, & Ramirez, 2017). They named transportation challenges and the inability to attract quality talent, to occupy the workforce needed to manage a company like Amazon, as main reasons for the denial (Williams, et al., 2017). Sandy Buruah, Director of the Chamber of Commerce, told the Detroit News that Amazon was “very impressed with the proposal, creativity and impressed with the regional approach… What they had questions about was talent. Do we have enough talent here over the long haul?” (as cited in Williams, et al., 2017). Detroit is a city where 83% of the population is African American, the public-school system was designated as a failing system, and the State of Michigan appointed a financial manager to run the schools (Vang, 2017) in the aftermath of No Child Left Behind.

**Opportunity gap.** Ladson-Billings (2013) argues the achievement gap is ultimately attributed to what she calls the “opportunity gap” between White students and students of color. The educational achievement gap is the result of the opportunity gap that exists between the
haves and have-nots. This opportunity gap is evidenced by data reported by McKinsey & Company (2009) that touts “impoverished students (a group here defined as those eligible for federally subsidized free lunches) are roughly two years of learning behind the average better-off student of the same age. The poverty gap appears early and persists over the lifetime of a student” (p. 12). A new wave in education, or a new way of educating, is needed among schools serving large populations of low-income, marginalized students. The gap not only has an economic implication on our nation, more importantly it creates a cycle of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and societal segregation among marginalized minority groups within society, specifically African Americans and Hispanics.

These are symptoms of what Ladson-Billings (2014) calls “academic death” which is the result of consistent patterns of disengagement, academic failure, dropout or push out, and suspensions and expulsions. She likens it to a generational cycle, or curse of sorts, that is passed down from one generation to the next. Ladson-Billings (2013) suggests that this problem stems from a systemic societal problem of racial inequalities and segregation dating back to slavery; and that this goes well beyond an individual choice to learn well or teach well. She speaks of the greater socio-political, moral, and economic structural barriers that exist in our nation.

These unequal opportunities are referred to as the opportunity gap. The National Conference of State Legislatures (2018) defines the opportunity gap as “differences in students’ access to highly effective educators, exemplary curriculum and materials, and appropriate academic and social support. These opportunities, resources, and supports can be thought of as educational inputs” (p. 1). The opportunity gap is about inputs, or the “root cause,” whereas the achievement gap is about outputs, or “symptoms.” Carter and Welner (2013) says it like this: “If you want the right outcome, you need the right inputs. In a society that mandates compulsory
education, a subset of the population is still not being educated, although they are attending school daily” (p. 1) While the gap seems to be largely true for minority students, Bowman, et al. (2018) propose that the achievement gap effects the entire country. The education system in the United States has historically gone through many facets of change, legal mandates, initiatives, and reforms, in efforts to improve academic achievement and to alter the narrative of minoritized youth but have fallen recklessly short on turning the tide in this regard. The educational system was founded on the needs of an agricultural society and then the system changed to reflect the needs of an industrial society as the nation began to change in the 1940’s. However, at the helm of each change were the consideration and needs of the dominant culture, thus preserving white supremacy.

We must continue to address the opportunity gap in order to make an impact on the achievement gap. The opportunity gap is the unequal distribution of resources, learning experiences, and opportunity that results in lower levels of academic achievement among marginalized groups of people based on race, socioeconomic, and zip code. In describing the opportunity gap, Garris Stroud, a teacher and blogger, emphasizes “the opportunity gap is the culmination of the many inequalities that can impact people and their ability to succeed academically” (Stroud, 2017). The opportunity gap is a consequence of ongoing racism, inequity, education inequality, and discrimination. Marginalized communities, specifically Black communities, essentially get trapped in a cycle of poverty and lack due to educational inequity, racism, and inequality in society, which results in unemployment, homelessness, imprisonment, and health disparities. These factors further reinforce widely-held beliefs about Black people as being criminals, inadequate learners, poor, and other negative stereotypes often held by teachers and school district decision-makers… and then the cycle begins again.
Friedlaender, Burns, Lewis-Charp, Cook-Harvey, and Darling-Hammond (2014) suggests using a student-centered approach when working with low-income, minoritized students to close the opportunity gap. The student-centered approach includes engaging teaching that fosters collaboration, communication and analytical skills; **project-based instruction**; **relevant curriculum**; **performance-based assessments**; connectedness with adults in school and the community; and shared leadership among staff, administrators, parents, and community members. This entails structures like advisory, differentiation, career focus, and intentional time for teacher collaboration. Another necessary component of closing the opportunity gap rests in culturally relevant curriculum and learning experiences. In response to unsuspecting teachers who say “I want the same thing for everyone else’s children as I want for mine,” Lisa Delpit (2006) warns:

> To provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it… Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal for education is for children to become autonomous, to develop fully who they are in the classroom setting without having arbitrary, outside standards forced upon them. This is a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalized its codes. But parents who don’t function within that culture often want something else… They want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society. (p. 28-29)
Black students need the opportunity to be exposed to the unwritten rules of society in order to be successful, but they must also to learn to analyze, interrogate, and manipulate those rules. Delpit (2006) also points out that cultural differences in language usage can cause a Black student to misunderstand the classroom rules or directives of a classroom teacher and subsequently be labeled with behavioral problem. Cultural competence for teachers is essential in providing rigorous, engaging curriculum and learning opportunities for students of color.

**Biased Education**

Grissom and Redding’s (2016) findings indicate that Black students are three times less likely to be recommended for gifted program in schools when taught by White teachers, even when the Black student have equal assessment scores, and similar family background (p. 10). This is problematic because Black children don’t have an opportunity of access to this program. Grissom and Redding (2016) cite the bureaucratic representation theory, which points to more positive treatment of Black students when interacting with other own-race teachers; similarly, assignment of students to a gifted program is more likely when the teachers race is the same as that of the student.

The problem with education in all-Black schools was not because they were populated with Black children, but rather because those classrooms were defined as inferior by the racist system within which they operated (Lawrence, 1980). Indeed, as Siddle-Walker (1996) argues, in some cases, the all-Black schools outperformed their White counterparts, but the system of segregation overshadows this fact. Many of these schools did not sustain through integration; however, there are a sum that still exists.

Lisa Delpit (1988) proposes five tenets, or rules, of the culture of power that influence meeting the needs of Black students. Within these rules she identifies and defines who has power
in the educational setting and who doesn’t. Delpit (1988) suggests that power and schooling are intimately related, and she argues that this “culture of power” has succeeded in silencing the dialogue of those who are directly affected by a phenomenon, through lived experience. Without explicitly teaching the rules of the culture of power, students are deprived of an opportunity for success in a dominant world. The voices of those with lived experiences has not been included in much of the literature. These lived experiences, of both the adults and children, are a critical component to understanding the struggles, barriers, and successes of marginalized persons, particularly as it relates to education. Reynolds (2010) suggests, “Power differences and conflicts that minoritized families experience in schools are oftentimes due to the multiple manifestations and subsequent clashes of culture in school settings, including ethnic culture, the culture of schooling, and capitalist culture” (p. 147). This culture of power is a deterrent for not only Black children, but their parents as well.

The research discusses the disparities, and the historic and systemic barriers, to educating African American children, but it fails to focus on what works in educating these children. Delpit (1988) argues that “to provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it” (p. 285). In a review of two popular, commonly used literacy programs in underachieving schools, Delpit (1988) concludes that “although the problem is not necessarily inherent in the method, in some instances adherents of process approaches to writing create situations in which students ultimately find themselves held accountable for knowing a set of rules about which no one has ever directly informed them” (p. 287). Black children are more likely to be labeled with special education labels, and less likely to be placed in gifted programs, because teachers are the primary decision-
makers for these labels (Ralph, Ford, & Miranda, 2001; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003), and the absence of Black educators impact these outcomes. Reynolds (2010) warns:

If a child's academic achievement is based on the teacher's expectations, parents… must become involved if parents, students, educators, and researchers wish to interrupt and disprove the poor perceptions held by school personnel, or to ensure that their child's needs are met despite them. (p. 153)

The absence of Black educators offers little support for Black children and creates a distrust of the parent-school partnership. This explains why Black children are being labeled with special education labels, or as defiant, disrespectful, and other labels that have become synonymous to Black children, in schools.

Duncan and Murnane (2014) contend that rising residential segregation by income has led to increased concentrations of low and high-income children attending separate schools. They cite peer problems, geographic mobility, and challenges in attracting and retaining good teachers, as having made it difficult to provide consistent high-quality learning experiences in schools serving a large proportion of low-income students. These and other issues were cited as obstacles in urban schools. The National Education Assessment Program (NEAP), in a 2015 report titled School Composition and Black/White Achievement Gap, looked at Black student density in public schools in the United States of America. NEAP found that “approximately, 10% of schools are in the highest density category, where “highest density” is defined as schools in which the percentage of students who are Black is between 60 and 100 percent” (NEAP, 2015, p. 7), which shows that public schools in the United States are still very segregated.
Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature that speaks to the intersection of race, poverty, and education, in the larger context of educational inequity; the history of education in the United States; and the positionality of Black people in education, society, and history. The study of Black student achievement is important for myriad reasons, but for the purposes of this research, I focus on three. First, Black people have suffered an incomprehensible history in America, and part of reclaiming one’s future is understanding and healing from the past. This healing requires that wrongs be made right; in this case, access to quality education is right, and will not only benefit the Black community but all Americans. Secondly, education is essential to life (especially as we are in the information age); without which, the struggle to attain the basic needs of life is increasingly difficult. African American children continue to be marginalized in the education system and are not being prepared for success, and as education is a basic civil right, it has been denied for far too long. Third, educational leaders, teachers, and staff have a responsibility to educate all children; this includes African American children. The current system is not designed for their success, and in fact, has at its origin is anti-Black roots. This research is intended to guide, inform and equip educators and educational leaders in designing, offering, and ensuring success for Black children. Research methodology is addressed and expounded upon in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

A new approach to educating our children is needed, one that is effective, equitable, opportunistic, and culturally relevant. Students of color, specifically African American children, have been marginalized in the United States and continue to realize failure as a result of an educational system that is racialized against them. This analysis examines the role of multiple components and features that influence the educational success of marginalized youth. This qualitative research examines, records, analyzes, and compares the approaches of multiple K-12 educational institutions that are successfully educating marginalized students, specifically those of African descent. I identified, classified, and defined the cultural artifacts, norms and values, educational best practices, structures, and other success factors in these institutions that are used to successfully educate marginalized students. I identified common patterns, approaches, and cultural underpinnings that will serve as foundational to erecting an educational model to ensure the needs of the population of focus are met. This analysis is intended to create a model that will inform educators and educational pedagogues working with these students in order to fortify educational opportunity for them.

The purpose of this study was to identify and operationalize effective teaching and learning practices, environmental factors, cultural norms and values, and the commitments or assumptions required to successfully educate Black students who are also considered low socioeconomic status, at the secondary level. This research aimed to capture data and new knowledge through the lived experience, daily practices, human interaction, cultural elements and artifacts, and instructional beliefs that are considered essential in teaching and learning among a population of historically minoritized individuals and communities. This chapter
presents the research design, approach and methodology, sample and setting, and sampling procedures, as well as data collection and analysis used in this research.

**Research Design and Approach**

- **Qualitative research.** Saldana (2011) suggests, “Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches and methods for the study of natural social life” (p. 3). I chose qualitative research methodology for this study in order to identify, analyze, and describe best practices used in educational spaces where minoritized students are thriving academically and socially. The question that guided this research is as follows: In educational spaces that successfully educate African American, low socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?

  Academic and social success within this population is under-researched, unrecognized, and misrepresented by the research on the achievement gap. This phenomenon was researched by observing lived experiences and social interactions, and understanding human expression, creativity, and reality. Providing guidance for qualitative research, Creswell (2009) states:

  The process of [qualitative] research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data… Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

The process of qualitative research is emergent, meaning it shifts and changes throughout the data collection process. These data were collected by employing a variety of methods and
approaches within qualitative research, such as participant observation, interviewing, and the collection and examination of cultural artifacts.

Creswell (2009) states, “To reiterate, in planning a study, researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice” (p. 4). This research method most closely aligns with a constructivist worldview, as understanding this phenomenon relies heavily on the knowledge and meaning derived from the members of the community under study. Creswell (2009) reminds us,

Social constructivists believe that individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for a complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied. (p. 8)

Meaning is constructed based on the participants' interactions and experiences within the culture. The data collected was intended to reflect the meaning-making, knowledge and experiences of the participants, and my interpretation of such information, as the researcher. This research design commissioned the grounded theory methodological approach for this study.

**Grounded theory.** Saldana (2011) defines grounded theory as “a methodology for meticulously analyzing qualitative data in order to understand human processes and to construct theory---that is, theory grounded in the data” (p. 6). Because this phenomenon is understudied, there is a strong likelihood that a central theme or new theory will emerge. Saldana (2011) refers to grounded theory as an analytic process that constantly compares small units of data until
categories emerge. Grounded theory has some significant parallels to the phenomenological methodology, as an examination of the lived experiences of subjects; however, phenomenology does not allow for the generation of the new theory. While phenomenology was strongly considered in this research because it allows the researcher “to come to an intimate awareness and deep understanding of how humans experience something” (Saldana, 2011, p. 8), only some of its components would apply. Grounded theory methods are most appropriate for use in this research.

Grounded theory summons the practice of constant comparative analysis of data collected within and between institutions. Other methods used in grounded theory include comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling and coding, such as open, axial and selective coding. Studying culture to understand the context, practices, and beliefs that are central to this phenomenon requires the researcher to toggle from data collection to analysis of data back to data collection. This is referred to as iteration. I immersed myself into the culture and happenings of the selected institutions for three days in order to observe, collect, and analyze data regarding this phenomenon. Further, these data were interpreted and categorized using coding techniques. This analysis takes an in-depth look at a phenomenon that contradicts much of the historical research steeped in deficit thinking and describes new emergent themes that highlight the cultural and educational elements required to sustain success among the population of study. Culture incites student learning and should influence teaching practices, in order to aid in student success by connecting students to themselves, their family, their community, and the world (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Signh, 2011; Durden, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Chawane, 2016).

While this is not the first of its kind, this analysis furthers the conversation about what works in teaching and learning with marginalized students, narrowing in on African American
students who are classified as low-SES. The data uncovered school-wide strategies, methods, and practices that closes the opportunity gap and fosters academic success. This study shifts the narrative from the well-researched effects of the achievement gap and academic failure of African American students, to realizing the ongoing yet little-known academic success of African American youth. To describe how success can be realized and optimized among these students, I employed a variety of techniques including interviews; participant observations; and collecting and analyzing interactions, rituals and traditions.

**Research Questions and Conceptual Framework**

Research consists of observing and understanding a phenomenon by questioning the what, the how, and the why of that phenomenon. Creswell (2009) states, “The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (p. 4). The main research question that guided this study is as follows: In educational spaces that successfully educate African American, low socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success? The sub-questions were used to drill down into the nuances of this phenomenon and provided additional insights.

- What practices are common within learning spaces in which marginalized students are successful? How do these practices influence the culture of the school?
- How do the students’ understanding of their cultural history shape or incite their learning?
- What metrics are used to determine student success in these spaces?
• What decisions are leaders (principals, teacher leaders, and others with leadership influence) making in these spaces that contribute to student success?
• How does the relationship among school leaders and stakeholders (students, teachers, and community) influence school culture and student achievement?

These questions helped me more fully explore this phenomenon and provided a depth of understanding of this phenomenon, in order to replicate the efforts of educators who foster success for African American students and make it the norm.

The theories used to inform this research consists of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). These theories combined, as used in this study, constructs a bridge that illuminates the intersection of systemic inequality in education against minoritized populations as a condition of white privilege and white supremacy, and the role of a pedagogue in providing academic achievement, cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness to minoritized students. Gloria Ladson-Billings is the founding researcher of CRP. Ladson-Billings (1995a) states:

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order. (p. 160)

The theoretical underpinnings of CRP require a teacher to help “students to be academically successful, culturally competent and socio-politically [conscious]” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a); all of these components must be present in practice, thought, and theory.

Student success in this context becomes a question of metrics and the validity thereof. Considering if it is of sound practice to continue to use biased metrics, such as standardized tests
produced by an oppressive system, to judge the success of the very students it was designed to oppress, the obvious answer is no, but our educational accountability system is full of these contradictions. The achievement gap is a testament to the inequities that exist in our education system, so other forms of measurements used to determine success are explored herein. A student’s level of cultural competence has implications for what is required of the teacher’s level of cultural competence. For centuries, Black culture has been intentionally dismissed from the generalized curriculum and further stripped away as socially unacceptable forms of interactions in the educational context. Therefore, there is a population of people who have been generationally disconnected from their history and cultural background, specifically in the context of educational content. Socio-political consciousness is the ability to use school knowledge to solve relevant social, cultural, civic, environmental, and political problems, thus making learning more relevant to the student’s life, but also empowering and equipping them to lead within their community and in the future. While this theory targets educators, who teach marginalized students, CRP benefits all learners.

PTSS, as explored and theorized by Dr. Joy DeGruy, looks at the intersection of inequality historically and the trauma response of a people who have experienced repeated, ongoing trauma for generations based on a need to survive. PTSS identifies and describes the cultural behavior that seems common among Black people and, in some seemingly inherent cases, the beliefs, fears, and experiences of African Americans as a result of atrocities committed against enslaved Africans, and their descendants, over multiple generations. This is supported by the science of epigenetics, which shows environmental trauma can influence genetic memory and behavior. PTSS helps us examine the human condition of minoritized, traumatized people and their approach to live, which has a directly relative connection to learning and what is
expected in the learning settings. These theories provided a lens or conceptual framework for this study.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

I have served in education for over 15 years, in both rural and urban settings. Every setting in which I have worked has been defined by a student population that includes a majority of low socioeconomic status, minoritized students, specifically Black and Brown students. I have seen and personally experienced the miseducation of marginalized students and have been a participant, employed as an educator, of the systemic racial oppression evidenced in the educational system in the United States. I am also a product of this same environment and have been educated in America’s biased education system. Creswell (2009) stresses:

Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences. The researcher’s intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. Rather than starting with a theory (as in post positivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. (p. 8)

Identifying my positionality, and the blind spots that may result from my experience, helped me to be more objective in the research methods used and interpretation of the data. I have a personal connection to this research because I feel a sense of destiny, as it relates to creating a solution to the miseducation of our young, African American children. As an educator, I have always worked with marginalized youth in high-poverty areas. I feel a calling to work with these youth because it energizes me; it seems to come naturally. I lose all sense of time when I am with them, and I am successful. However, I am outraged by what is happening with the education of
African American children across the country, and I believe that what bothers you most about something, is what you were created to solve. The thing that makes you cry at night, and continues to show up at your doorstep, is that which you have been called or designed to fix. I have been blessed to be up close and personal to this dilemma and experienced first-hand how African American children are [mis]educated and the lasting results of these decisions.

I am the research instrument. I am a Black woman who grew up in a single-parent household, in poverty, striving to be successful and hoping that education would provide a means for escaping my situation. While I have carved a path in education, the system did not serve me well, where I experienced racism, discrimination, and injustices in multiple ways, but I also experienced glimmers of light and hope in my educational journey with teachers who looked like me, cared deeply for me, and had high expectations of me. I believe these glimmers of hope should be commonplace for all marginalized students and can change the trajectory of marginalized communities. I also believe I have been allowed to see the good and the bad, because I’m supposed to do something about it. That’s what this research is about… me… doing something about it! My objective, and great passion, is to change the trajectory of how marginalized, specifically African American children, are educated through reimagining schools for their benefit.

**Ethical Considerations**

As a qualitative researcher, I am the key research instrument by the nature of data collection using examination, observation, interviews, and interpretation (Creswell, 2009). As the researcher in this study, I aimed to point out the similarity of my own personal background that situates me uniquely into the research I conducted. My background created juxtaposition between me and some of the students being observed, as I shared similar situational
circumstances with them. Like many participants of this study, I am a Black woman that grew up in a single-parent household, in a low-socioeconomic status (SES) family. Growing up in poverty, I am deeply familiar with its impact on a family, and I have personally experienced a racially biased system of education at many educational levels. I understand that my background, race, and gender in some cases might privilege me to some “insiders” or exclusive conversations with participants. This advantage allows me to see, navigate, participate in, and question “why” things are happening more readily, than someone of a different race, background, or status. I am, however, aware that my experiences may cloud or distort my perception of someone else’s story, that may differ from my own, or my experiences might cause me to be blinded to conditions that might influence the phenomenon due to my perception of normalcy or commonality. I believe success for Black students is an absolute; however, I want to be careful to explore the tenets of “how” without my own path to success presenting bias in the data.

Obtaining informed consent remained a priority, and written consent from all participants was required to account for their desire to be considered a part of the study. During the process of organizing and collecting the data, commonalities within the data was a focus for interpreting and reporting. Further, memos provided a trail of inference from individual situational analysis to collective analysis in theorizing critical elements. Lastly, by using rich and in-depth descriptions, the researcher ensured transferability of ideas, trends, and findings from this study upon future contexts in high school success.

Methodological Approach

**Qualitative descriptive analysis.** Qualitative descriptive analysis is the research approach to this study, in that I looked to intentionally describe and interpret the participants’ perceptions, inclinations, beliefs, and ideologies about this phenomenon. Sandelowski (2000)
All inquiry entails description, and all description entails interpretation. Knowing any phenomenon (or event or experience) requires, at the very least, knowing the, “facts”, about that phenomenon. Yet there are no, “facts”, outside the particular context that gives those facts meaning” (p. 335). Qualitative descriptive analysis is a method that can stand alone. According to Sandelowski (2000), “qualitative descriptive studies offer a comprehensive summary of an event in the everyday terms of those events” (p. 336). However, I chose to use the grounded theory method, in order to incorporate other substantive inquiries into verbal and visual data collected. Sandelowski (2000) reminds us that “qualitative content analysis is similarly reflexive and interactive as researchers continuously modify their treatment of data to accommodate new data and new insights about those data” (p. 338).

Qualitative description and analysis consist of using grounded theory and was preferred for this dissertation study for several reasons. First, it provided a rich, in-depth description of the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of school staff and teachers working in learning institutions where Black students, who are low socioeconomic status, are successful. These accounts provided insider's knowledge about this phenomenon. Second, it provided undocumented nuances, both internal and external, that influenced teaching and learning, learning perceptions, beliefs, and learner self-identity. Considering people create knowledge from their experiences, this was reflected in the research data. Third, grounded theory fosters authentic data about a culture that is seemingly foreign and unknown in a large part in the research literature. Saldana (2011) states, “Culture is the knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society” (p. 5). Fourth, the collected stories expose the counter-narrative (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017, p. 43) of Black student success in America. The
documented history of Black students in this country were primarily highlighted from a deficit lens, with several missed opportunities which showed a different picture or alternative story, which speaks to academic success and excellence.

**Other methods.** A variety of methods were used to gather data about this cultural phenomenon. Multiple methods used in a study helped to obtain a broader spectrum of evidence and enhanced the credibility of the analysis. I used four popular approaches for this study---(a) participant observation; (b) in-depth, semi-structured interviews; (c) focus groups; and (d) collection and analysis of interaction, cultural nuances, and other rituals. Each of these methods were appropriately used to identify naturally occurring phenomenon, cultural norms of the learning institutions, and stakeholders’ personal histories or experiences to better understand the practices, functions, and interactions of the school. Saldana (2011) states, “These three forms of data, in combination, provide not only additional information but also additional dimension to the phenomenon” (p. 76).

This research takes a constructivist approach to knowledge, meaning it examined the interactions of participants in authentic settings within which they live and work. In discussing constructivism, Creswell (2009) recounts the assumptions made by Crotty (1998):

> Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting... Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and background. (p. 8-9)

The type of knowledge and information that were used as data originated from the subjects or participants of the research. Individual stories, thoughts, feelings, and opinions
constituted knowledge or data, that was used to analyze and understand a phenomenon. Intuitive knowledge was viewed as relevant in this research, as the research processes used included interviews, surveys, and observation. After gaining IRB approval (see Appendix A), I contacted the school principal to request permission to conduct research, see Appendix B.

Data Collection

Qualitative research incorporates varied methods or approaches to gathering and collecting data. Data collection involves (a) participant observation (Saldana, 2011); (b) in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Sandelowski, 2000); (c) focus groups (Sandelowski, 2000); and (d) collection and analysis of interactions, traditions, and rituals (Saldana, 2011). Saldana (2011) admonishes, “Data gathered from different sources will better guarantee a spectrum of diverse perspectives for analysis and representation” (p. 76). Participants were solicited via email with a voluntary request to participate in research, see Appendix C. Grounded theory calls for an examination of the lived experiences of the participants and gives a bird’s eye view of the internal perceptions, personal needs, and cultural nuances of a phenomenon, in this case success among African American children. I spent 2-3 days observing and recording personal interactions, language, and learning processes. Throughout this multi-day process, the constant comparative method will be used by immediately collecting and analyzing data back and forth in a cyclical process.

Observations within the learning spaces, attempted to capture the lived experiences of participants and focused on components of (a) school culture---such as structural and visual design of the space, integration of student culture, the style, arrangement, or delivery of cultural rhetoric; (b) programmatic elements; and (c) organizational beliefs or norms, as evidence by day-to-day conversation and interactions of the participants observed. Other dimensions of the
experience surfaced during the observation process and was welcomed as new knowledge to support the understanding of this phenomenon. Saldana (2011) advises, “One key element of collecting data in this way is to observe participants’ behaviors by engaging in their activities” (p. 16). I positioned myself as a participant in activities and programmatic elements of the learning space in order to thoroughly observe and gain knowledge of what’s occurring in this authentic context or setting. Specifically, I observed learning, start/end of day processes, engaged in school activities or events, connected with teachers and students outside of the classroom, and participated in other activities that are going on at each school.

Grounded theory calls for visits and observations of learners within the authentic learning context and participant interviews, which served as the primary source of data collection for this study. This research is grounded in data collected while immersed in the culture, which reflected the lived experiences of students, staff, and other stakeholders of the selected institutions. In addition to participatory observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and staff were conducted to focus on better understanding of this phenomenon from the perspective of the participants themselves. Qualitative research consists of recording “natural social life” in varied ways that document the human experience in social actions or reflexive states (Saldana, 2011). Saldana points out (2011), “It is revealing to another what goes through one’s mind and what one feels as the phenomenon occurs” (p. 8). One’s thoughts and feelings can be captured and recorded by conducting interviews and observations, which provided significant value in studying the personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individuals within a phenomenon.

During my time in each learning space, selected participants were interviewed using semi-structured interview protocol. This allowed for additional questions to be constructed naturally in response to what the participants share, to introduce more depth of understanding. I
conducted interviews with multiple stakeholders, including staff, teachers, school leaders, and even parents, when possible. I pinpointed the actions of educators and school leaders, as the work they do affect student success directly. The interviews with staff, which included administrators, teachers, and support staff (paraprofessionals, custodians, office staff, etc.), attempted to pinpoint themes around common beliefs about students; instructional practices, strategies, and approaches employed; staff demographics and background; and cultural strategies intentionally infused. In order to ensure data was collected accurately, transcription and member checking was used. Another variation of the semi-structured interview protocol deployed was “focused groups.” Similar to the interview, a focus group with specific interview protocol used open-ended inquiry with a small group of participants who shared a common position or title, such as parents, community partners, or volunteers. Consent for participation in the interview process was required for all participants, both staff members and focus group participants. See Appendix D and E for consent forms. This unique perspective offered more depth, collective input, and a sense of community-mindedness and relationships. Interview protocols for each constituency group can be found in Appendix F.

**Analysis and Synthesis of Data**

**Coding.** Coding and member checking were essential aspects of the data collection process in this method. There are three methods of coding---open, axial, and selective coding. These three coding processes are defined by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as such:

- **Open coding**---the researcher begins to segment or divide the data into similar groupings and forms preliminary categories of information about the phenomenon being examined.
• Axial coding---following intensive open coding, the researcher begins to bring together the categories he or she has identified into groupings. These groupings resemble themes and are generally new ways of seeing and understanding the phenomenon under study.

• Selective coding---the researcher organizes and integrates the categories and themes in a way that articulates a coherent understanding or theory of the phenomenon of study. (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Prior to coding, member checking, and other data review processes were employed to ensure validity of the data. Coding gives way to specific thematic codes that are assigned to collected data gathered from participants and researcher observations that seem to emerge with similar ideas or thoughts. Themes identified in the data using the coding technique served to develop generalizations or patterns of thoughts and beliefs among participants experiences. In reference to qualitative theory, Creswell (2009) states:

The researcher begins by gathering detailed information from participants and then forms this information into categories or themes. These themes are developed into broad patterns, theories, or generalizations that are then compared with personal experiences or with existing literature on the topic. (p. 64)

**Member checking.** After collecting the data from interviews, observations, and focus groups, I employed member checking to ensure that I accurately captured the statements and meanings of individuals, when possible. I looked for patterns of themes in the data to be categorized, and then each category was subsequently assigned codes to data based on corresponding themes. The themes that emerged give insight about additional information that
needs to be gathered or questioned. This resulted in theoretical sampling to explain the phenomenon.

**Artifact collection.** Artifact collection, as a method, provided insight to the cultural underpinnings of the institution, such as rituals, symbols, structures, and interactions. The research on culturally appropriate education calls for educators to consider the importance and role of the home culture and language of Black students, which aide in the establishment of such rituals, symbols, structures, and parameters. Singh (2011) articulates these considerations:

Therefore, it is imperative that educators should acknowledge the fact that teaching and learning processes are entrenched by the core values, beliefs, and attitudes as well as the predominant cognitive and communication styles and linguistic patterns of a culture. Moreover, educational practices (formal and informal) are equally influenced by the socioeconomic status of the learner, peer pressures, the nature of relationships between dominant and minority groups, and the impact of technology on society. (p 13)

A review of the artifacts included a review of traditional material like websites, social media pages, manuals, pamphlets, and brochures. However, more indistinct memento included imagery or propaganda in the environment; uniform or apparel; other cultural rituals, such as celebrations, cheers and chants, greetings, group identity, and organizing agents (groups, squads, teams); and other cultural elements that are pertinent to be a member of the community of study. These interactions were photographed, recorded, described, and categorized into themes in order to make sensible connections between them. An analysis of cultural traditions asserted evidence of the influence of the combined conceptual framework of CRP and PTSS in the setting.
Setting and Sample

The focus of this research required identification of multiple learning spaces, including schools, programs, or other learning institutions with urban youth characterized by a 70% or higher population of marginalized people, with an equal proportion (greater than or equal to 70%) of that population identified as low socioeconomic students who demonstrated academic achievement or success. More specifically, the demographic of the target population included a student population that was comprised of at least 70% of students, self-identified racially as Black or biracial including Black. Additionally, at least 70% of the student population were classified as being low socioeconomic status, by using the indicator of low-income based on the federal Free-Reduced Lunch (FRL) parameters. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National School Lunch Program (2018), a student is eligible for “free or reduced-price school meals based on household income and family size. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for free school-provided meals. Those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for reduced price school-provided meals. Schools may not charge children more than 40 cents for a reduced-price lunch.”

Additional guidelines provided include students whose family participates in federal assistance programs or have a status of homelessness, migrant, runaway, or foster child (USDA National School Lunch Program, 2018). This research targeted institutions who serve students historically underserved or with previous histories of underachievement. Institutional location is also a factor for comparison to determine the effect of the community as a key influencer.

The learning spaces included grade levels served within the “secondary school” students serving up to, or equivalent to, Grades 6-12, who demonstrate a minimum of 80% academic
success rate, as measured by myriad measures, such as graduation rates, academic proficiency on local benchmark or summative assessments, college acceptance rates, and other factors. A review of research literature, historically Black secondary institutions, and an online search of institutions that fit the profile were applied to identify institutions studied in the research. Demographics collected about each school were used to determine if each school fit the profile for this study.

Once learning spaces or schools were identified, the students, staff, and stakeholders were defined as eligible participants for this study. Participants were selected based on being associated as parent, or a staff member for a minimum of one school year. This ensured that the participants were knowledgeable enough to speak to the elements of success within the institution and the cultural nuances within. Most of the data was collected in the field, through face-to-face interaction over a period of 1-3 days at each site. Each participant received a consent form to each participate, detailing the parameters of participation in the study, as well as the confidentiality agreement. See sample consent form in Appendix D and E. Researcher bias was explicitly stated and discussed with participants to establish neutrality. Additionally, I sent information and talked to the building leader prior to my arrival that explained my background, interest, and focus of my research, to begin establishing comfort through transparency and clarity of focus. Full disclosure of my positionality and the purpose of the study were presented at the onset of my time spent using the designated methods with the targeted population and throughout to refocus the data collection. While I made my presence known to members of the school community, I remained as passive as possible and focused on being a participant in this experience, rather than a facilitator.
Research Site

The school is a K-8 charter school with 738 students. The student population is comprised of 99% African American students and 92% low-SES population, as determined by federal free/reduced lunch guidelines. This school is situated in a large city, in a desolate neighborhood that is now nearly abandoned. There are empty lots where houses once stood, and several homes are boarded up and condemned. This school is no longer directly on the city’s bus route. The bus route has been changed due to a new plant being built in a massive area of open land just down the street from the school, in an early attempt to revitalize this neighborhood. This neighborhood has similar struggles to most inner-city neighborhoods with high rates of unemployment, crime, violence, and substance abuse.

This site was chosen to conduct the research around the success of the population of study for several factors. The first consideration was directly related to the student demographic match the target population at 99% African American and 92% low-SES. Second, access and availability were huge factors in this study. As with any research common limitations are time, site location, and access to research participants. The principal of the school site was responsive, transparent, and welcoming. She took an interest in the topic of research and committed to open her space for observation of school practices, in hopes to affirm their work, but also learn what things might need to shift. Lastly, determining success for this institution was a precursor to starting the research. I could not choose a school based on common metrics, such as standardized test scores, as this measure is not equitable for all communities.

For the purposes of this study, success is determined as a measure of thriving. This site was chosen by administering a pre-questionnaire to the principal to ascertain how the school measured based on the component of thriving. Schreiner (2010) found the five components of
thriving are significant indicators to student success, even beyond other traditional predictors, such a student’s background. By researching and analyzing Thriving survey questions used by Dr. Schreiner in her study, I developed and modified questions of my own to utilize in this study, to assist in the determination of qualifying as a school that meets the requirements of thriving. The pre-questionnaire (included in Appendix F) offered several questions based on each of the five components of thriving: engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness.

The principal’s responses provided insight into the school and provided assurance that this site was an appropriate fit for this study. A review of the data collected in the pre-questionnaire determined that this school site was a fit. The principal’s average scores reflected in each category were as follows: 73% in engaged learning, 73% in academic determination, 80% in positive perspective, 66% on diverse citizenship, and 65% in social connectedness. These scores indicate that this school is thriving: All categories were rated above 50% in each category. This was a significant indicator in the choice to pursue this site for research. Later in the data, when another administrator was asked in an interview to rate the school’s students on their ability to thrive, similar data was reported. She reported 65% in engaged learning, 55% in academic determination, 75% positive perspective, and 80% in social connectedness. She did not rate her students in the categories related to diverse citizenship, rather, she indicated that school and the neighborhood is segregated, which is a bigger societal issue and not the children fault. The slight differences in these responses are because this administrator’s work targets a subset of the student population by grades-bans, and the principal has a more global vantage point of all students.
Other factors that were considered in choosing this site consisted of awards and recognition received by school. Annually, the charter management organization (CMO) recognizes schools for outstanding performance in a variety of categories. This school was recognized for several award categories, which included parent satisfaction, student enrollment, and the school of excellence. While details of test scores are not the focus of this study to ultimately determine success, it inevitably came up in most conversations had while working with participants and reflects the success they experience by other definitions. The school site outperformed the average state test scores on the state test, when disaggregating for African American as the sub-population. This trend holds true for the last two years of testing in math, and the last three years of testing in reading, as measured on the state test. The data also shows that this school is outperforming other schools that are “similarly situated,” meaning a comparable student demographic. Additionally, the state’s dashboard reports student progress, which indicates that the amount of students on-track to become proficient in the next three years, at almost 50% in math, with nearly one-third of students proficient in reading (see figures 1 and 2). This school is moving the academic proficiency rates of this population of students; we can see the positive impressions of Thriving characteristics contributing to this movement.
Figure 1: Math M-Step proficiency scores. The average percentage of African American students performing as proficient or advanced on the Math M-Step test, comparing the school site to the state average, and to school similarly situated.

Figure 2: ELA M-Step proficiency scores. The average percentage of African American students performing as proficient or advanced on the ELA M-Step test, comparing the school site to the state average, and to school similarly situated.
Data Analysis

Participant observation, artifact collection, semi-structured interviews, and focus group allowed me to triangulate the data of each school selected. Additionally, a comparison of triangulated data identified emergent trends within the data and established validity when identifying common outcomes. When collecting data via semi-structured interviews or focus groups, I was intentional to provide participants with open-ended questions, and worked to eliminate biased questioning. When possible, member checking or having participants review the transcripts was incorporated to ensure accuracy before analyzing data resulting from interview protocol. I transcribed interviews, scribed detailed field notes, and recorded observations of participant interactions and rituals. The transcripts were reviewed for common themes, information, and ideas I also reported disconfirming results or counter stories yielded in any part of the study transparently. Every effort was made to determine participants’ meaning and beliefs about the phenomenon, instead of the current literature.

Participant rights to privacy and safety in this process was essential. There are some specific practices that I used to maintain confidentiality and eliminate the threat of harm to participants. In addition to the Eastern Michigan University confidentiality statement, I observed needs for privacy and made additional efforts to provide comfort and emotional and mental safety. While recording responses in the semi-structured interviews, I suspended judgment and was intentional with my responses while carefully considering my verbal and non-verbal ques.

Participant Demographics

To solicit participants in this study, I sent an email to the staff at the school site, explaining the study’s focus and the parameters of the research methods. Participants were asked to volunteer their time to speak with the researcher by answering a series of questions. There was
a total of 19 respondents to the initial requests for participants; however, schedule conflicts arose during the 3-days visits, in which some of the interviews were not able to be rescheduled. Interviews were conducted with 14 participants, 11 of which were staff members, and three parents showed up to participate in a focus group. It is important to note that one of the parents was also recently, in the last year, hired as a paraprofessional at the school.

Table 1 reflects self-identified background information from each of the participants, revealing 100% of the participants were female. Participants were solicited on a voluntary basis via email. All staff received the invite and a schedule was created to include those who
responded and indicated a desire to participate. It was coincidence that only women signed up to participate in this research.

The provided information also details educational attainment of participants: 64% have graduate degrees, 18% (2) have bachelor’s degrees, 9% (1) have an associate’s degrees, and 9% (1) have attended three years of college. Parents were not asked to disclose of their educational attainment, as this information is not relevant to this study. Participants were also asked how long they had been associated with the school site; 72% of respondents have been affiliated with the school for 5 years or more. Their experience working at the school ranged from 1 years to 16 years, when the school first opened its doors. One hundred percent of parent participants have been affiliated with the school for 5 years or more. The self-reported race/ethnicity makeup of the participants yielded 100% of parent participants as African American, while approximately 27% of the staff participants were African American. Additionally, two staff members (18%) indicated bi-racial, of which both acknowledged one of their races as African American. Six of the eleven staff participants (54%) described themselves as White.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were strengths and weaknesses in this research study. While this phenomenon has been researched, this perspective was unrepresented in the research. While the research proposes a variety of theories around pedagogical practices to address the deficit in Black student achievement, this research identified a model for guidance, best practice, and replication. Identifying and gaining access to these institutions and their constituencies was considered a limitation, as people, by nature, are skeptical, but specifically about how they will be represented in the process of vulnerable information being portrayed and transcribed. Much of the previous
research around Black student achievement lies in a deficit frame, and the perpetuation of this lens is all too common regarding topic. Duncan-Andrade (2007) reminds us:

> Historically, work by anthropologists, in poor and non-White communities has produced conclusions of social dysfunction that have been used to justify repressive social, political and economic agendas. Our work must combat such efforts, counter-narrating racist conclusions with the stories of struggle, dignity and resistance that occur daily. The scholarship of anthropologists working in urban communities should expose the long-standing inequities there and the people’s efforts to transform those conditions. (p. 27)

While I am personally well-versed on these topics, from a research perspective, I am considered novice. Because of this, I may lack the social capital or connections needed to access some of these learning spaces easily, primarily seeing as trust is an important factor in experiencing life with people. Another limitation rested in identifying schools who experienced such phenomena related to defined population demographics. While these institutions exist, locating precise environments wasn’t always easy.

The conceptual framework included a very specific view of the research, which included culturally relevant pedagogy and post traumatic slave syndrome, which imposed its own set of boundaries on the study. Grounded theory methodology also set boundaries for this study, in the approach, collection of data, and interpretation or meaning making of data. Interpretation was intimately influenced by my experience as a Black child, growing up in poverty, and the influence it had on my assumptions, beliefs, and view of the world. Other delimitations that were revealed included the criteria set for demographic requirements for the population of study, as well as the timeline within which I conducted and completed the research. The results of this study was generalized to schools that (a) educated African American children who hail from
low-income/low-socioeconomic status backgrounds, (b) educated middle school or high school aged children, (c) resided in the United States of America, and (d) showed academic success using measures that may include standardized tests, but were not limited to this as a sole measure of success.

**Assumptions**

The assumptions included that this information was relevant and necessary for our success as a nation as a whole, goes without saying. Academic achievement and success is the norm in some schools and pockets of the country, so to amplify this work it was realized this success as a national norm. Success for minoritized people, means success for all. Practices that are successfully used for marginalized students can be used for all children and serve as good practice for all teachers.

**Summary**

Chapter 3 summarized the methods, protocols, and procedures for collecting and gathering data, as well as the processes used to help effectively interpret the meaning of the data, such as transcribing, and coding rounds. I employed multiple types of data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and artifact collection. Data was collected for interpretation and provided deeper insight into this phenomenon. I proposed qualitative research as the primary frame for approaching this study, because the study focuses on a social, cultural phenomenon in which participants lived experiences, thoughts, and stories significantly inform the research. My research questions guided this method of research. This research identified effective strategies used in schools that successfully educate Black, low socioeconomic students with evidence of academic achievement. Chapter Four presents and expounds on the findings, data, and interpretations of this study, in detail.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive analysis was to investigate and identify the ways in which schools were engaging marginalized youth, specifically African American, low-socioeconomic students and provide a detailed illustration of the practices and strategies employed in successfully educating these youth in the K-12 school setting. The literature is inundated with descriptions of the achievement gap, low achievement of marginalized youth, and the challenges faced by urban schools. While this information is in many cases valid and has merit, there is debilitating lack of research that shows the counter-story to the dismal image that many marginalized youth face in their schools, including charter, public, and parochial. The truth is, the reality of low achievement, underachievement, or educational disenfranchisement does not exist in every school. In fact, there are schools experiencing exceptional results in relation to successfully educating low-socioeconomic, African American children. These examples of success are understudied and are rarely highlighted as a topic of research. If those institutions and individuals involved in the critical work concerning education and race fail to augment the conversation with highlights of success, schools will continue to underachieve, (mis)educate, and eventually, give up on our students altogether.

This research highlights the efforts of a school on their journey to success for all their predominantly Black and low socioeconomic students. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 12 interviews with teachers and administrators, a parent focus group, a pre-questionnaire, and over 15 hours of observations. The interviews were transcribed and coded by analyzing commonalities and participant role. The observations are reflected using descriptive
language and memoing. The content was summarized in relation to each category of question presented and analyzed for emerging themes and other commonalities.

**Findings**

This chapter examines what guides the actions of a school community, as a whole, to produce success with the targeted population of students. Investigating the staff’s engagement with students, their interactions based on their unique role within the school, and their lived experiences revealed their core beliefs about these young people, including their perceptions of students’ academic abilities, needs, and what it takes to educate them successfully. The research method chosen for this study was grounded theory. Through an analysis of the participants’ words, experiences, and interactions, I identified the commonalities found among the answers shared by participants for each question. These commonalities formed the basis of the themes identified and expanded in this chapter. My analysis aimed to answer the following research question: In educational spaces that educate marginalized students, who are low-socioeconomic, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success? The secondary questions of focus were as follows: How does the relationship among school leaders and stakeholders influence school culture and student achievement? and What decisions are leaders making in these spaces that contribute to student success?

Before moving on, I find it prudent to address an “elephant in the room.” The research obtained in this study is from observing, interviewing, and collecting data at a K-8 charter school, and in doing so, I have encountered some who feel that I should have chosen a different site, specifically, a non-charter public school. Some of the researchers cited in this study also have very strong positions regarding charter vs. public school, and the perpetuation of educational segregation fostered by charter management companies. Saying this, the school site
chosen was based on access, student demographic, and evidence of thriving characteristics. The purpose of this study speaks to the phenomenon of success of African American youth who are also of a low socioeconomic status. The system of education in the U.S. is failing this subpopulation of students, regardless of their attendance within charter, traditional public, or private schools. I have worked with low-income, African American students in both charter and traditional public-school settings, and they are both in the same metaphorical boat as it relates to inequitable education efforts. A further conversation about charter vs. public is important for other purposes; however, within the scope of this study is not the conversation of focus.

For consistency and flow, I will briefly recap defined terms that are crucial for foundational understanding of this analysis. Continuing further, I will present the findings of this study through emerging themes and concepts. This process will allow a scaffolding of data, giving voice to the experiences and stories expressed by each of the participants. As the data is presented, personal commentary from observations notes and memos will be shared as a means of providing researcher insight that was explicitly spoken of during the interviews.

**Operationalized Terms**

Language is powerful in the expression of thoughts, ideas, and meaning. These terms and working definitions are reviewed here to ensure clarity and continuity for the purpose of this analysis. Considering the ideology of successfully educating marginalized, low socioeconomic students, it is important to create a distinction between education and schooling. Thus, the working definition of *schooling* is a “subtractive process” of learning that strips away social and cultural resources from marginalized youth (Valenzuela, 1999) and prepares them to suffer and just survive (Love, 2019). *Low socioeconomic status* describes the financial status of a family whose income reflect about twice the federal poverty level. As defined by Jessup (2012),
“students’ SES is traditionally defined as a combination of family income, parental educational attainment, parental occupational status, and household or family income” (p. 4). Jessup (2012) offered an expanded definition of SES which includes additional household members, neighborhood, and school resources. Other terms used to describe the population studied are minoritized and marginalized. *Minoritized* is defined by Smith (2016), as “groups that are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality, and gender and as a result of social constructs have less power or representation compared to other members or groups in society” (p. 1). Smith (2016) further argues, “[A] minoritized student, is a student that because of circumstances outside of his or her control has to deal with issues of racism, ableism, and teachers presuming his or her competence” (p. 1). *Marginalized* describes a sub population that is positioned in the margins of society or deemed inferior due to characteristics or classification such as race, but also including gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other classifications. Alakhunova, et al. (2015) define *marginalization* as “both a condition and a process that prevents individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life enjoyed by the wider society” (p. 2).

Further, I define *culture* as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. This definition, while it does not conflict with more commonly accepted definitions of culture, I feel is more appropriate for this conversation as it is centered around the history of education and the generational impact of slavery, as well as educational segregation, inequality, and discrimination. Last, and maybe most important, is the term *success*, which is redefined as the “thriving” in relationship to the Thriving Quotient rendered by Dr. Laurie Scheiner. who refers to it as a distinct construct comprised of five primary factors: (a) engaged learning, (b)
academic determination, (c) positive perspective, (d) diverse citizenship, and (e) social connectedness (Schreiner, 2010a). Further, she reminds us:

A focus on thriving rather than merely surviving in college has the potential to change the way higher education views student success. Rather than defining success solely as grades and graduation rates, a focus on thriving encourages a more holistic view of student development that expands to include healthy relationships, sense of community, making a contribution, and proactively coping with life’s challenges. Having Thriving as our goal also changes the strategies we use to assist students; we move from deficit remediation to strengths development and from a focus on who students are and where they’ve been to who they want to become and where they’re going. In short, we shift from failure prevention to success promotion. And most importantly, we begin to measure what matters—the development of a perspective on themselves, the world, and their future that equips students for success not only in college, but, more importantly, in life. (Scheiner, 2010, p 10)

When student success is envisioned as factors of thriving, it centers upon considering the whole person in that success. I suggest that success is a qualitative measure, rather than merely a quantitative score on a standardized test. Being successful in life is not solely determined by test scores; rather, it includes life skills, personality traits to an extent, and being providing and taking advantage of opportunities.

**Parent Perception of Success**

A focus group for parents and community members was offered, where three parents showed up to participate. I was intrigued by the level of consistency and agreement that was
evident from this small group during our conversation. Their answers, while not the same, had similar themes and ideas which indicated data saturation. I noted in my memo:

The parents (3 mothers) seemed nervous at first, as if they were being judged on how well that would represent the school, but quickly became comfortable, which showed in their conversation, body language, and facial expressions. They didn’t know each other’s names but had seen each other around and seemed somewhat familiar with each other as the interview went on. (Memo, T. Brown, 12/11/2019)

The three parents who spoke with me, self-identified as African American mothers, with students at varying grade levels, had all been associated with the school for at least 5 years. When asked about the goals they have for their children, the parent participants in the focus group indicated what they thought were factors of success, such as hard work, never giving up, staying focused, and trying your hardest. One hundred percent of the parents had a goal for their child, but none indicated being proficient on a standardized test as a factor of success. It is essential to highlight the parent perspective of success early, as we have redefined success as measure beyond test scores for the purposes of this conversation. The following was collected as a response to the questions “What are the goals you have for your child(ren)?”

My goals for my child is her fundamentals of education first. That’s number one. She got to have education to go anywhere in life. That's her life skills, and then pick up some training. For her to understand that sometimes people fall back from what they don’t understand, at that time of life. But you can succeed in life if you try your hardest. (Parent Participant #1, Focus Group, 12/11/19)

My goal for my children, you know... I like to tell them to stay focused. Cause, I have four children and usually, I have the two boys, they usually off tasks, so I’m more hard
on them than the girls. So, to stay focused, learn as much as you can, you know, in life it might be difficult, but I keep telling them, you can do it. (Parent Participant #2, Focus Group, 12/11/19)

My goal for my children, umm, I always tell them, never give up. You know, no matter what it is, you know, just always try again and keep trying, no matter what. You may have to try 3-4 times, but you gone get it. Regardless of the next person... they may have got it their first time, you know, well everybody is on different levels, you know. The one child maybe on a higher level than the next, in something like reading and math. Some people know more, you know. They can comprehend reading, but some can’t comprehend math, with the numbers they get confused, but with reading you know they can put the words together. But everybody is on different levels and I just tell my children never give up, no matter what. (Parent Participant #3, Focus Group, 12/11/19)

Parents expressed hope for their children’s future that aligns with what Shreiner (2010) eloquently called “a shift from failure prevention to success promotion” (p. 10). The parents observed in this study are looking at “what matters” hard work, perseverance, and focusing on what they can do, in order to have a successful impact on their child’s future. I probed further with the parents about what goals or aspirations they thought their children had for themselves. When asked, “What do you (parents) think they (your children) want to be or do or achieve?” the answers were thoughtful, authentic, transparent, and provided insight on their perspective of success:

You know what, I really, I know probably our teachers are asking the students that question. Majority of the time, we really got so much going on with other things, we asked them, but we really didn't know that we really asking ’em that. And it seem like we
want more for them then for ourselves. Like our parents want... we want to be more than our parents, and that's the whole thing about it is. We want to see if our children understand that when we keep telling them, ‘You can do more you can do better than me.’ That's the main thing, and then we kept saying you can do it you can do it, more achieving in them. They just have success, that's, that's the main thing we are doing.

(Parent Participant #1, Focus Group, 12/11/19)

Well I'm gonna use my older son, since he will be going high school. I always tell him, ‘be better than me and your father. You can do anything you want.’ Because he always say, he wants to travel, he wants to go to different places. I say you can do it. So keep… put your mind to it and go for it. (Parent Participant #2, Focus Group, 12/11/19)

Well, my [youngest] daughter, she's nine. She's just turned nine. She sees her older sister. She has a sister that's about to graduate college... So she's like, ‘I want to go to the same school my sister go to. GO green!’ … I'm like, ‘you sure you want to go there?’ ‘Yeah, my sister said I have to go there. Cause she went there; I have to go.’ I’m like, ‘You can go anywhere you want to go.’ But since she went there, you know she's looking up to her older sister, you know. (Parent Participant #3, Focus Group, 12/11/19)

These renderings show a confident expectation that their children will be successful, but indicated a different understanding of success, that lie outside the realm of test scores. The parents acknowledge a desire for their children to reach far beyond their present level of living.

**Hiring and Maintaining Quality Staff**

Staff retention and longevity was found to be a key factor in creating successful students, from a whole school perspective. Darling-Hammonds (2001) suggests that
minority and low-income students in urban settings are most likely to find themselves in classrooms staffed by inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill-qualified teachers because funding inequities, distributions of local power, labor market conditions, and dysfunctional hiring practices conspire to produce teacher shortages of which they bear the brunt (p. 218).

More than half of the staff, while some are serving in a new role, maintained tenancy within the school. Approximately 45% of the staff have been employed at the school for 5 years or more. Similarly, among the teaching staff, 43% of those holding teaching positions have been at the school for 5 or more years. While their role may have varied over the years, these staff members have sustained continuous employment at the school for a significant time. Forty-seven percent of the full-time teaching staff currently hold a graduate level degree. This number is 32% when considering the whole staff. Similarly, 53% of the full-time teaching staff have a bachelor’s degree, which is reflected at 32% when considering the whole staff. Another 8% hold an associate degree or certificate. Darling-Hammonds (2001) cites a lack of teacher experience and quality as a primary barrier to closing the achievement gap. The lack of hiring and maintaining quality teachers in urban schools is an inequality (Darling-Hammonds, 2000a). When schools experience significant turnover, there is no continuity of instruction and quality is affected, as a new person still must learn their craft and get acclimated to the schools’ expectations, culture, and structure.

This school has not only maintained the majority of their staff for several years, they have maintained a qualified staff. In some charter schools, such as Teach for America, preservice teachers are asked to sign on for a two-year commitment. Often overlooked is the influence that this short-term commitment has on student success and achievement. Delpit (2011), reflects on
the importance of creating programs that will provide quality training for preservice teachers and promote long-term commitments in the classroom:

I do not propose that we terminate these programs (referring to programs like Teach for America), but we must ask alternatively certified, young, idealistic teachers to make a longer commitment to education to ensure that our most fragile students are not subject to constant teacher turnover. Further, we must use some of the money we pour into alternative certification programs to provide long-term, careful training for a cadre of teachers who are committed to long-term service in low-income communities and who are extraordinarily skilled in all that we know about teaching children from culturally diverse communities (p. 114).

At the research site, staff demographic data demonstrates a pattern of high retention rates that are not exclusive to the teaching staff, but also support staff and administration. This is advantageous in myriad ways. Staff not only know the culture of the school, but they develop as a part of the fabric of the school. Parents recognize them, trust them, and look forward to sending their child into the next grade level with specific teachers. During the focus group, I discussed the impact of having teachers in the building for multiple years. The following was observed:

Tamela: How well do you think the teachers know or connect with your children? Do they know them well? Do they know what's going on with them? Are they connected to them?

Parent Participant #1: Oh, they know.

Tamela: And how do you know or what tells you that?
Parent Participant #1: They [teachers] observe they children in that classroom and know that person. Every individual student, that teacher is paying attention to.

Parent Participant #3: Ahhh Huhhh. (nodding in agreement)

Parent Participant #1: (continues) The student may not know, but that teacher do. And anything they think they can get away with, that teacher already know what that child is capable of doing.

Parent Participant #3: I believe like, you know you first go into a new classroom and the teacher you know basically have to evaluate you, within that first two weeks, sometimes within a week a teacher already knows who you are, your personality. Because they know, especially when they have other siblings that had that same teacher. ‘Oh you're ‘so-and-sos’ brother or cousin. All right you know they sometimes be like will y'all basically act the same way. Oh, have your cousin or your brother helped you out how you know this, like okay I know you know this because you have older or younger brother, or sisters or cousins that I had in the past.’ They are very familiar with all the students.

Tamela: So that, that makes me think that teachers are staying; that they're here for years. They don't come for a year and then leave, if they're able to see an older sibling come through and then make that connection. So, teachers stay here, when they come to work…?

Parent Participant 3: Yes, majority of the time.
Parent Participant 1: Yeah, majority of them. And what will happen is a connection with the parent and the teacher… you know concerning the child. That’s a good connection too.

Their perspectives express the importance of staff longevity in connecting with students and gaining the confidence and trust of the parents. Staff retention allows for relationships to be forged, nurtured, and honored by parents and staff alike. Another benefit of staff retention is that momentum is gained, and it allows the school program to stabilize, grow, and flourish.

An additional benefit of hiring and maintaining qualified staff is building capacity and competent instruction, understanding the school program, becoming a school community, and connecting with the student population. I interviewed teachers, support staff, and administrators and asked why they had chosen to stay at this school for so long:

But that's also a trickle-down effect because so many of our family members, you know, some of these kids, they're the third or fourth kid in the family I have had. So, they recognize that too and parents recognize that… and our parents talk too. So, at parent teacher conferences I had a parent sit down and was like, ‘well I'm sitting with the O.G. again’, cause you know, our team has been around [for years]. Until this year, it was the same team for four consecutive years, which is very rare to find in any middle school, let alone a Detroit middle school… at one point there was four years in a row where they had the same teachers, all four years. And that was impressive. I even think, still some of our teachers who are lead teachers now, they were support staff members... we only have one brand new teacher this year. Some of the kids I have in my class now is sixth graders I knew them as second graders. So, yeah, they've been around the building… Students for sure, but I think at the end of the day you have to realize students come and go. The
relationship you have with your colleagues, they’re our family. We hold a “Friendsgiving” every year and it's all middle school teachers. The person who hosts it was a teacher who left two years ago. The only reason she left is, she was driving an hour and 15 minutes. She worked here for four years; she made that drive for four years. So, I think it's the relationships with the teachers, and then it goes back to the admin team setting those expectations for culture and relationships and then the trickle-down effect to our staff, our immediate team and then into our students. So, it's all about, it’s the culture.

For me personally, it's the trust, and the trust in “I'm going to do a novel, three times a year, but I will hit all the skills that I need to hit I promise you”, you know. What I mean some teachers don't have that autonomy in other schools that I have. Thankfully the trust and the autonomy to kind of do my craft, what I love to do. (Teacher Participant #1, interview, 12/13/19)

I think the teacher turnover is a lot lower, which I think is huge. I think education as a whole is trying to figure that out, not just urban ed. But urban ed is hard. It's hard work and like, I think we've had a few teachers recently who like left and I was like, honestly, not like negatively towards them but just like their heart wasn’t there anymore and like it just is it takes everything out of you and like, I think, for some people it's like eventually you just don't have any more that you can give, and like I think realizing that and like stepping back when it's necessary it's like respectable I guess I'd rather you do that, than to stay in the classroom and be miserable. And so I think for me it's like we have a really committed staff who like has stayed. The principal has been at the school since it open, and now she's the principal. And like that's just, I mean she knows all the families, and knows all the kids and like that's just really great… It's just something that I think like
took for granted, like being able to see your teacher, over and over again... people that care a lot, and are here for the right reasons, and they've been here. (Teacher #4, interview, 12/11/2019)

And in addition to that, as far as our staff goes, I have met just some amazing individuals since I've been working there. Because, you know, life happens. I've had several incidents that have happened to me, several life changing things that have happened to me. And the way that the staff just, oh my god, they were phenomenal. They're an awesome group of people, and you don't find that at every workplace. This is like home to me. Like I'm just I can't leave it, at this time. I don't know if I can retire, I could probably retire right here. Because I want to do as much as I can to see as many of these little people get their piece of the pie, whatever that piece may be. Do you understand what I'm saying? So, it's just hard to leave it as you know, it's, I don't know. (Support staff #3, interview, 11/13/19)

Teacher #1 described her connection to the families at the school because she had been “with them” for years. She points out that the team had begun to establish a relationship of trust and respect with parents, which she attributes to their longevity. The term O.G., the term used to refer to the teacher during conferences, signifies a person who has been around for a while and has earned respect and honor within the community.

As reflected by Schreiner (2010), “Thriving is incomplete without relationships” (p. 5), teachers and staff exemplified interpersonal connections as an important component of thriving:

My daughter came over here first... This is my second year here at this school. I came from another school (within this charter network). The previous principal was my administrator at the other school before she came over here... And so, then there was some personal things that happened my daughter ended up coming to this school first to
go here. I will say that I was trying to get over here prior to that, though, and so like there are deadlines being able to transfer from one place to another. And so, when an opening did come up because very few come up over here. But I was past the deadline and so I couldn’t come because of deadlight And then I was, I was in a car accident so I was off. So, coming back, there was an opening, and I was like, Hey, I'm sorry, I love y'all over here but like closer to home and my baby is over there. So, she came in a third and now she's in fifth. (Teacher Participant #3, interview, 12/12/19)

I enrolled my daughter here... And I was that parent who was always volunteering. Let me see what's going on up there. I spent so much time here. And that's been 13 years ago, and I've been here ever since. I stay for several reasons. One because, I just feel like I just have a connection to these children because I grew up not too far from here. Like, I live in gross my Park now, but I lived, and grew up right in that Jefferson-Chalmers area down here. And I feel like I have a connection to these children. Like my stories aren’t as traumatic as some of their stories, but I can still identify with them. And I feel like an obligation to help them to help them go where they need to go, and to give them what they may not get at home or, you know. I feel like I need to be part of that piece that helps them make it… I have to do what I gotta do with these kids. Somebody has to make sure that as many of these kids make it as possible. And now in here like I'm vested in it. I can't leave them yet. I'm not ready to leave yet. (Support staff #3, 11/13/19)

The kids… I mean I just, I don't know, I don't know, I guess. Well, I don't know what it is. I mean, I guess one thing I can say I guess it's just the kids; a love for the kids. And to see them because I've had several family members to come through and you know,
they've gone on to college and everything so I just, I think it's just a love for kids I have.

(Support staff #4, 12/12/2019)

While these benefits express mild differences than what emerged with the parent focus group, it serves to provide insight for educational leaders regarding how to improve staff retention. These staff interviews highlighted several recurring factors, such as a sense of family or personal connection among staff, purpose, efficacy, love for kids, autonomy, and feelings of pride and satisfaction with the school. Additionally, several of the staff have children or family members that attend (or have attended) the school, of which a few were indicated during interviews. This personal investment demonstrates trust, pride, and belief in the school staff and the work they are doing. As teachers and staff trust and support the school greatly, they therefore continue to enroll their own children, as well as other family members.

**Staff Background: Race Makes a Difference in the Classroom**

Prior to my arrival at the school, I was aware of the student demographic of 99% African American population; however, I did not know what to expect of the staff population. On the second day of visit, I recorded this note regarding my observations of staff:

So, within the first half hour that I was here yesterday, I was overwhelmed in the most positive sense at the amount of staff members and teachers of color in this building. I have just never seen this. It is exciting, it is awe striking and just pretty doggone amazing. I went down to the first-floor classrooms today and saw some other folks (teachers of color) I hadn’t seen yesterday. (Memo, T. Brown, 12/12/2019)

While marginalized students make up more than half of our urban schools’ populations, the teachers in front of them consist primarily of White teachers (Delpit, 2011; Delpit, 2006), and there is an imperative that teachers entering the classroom know, acknowledge, and understand
the history of race and education, and why it matters in the present (Love, 2019). At the research site, this is not the case; students are seeing themselves reflected in the people standing in front of them. The racial makeup of the staff at this urban school, consists of 63% African American, 30% White or Caucasian, 4% Asian, and 3% Biracial.

I had an opportunity to observe classrooms (core and elective), lunch time for middle school students, hallway transitions, arrival and dismissal process, parent-teacher conferences, and the front office. From my observations in a middle school math classroom, I noted the teacher effortlessly commanded the attention of the class of all African American students. The teacher, a Black man who wore dreads and a sports blazer, used the language of mathematics, but appropriately infused slang in his instruction to the class. Students were laser focused, quiet, paying attention, and even updated a “old school” slang term, from “bling” to “drip”, without breaking instruction. In an interview with the principal, she expressed her excitement for continuing to recruit and maintain staff of color in all roles and its importance to the school; she also expressed with an unwavering expectation of competence for any teacher who is in front of the students:

Oh my gosh. I am so pumped about it. I know it's weird cause I'm white person, literally. I get it, I get it. There are certain things that I cannot, you know, do or say or whatever, that’s why I'm lucky I've been here for so long because my family's trust me. Um, but with that being said, we've been really fortunate with some of the candidates that have been coming into our school. And I'm so pumped about it because as I've mentioned about reading, I want my kids to be able to see the protagonists in the stories as African American persons that look like them, you know, that talk like them and are from the same background or community; right that's important. But it's also important for them to
see someone in front of them, teaching. “I could be you; I could do what you're doing”. And even bring people in, like, with different careers. “Let me see,” you know, “what I could be, and what I can do when I grow up”. I love it. I think it has a very positive impact on our students, especially males... I still consider like you know the person who's coming in, like, can that person teach. I don't care what color your skin is, you better be able to connect with my kids because if not, you cannot be here. (Admin Participant #1, Interview, 12/11/19)

As we continued this conversation, the principal began going down a mental list of staff members of color in the building, referencing aloud over 25 staff members. She spoke with such transparency, awareness of cultural nuances, and awareness of her own whiteness. In speaking of culture, she made the connection that many of the staff, specifically African American, have children and family members at the school. She believes this strengthens the culture connections within the school and has an inherent positive impact on student achievement and empowerment.

I spoke to various staff members, and no one could point to intentional efforts to infuse cultural history content within the curriculum. However, many alluded to the significance of having African American staff members in the building and having the culture embedded within the context of the school as a form of empowerment for the students. The other things I noted was that the emphasis was seemingly placed more on knowing the students well, loving them by meeting their needs, and believing in them by holding high expectations beyond focusing solely on history, culture, and cultural artifacts. During my observations, it appeared that the staff understood the students background and, in many cases, could personally relate to the students' culture and background. I reflected on this in my memo, noting the following:
There is little evidence of intentionality towards culturally relevant pedagogy. There is however an awareness and intentional desire to connect with kids on a personal level and empower them to become, as well as a real investment in their life, well-being, safety, and learning. Student centeredness seems to be the mantra or focus among the staff.

(Memo, T. Brown, 12/13/2019)

During several interviews the staff named a need for training on how to bring more African American history, culture, and background into the curriculum and instruction more intentionally, as a schoolwide approach. However, staff members are individually embedding practices that promote culture and consciousness within the classroom:

[Referring to novels and articles in the ELA class] I think for some kids, it relates to some of the things they've seen in their own neighborhoods, sometimes very close to them in their own families… or somebody they knew have and so just bringing that in and bringing that real life experience... we relate it to real life experience but also the ELA classroom so just bringing in high interest things and real things that are happening out in the world... and find out more information so just bringing out real world real life experiences that our community, our neighborhoods dealing with right now. (Teacher participant #1, Interview, 12/13/2019)

I can't speak for everybody but for me, I'm an African American. So for me, I think it's important to you know embed and teach them things about their culture; you know, how, how it came about or when it fits with what we're talking about. Not that I necessarily go and just pull random things or whatever, but you know definitely if it's something that's a part of something that we're learning to teach them, you know some of the background from it. Then even have them, you know, kind of push for them to go explore and learn
more about it on your own. Haven't so much this year… but in the past… we talked about Black Lives Matter and it's like, well, go look and see what does that mean? I'm a big person on not telling you what to think but telling you to go get the facts so you know formulate your own opinion. And that's what I really push for my students to go learn about it on your own and make your own opinion about it. You know, how do you feel about what's going on and why. So especially in our culture, you know, shouldn't you learn about your culture and find out why you're doing what you're doing. (Teacher Participant #2, Interview, 12/12/2019)

Teacher Participant #2 shares her beliefs about raising the social consciousness of the students by urging students to “get the facts so you can formulate your own opinion… and to make your own opinion about it.” Diving deeper into her interview, she articulates the importance of cultural awareness as a vehicle to connect with students, even if the teacher doesn’t look like them:

It [cultural competence] definitely has a big impact on them, because you see people that look like you, that are doing, you know, things that you might not see every day. They are teaching you and your seeing, “I can ask this person”, because connect with them and you might even feel more open to talk to this person because they look like you like I mean, that can have a lot of impact on them. (Teacher participant #3, Interview 12/12/2019)

Fifty percent of the staff interviewed indicated that cultural competence was important, but specifically pointed to the presence of African American staff and how it empowers students to achieve and be successful because somebody who looks like is. When the teachers reflect the culture of the student, they realize they can do well and are expected to. One noted, “I think they
need to see successful people that look like them, if that’s what you mean” (Support Staff Participant # 3, Interview 12/13/19).

Others spoke of a need for more cultural competence training but are actively incorporating the African American culture in their classroom. Participants named reading novels that reflect our students, bringing the student real life experiences into the classroom, using related scenarios in instruction, and of course, celebrating Black History.

**School Resources**

While interviewing the staff at the research site and asked about the barriers to education for their student population, staff repeatedly discussed the lack of resources students have. Not one staff member blamed the student, nor mentioned an inability to learn; rather, they discussed resources that were lacking, their desire to meet those needs, and what the school has done to address the need for basic resources.

The school has implemented systemic strategies for meeting the needs of students and families. First, the school designated a parent room that was available to parents all day, for meetings, working with their child(ren), and as a waiting room or place to be. There are free books available in the parent room for parents to take and add to their students’ home library. Another strategy used is the presence of dedicated staff, whose focus in part, is meeting the needs of students and supporting parents. This dedicated staff included a parent liaison and school social worker. Throughout the day, these staff were available and call upon to meet with students and parents to better understand what supports were needed. There were on-hand resources, such as winter gear, uniform replacements, school supplies, and other basic clothing necessities (socks and undergarments).
Meeting the needs of students and their families aligns with components of Engagement. Another way staff met the needs of their students were through providing intentional daily interactions to “check in” with them about how they are doing, such as greeting during arrival and dismissal, thresholding at the classroom door, and sharing good news in class. It was common to see staff hug a student, or zipping jackets on the way out of the door. The main office seemed to be the front line for assessing what students, and parents needed. The front office staff were heard using terms of endearment, making connections, and greeting with smiles, hugs, and words of encouragement. They were the informants for how to access the school resource and other community resources.

Several staff members and the parents spoke of a partnership with Gleaners, a community partner who provides weekly food bags to students, and a once monthly 50 pounds bag of grocery for families at the school. The principal also spoke of the support and sponsorship provided by the school board members, and other local businesses. The parent liaison was also seeking additional partnerships and order funding sources to provide more resources and support for the family.

**Student-Staff Relationships**

Creating a sense of belonging for students was evident in the interactions between staff and students. Students were greeted at the front door every day, and even at their car by a staff member whose duty it was to open car doors and welcome students. During my visit, I witnessed hugs, high-fives, and verbal affirmations as a norm of daily life. Students were called by name, or sometimes terms of endearment, such as love, sweetheart, and sweetie. Additionally, staff referred to students as “scholars.” Additional examples of resources provided daily school social
work, greetings, hugs, addressing students by name, and holding high expectations behaviorally. Teachers regularly encouraged free, open conversation to develop insights in a natural manner:

A lot of is just through discussion like I allow them to be very open with their traditions, what they do, you know what I mean, like we've talked about, like what they did for Thanksgiving, what they're going to do for the upcoming holidays and usually that's a lot of the like do now portion, so I can get, get to know them more and get to know what they're into or even like their feelings for the day so-to-speak like what is on their mind for the day I allow it just a lot more just open discussion during the Do Now (or warm up activity). (Teacher participant #1, Interview, 12/13/2019)

The relationships observed existed between students and teachers, but also exist between and staff and parents. Student relationships are valued and intentionally pursued both in and outside of the classroom. The relational component is necessary for success, because “thriving is incomplete without relationships” (Schriener, 2010, p. 5). Social connectedness is explained as one of the important components of thriving, attached to the interpersonal functioning of a student. Ladson-Billings (1995) names structured social relationships or connections with students as a necessary component to embedding culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the classroom. She refers to it as fluid student-teacher relationship. During the interviews, participants spoke about how they feel about relationships with their students:

It’s a mission, like I honestly feel like that, and I have kids that still come back and that like the fulfillment of it. It’s just a really great feeling. (Administrative Participant #2, interview, 12/13/2019).
I think that now it's for me personally, a love for these kids. I mean I drive 45 minutes here, 43 miles a day. I go home and sometimes you know hour, hour and a half. And it's just, I don't know, I love it here. I love the kids. But it started out with a lot of. Yeah… Our principal didn’t smile much. Yeah, you know like, you know, it just wasn't necessarily fun. But I think people were getting set and I think that's exciting and inspiring you're doing something you're not just taking up oxygen, you're really doing something different, and the kids are better off leaving you than when they came and that in itself I think is rewarding. (Teacher Participant #3, interview 12/13/2019-04)

During the interviews with other staff members, the theme of purpose continued to surface. They spoke of a life event or family member who influenced their interest in education. They felt a sense of purpose or higher calling as it relates to pursuing education as a career:

Coming out of high school, I began working for that youth program. I really enjoyed like the teaching of academically and socially. Umm so that's what made me switch my major from performing arts to education. I always knew I wanted to work with youth though. (Teacher Participant #3, interview, 12/12/2019)

Honestly, it was when I was in high school and my brother really started to struggle, and he had to go to alternative education. And so that was my passion as alternative Ed. So, I started off for five years in South Carolina and alternative. (Teacher Participant # 4, interview, 12/13/2019)

Actually, I thought I never wanted to be a teacher. My mother is a retired teacher and DPS for over 30 years, and I will buy a girl I want to be a doctor. And so, um, I guess what's funny about this is that I've always worked in education but in different ways so how used to dance and so I used to help assist ballet classes in high school, because I
would help teach in that would be my financial pay for the classes. And then as I got in college, I was the University of Michigan I have you. Are you from your gear up? Yes. So, I worked with gear up, and then really kind of changed my life. I just wanted to help people, you know, and this is crazy how God's plan you know comes into play. (Teacher Participant #3, interview, 12/11/2019)

Mission is driven by purpose. When people feel a sense of purpose, it makes what they do come alive in a real way; it becomes personal. Ladson-Billings (1995) speaks to the characteristics of teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy:

All of the teachers identified strongly with teaching. They were not ashamed or embarrassed about their professions. Each had chosen to teach in this low-income, largely African American school district. The teachers saw themselves as a part of the community and teaching as a way to give back to the community. They encouraged their student to do the same. They believed their work was artistry, not a technical task that could be accomplished in a recipe-like fashion. Fundamental to their beliefs about teaching was that all of the students could and must succeed. Consequently, they saw their responsibility as working to guarantee the success of each student (p. 163).

Staff-student relationships are built on trust, transparency, and relevance. The teachers who have good relationships make connections with students that go beyond classroom instruction, further engaging the student’s humanity, culture, and interest. These teachers have chosen to work at this institution and make a commitment daily to the work of educating these students.

All Children Can Learn…

When asked what the common belief staff held about students at the school was, the response was as if I had asked them to respond chorally and in unison; all three administrators
started with “All students can learn!” There was no question about this belief, as each of them spoke with confidence and without hesitation. This was echoed by staff members as well:

I would say that all students are capable of learning. (Administrator Participant #1, interview 12/13/19)

I think the first one we have is that every child can learn. I think without that mindset it makes the rest of the job, not very possible. (Administrator Participant #2, interview 12/12/19)

And I would say that the belief that all students can learn, some may not know the information yet. (Administrator Participant #3, interview 12/11/19)

While the phrase “all children can learn” can be considered an educational cliché, this school has put their “money where the mouth is” when making this statement. Several years prior to my visit, the school had gone through a change in leadership, which many attributes to the shift in focus on student learning and instruction. These changes included alterations in staffing and redefining parent expectations and relationships, but most significantly the way students were instructed. Students are assessed using progress monitoring tools two times a year: fall and spring. The data from these assessments are used to place students into flexible instructional groups. While this a typical approach for intervention, they have expanded this intervention model into a systematic whole school model. This means students learn in these instructional groups throughout the school day. Another unique factor related to this expanded intervention model is the consideration of “novice students,” or those needing the most support academically, are provided two full-time teachers, or a teacher and support staff, providing instruction all day, every day, to ensure growth and movement. Some students, based on specific need, are provided three adults in the room. This differs from tracking in that the students’ data are closely
monitored with a data folder, groups change or flex at least annually, and there is quality instruction and learning supported by qualified staff.

This systematic approach to daily instruction fosters the academic determination component of thriving at all levels of learning. When students thrive, they are engaged in the learning process, make meaningful connections, and are attentive to new learning opportunities (Schreiner, 2010b, p. 4). This format of instruction ensures access to, or experience with, content and quality instruction, ultimately improving academic achievement. Reflections of this are noted in a couple of interviews:

I’m in a novice classroom. That is when I step in with small group intervention, and a lot of one-on-ones, just to give them the extra push they need. And by the next year, they may be in the basic class, which means you are right where you need to be [academically]. (Support Staff Participants #3, Interview 12/13/19)

Seeing student growth, especially for the students who have been here. It would be like seeing a student’s growth, not necessarily test score wise, because I mean you know, like, that's awesome, too. So, I've definitely seen scores go up, which is like the best. But for me, it’s seeing the students change from the beginning of the year, to the middle of the year, to the end of the year, whether it's socially or academically. And seeing that change... that's success. (Teacher participant #2, Interview 12/12/19)

They're gonna grow. You can't expect less you have to have the same expectation for every student that's in front of you, but also know that every student front of you has its own struggles, but no excuses. I think that was, that was the start of it. And then once people started seeing success and then we, you start feeling yourself, you know
everyone's gonna be like oh yeah we're proud, you know. (Teacher Participant #3, interview 12/13/2019-04)

Ladson-Billings (2006) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy refers to student learning as “what it is that students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (p. 34). Ladson-Billings (2006) seeks to more clearly define her use of the term academic achievement in her original study on culturally relevant pedagogy, as student learning; she regrets using this term citing that educators equated this term to student test scores (p. 34). Academic achievement, then, is directly related to how students learn; not simply defined by scores on standardized testing.

This idea of all students can learn is translated to the students, as high expectations, instructional rigor, rewards, and in some cases, elaborate celebrations of student success. The principal discussed fun field trip opportunities and an honor banquet as examples of how students are celebrated. As developed further in the unexpected findings outlined in Chapter Five, this approach has created a culture of determination and ownership for success and achievement. I asked nine participants about how students negotiate alongside peer pressure; similarly, they all (100%) remarked that this issue doesn’t present itself within their institution. Further, they relayed comment that students think it’s cool to learn and are motivated to get into the proficient class/group:

So, it’s crazy, because if you're an academic achiever in our school, you’re not an outcast. You’re one of many. And if you’re not at the highest academic level, you want to be that person. They’re looked at in a very positive light. It’s just our culture. (Teacher Participant #1, Interview 12/13/19)
I don't think they think “I can’t be too smart.” I think that the leveling of the classes makes students want to push to get to that C class, which is the proficient class. (Teacher Participant #2, Interview 12/12/19)

Students seem to understand the intervention structure, but more importantly how to navigate it.

The staff continue to refer to the students desire or motivation to move up to the next level.

Summary

This chapter presents the findings from interviews (see Appendix F for protocols), observations and a parent focus group. The recurring commonalities that emerge from the data include the significance of hiring and maintaining quality staff, the importance of staff background, staff common beliefs, staff-student relationships, school resources are essential to student success. Chapter Five will discuss how the findings in this study can serve as a roadmap to schools for their quest to successfully educate marginalized populations who are also low-socioeconomic.

Chapter Five will further expound upon the findings of this study and its contribution to the field of education. This chapter examines the limitations of the study, and finally recommendations for future research.
Chapter Five: Discussion & Conclusion

Introduction and Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand what schools are doing to produce success among a subgroup of children, specifically African American students, who are low socioeconomic status. In this research study, I identified what practices and strategies were enacted by school staff as a whole and analyzed their influence on student success. As the study documented the efforts, beliefs, and actions of a school staff serving a student population that is 99% African American and 92% low socioeconomic status. This study is important to the field of education and educational leadership because the current research documents a short fall of achievement among this population of students, as cited by the achievement gap, lower than average graduation rates, and a lack of college attendance among this population. The staff’s behavior, beliefs, and interactions with students provide a framework for how schools can support the success of marginalized populations, such as those targeted in this study. The purpose of Chapter One was to introduce the current study by outlining the purpose and problem, as well as its importance to educational research and myself. Also, in Chapter One, I provided my personal response to the ‘why’ question and disclosed my intimate connection to the research. I reviewed the literature related to the study in chapter two, further providing the historical background of this study. In Chapter Three, I explored grounded theory as the chosen methodology, as well as data collection protocols and procedures, and provided further insight to the target population of this study.

In Chapter Four, I conferred six major themes yielded from an analysis of the data, which were expressed as hiring and maintaining quality staff, staff background makes a difference, all student can learn, relationships, school resources, and academic intervention. These themes
further provided rich data on how maintaining the same staff over time influences parents' trust of teachers, the relationships among staff and parents, and student achievement. It was evidenced that when students see teachers that look like them, it helps them know they can achieve success. Further, it was noticed that relationships are essential to teaching and learning, and the positive relationships between stakeholders proves to be greatly impactful. Other conversations expressed that a child’s needs can be a barrier to learning and prescribed that those perceived needs must be met before the child can successfully learn. These findings indicated that there is not a perfect and detailed step-by-step process to produce student success. Rather, obtaining the “right” people and preventing excess turnover, creating a solid and set of core beliefs, and following-through with actions that closely align to those beliefs are the most important aspects of creating an environment of educational success.

In this chapter, I reflect upon the findings, the significance of these findings as they relate to education, their contribution to education and educational leadership, and the limitations of the study. I further discuss the need for future research related to the success of marginalized and low socioeconomic students. Later in this chapter, I discuss and propose a school-wide E3 Strategy: Engagement, Exposure, and Experience derived from the findings of this study, which will prepare schools to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students and prepare them to Thrive, or become successful. I will also expound upon the unexpected findings that emerged in the data.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

There are three fundamental components that construct culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)—academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. While this research redefines success beyond academic achievement, achievement is a priority with the
educational setting. This schools’ primary focus appeared to be academic achievement and was observed as being monitored continuously and regularly rewarded. During the interviews, several staff members discussed the need to have more professional development around cultural competence, which currently relies heavily on the demographic makeup of the staff, as the foundation for cultural connections. Hawkins (2014) reminds us:

In this approach, culturally responsive teachers build on the strengths of all students by incorporating their histories, traditions, identities, and diverse forms of self-expression into classroom teaching as a way to value their respective cultures and broaden their learning. Children need to know that they, their families, and their communities are respected and that they matter. Teachers play a critical role in helping students develop positive academic identities through inclusive pedagogical practices that embrace the rich cultural and linguistic diversity that all students bring to the classroom. For their part, teachers themselves must reflect critically on their own assumptions and biases in order to recognize and respect students’ diverse ways of knowing and learning. (p. 21)

The participants were comfortable discussing race and education, and the needs they have as a building for training and more change. However, the discussion ultimately returned to academic achievement each time. While race was important, it seemed to be emphasized due to the social makeup of society, specifically when considering the injustices marginalized youth face daily. All participants expressed a belief in, and focus on, student learning first.

**Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**

The lens, or conceptual framework, of this works calls upon post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) in the analysis of the data and subsequent interpretation of such data. PTSS consists of vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization. Teachers of African
American children, who are low income, often point to a lack of ability or motivation as the cause of low achievement or disinterest in school. I would challenge that this is a result of vacant esteem. DeGruy (2017) describes esteem as the assignment of worth or value to oneself. She also acknowledges that esteem begins its development at birth (DeGruy, 2017, p. 107). In other words, parents first establish a child’s value early on, as determined by their interactions with and belief in their child. When students possess vacant esteem, it significantly effects their learning. Esteem or value is also ultimately determined by the community and most influential, society, which includes the school as an institution. Degruy (2017) further explains:

Vacant esteem is the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society. Vacant esteem is the net result of three spheres of influence – society, community, and family. Society influences us through institutions, laws, policies, and media. The communities in which we live influence us through establishing norms and encouraging conformity to society at large. Our families inform us through the ways in which we are raised and groomed to take our place, as our parents see it, in the community and society. (p. 108)

A student shows up to school daily, having experienced the influence of not only their family, but their community and society. These sources of influence rest in what a child is told or expected to do at home; what is seen, heard, or experienced in the neighborhood; and more significantly the way they are represented to the world in media, policies, schools, and other institutions. Hawkins (2014) warns, “One of the greatest challenges facing schools in the U.S. is how to effectively and consistently engage and embrace those students whose histories, culture, values, and socio-economic status are different from mainstream society” (p. 9). The school’s job is to engage the student is meaningful work, and find ways to add value to the student, their
culture, and their contribution (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). This will change the way students respond in school. The low-socioeconomic status of the families, and subsequent desolate conditions of the neighborhood, are sources of vacant esteem for these students. Additionally, media headlines such as “Detroit schools again worst in nation…” or actions akin to Amazon’s rejecting Detroit as the site of their new headquarter due a “lack of talent” (mentioned in Chapter Two), send clear messages about what society expects from Detroit’s citizens.

The school site combats vacant esteem by greeting every student as they arrive to school by opening car doors and saying good morning with a smile. Further actions include being greeted often by name as they enter the building with a hug or handshake, as well as being greeted at the threshold of the classroom door daily by teachers. These intentional touch points communicate “you matter,” “I’m happy you are here,” “thank you for being here,” and “it matters when you show up.” Celebrating and rewarding students for their achievement is another example of how the school fights against the impact of vacant esteem. Degruy (2017) purports:

Children and adolescents, given little responsibility and/or great praise for meaningless actions can easily grow up to be narcissistic, assessing their worth on a shallow level. Conversely, children and adolescents who receive little appreciation for the actual value of their contributions can easily grow up with an undervalued assessment of their worth, ultimately believing themselves to be of little or no value. In the best of worlds, children are given greater and greater opportunities to do meaningful work and receive an appropriate level of appreciation for their contribution. In this way, healthy self-esteem is developed. (p. 108)

In an interview with the principal (reviewed later in this chapter), she describes a rewards banquet given to acknowledge students, in front of parents and the school community, for
reaching proficiency on the state test. These types of acknowledgements run in contrast to the newspaper messages indicating a “lack of talent” in Detroit and helps to develop a healthy self-worth. Students are also recognized monthly for demonstrating character along with a picture and description outside the office, as well as mention in the monthly school newsletter. The symptoms of PTSS requires healing, not quick superficial changes. Healing occurs through awareness, stopping the continued assault or re-injury, and the acknowledgement of wrong.

PTSS also speaks to ever-present anger; however, this condition was not observed during the 3 days of observations, among students, staff, or parents. In Chapter Two, racist socialization is described as “the adoption of the slave master’s value system” in which whiteness is superior and blackness is inferior (Degruy, 2017, p. 116). The U.S. system of education is founded on white supremacist ideology. Therefore, schools buttress and uphold systems, policies, and structures that disrobes students of their culture and cultural identities in exchange for the dominant culture, White culture. Valenzuela (1999) refers to this as subtractive schooling; Ladson-Billings (2018) calls it an educational debt; Freire (2005) names it the banking concept; and Love (2019) brands it as the educational survival complex. In general, schools in the U.S. have a white, middle class value set, and anything outside of those parameters is inherently wrong, standing in opposition to the rules of schooling; thus, schools reinforce racist socialization.

In review of school’s handbook, evidence of racist socialization appears with regard to the schools’ dress code policy. The policy indicates that loafers are preferred and that athletic shoes are not recommended. It also warns against “extreme” hairstyles and hair color. The boys are instructed to wear “conservative hair” off the collar and no earrings; while the girls are restricted from colorful bracelets/necklaces/earrings, no make-up, and only ears can be pierced.
Fashion (specifically shoes), hair, and other accessories are cultural badge or symbol of self-expression within the Black community. This policy restricts and invalidates part of the student’s culture, naming it wrong, inappropriate, or inferior. In my 15+ hours of observations, I noted “acts of resistance” to these socialized policies. I noticed students, and even staff members, with hairstyles that went against the dress code policy as the norm; this included long dreadlocks, braids and extensions, and hair color. Most of the students, at all levels, wore gym shoes with their uniforms, even though these types of shoes are list as “not recommended.” These culturally appropriate symbols among students and staff, seemed normal, common, and went unaddressed.

The school’s culture seemed natively resistant to this handbook policy and embraced these cultural features. The uniform itself is part of the school’s hidden curriculum, in which students are taught, and staff models, the requirements of “professional attire” in the workplace reflected in larger society.

Another practice that reflected racist socialization was a method of tracking used as academic intervention throughout the school, at every grade level. Students are sorted into academic categories of novice, proficient, and advanced, and sifted into classroom based on the achievement category. This structure in many ways reflected that of traditional tracking systems. Turner and Spain (2016) assert that the tracking, in multiple ways, has been a mechanism of grave inequity in the United States, as the prevailing views of intelligence reflect White, middle- and upper-middle-class culture (p. 4). Oakes’ (1985) definition of tracking as the “process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned to groups in different kinds of classes . . . tracking, in essence, is sorting” (p. 3). Some of the parameters within the intervention model that stand in opposition to traditional tracking are (a) flexible nature of the groups and (b) co-teaching model used for instruction. Flexible grouping indicates that students
are monitored and move into a higher group when they need more of a challenge. The ultimate goal is that all students are at or above grade level performance. The co-teaching model is used exclusively in the novice (or lower) class, thus concentrating more support in the classes where students need it most. The goal in this tracking model is not just to sift and sort kids, rather to use additional resources to support the learning and growth of all students.

Review of Findings

The findings of the study are simple and plausible. They speak to the importance of our humanity in response to relationship and connection, need, purpose and doing what is right for African American, low socioeconomic children in schools throughout our country. While I expected something much more complex and difficult to duplicate, I am pleasantly surprised and pleased by the results, because it implies that marginalized youth don’t have to fail due to a teacher's inability to reach competence in a certain area. Rather, the findings dictated a heart posture or personal belief system of the staff, purpose-driven career orientation, commitment, and a high value of relationships. While these findings might appear simple, they reveal the true complex, inner-workings of our humanity, and can encourage educators to look deep into themselves (beyond their degrees, certifications, and qualifications) to do the work that must be done to obtain actual equitable education for all students. The unsettling revelation is that because of the simplicity of the findings, one is only left to feel enraged at why success for African American children continues to be an anomaly in the United States of America.

While I found the data outcomes to be somewhat surprising, I by no means found them to be personally uncommon. I have been incorporating many of these strategies for years during my tenure as an educator, but I was still surprised to see these themes emerge. I expected to discover much more formalized and intentional policy structures that would dictate how teachers interact,
instruct, and do their jobs in the desire to obtain success from marginalized student populations. The major categories that emerged from this qualitative study were largely reflective of human qualities, such as purpose, beliefs, efficacy, etc., and a larger process of interactions or connections, conditions, and resources with, and for, students. These core categories include Engagement, Experience, and Exposure.

- Engagement---This category refers to the connection and intentional relationship formed between parents, students, and teachers. It also describes “how” the school engages students and parents by assessing and meeting immediate needs, that may serve as a direct barrier to learning.

- Experience---This category strictly refers to academics and making the content accessible to all students, at every level. There are a variety of strategies that can be implemented by schools to make the content accessible, from intervention models to cultural relevance to using hip-hop or other music genres. This will depend on the demographic of the student body and the academic levels or cognitive needs.

- Exposure---This category refers to the need for students to see glimpses of their future, and things outside of their immediate scope of life. Exposure for students can happen in a multitude of different ways, but the result should always be an opening up of the mind, thoughts and desires through providing new experiences, ideas, and information.

These categories are the components of a bigger strategy that I call E3 Strategy: Engagement, Experience, and Exposure. The elements in this strategy are necessary for students to thrive, and thus be successful.
E3 Strategy

The E3 Strategy emerged from the themes identified during the data analysis and coding process. While many themes emerged, they seem to all connect to one of three overarching major themes; thus, these categories arose. As I mentioned before, I’ve use portions of this strategy throughout my educational career; however, the data collection defined the categories and created parameters necessary to make them successful in schools. Finding these categories in the data caused me some apprehension at first, as I wanted to be sure to stir away from bias, but the themes continued to emerge and show up. I could have chosen different words; however, creating new words would not have changed data outcomes regarding how schools can produce success with African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Engagement.** Engagement works to disentangle what Dr. Joy DeGruy (2017) refers to as “trans-generational adaptations” that African American parents operate within, as they engage America’s school system. DeGruy’s (2017) theory of post trauma slave syndrome (PTSS) was expounded upon in Chapter One. In short, these adaptations are based on the history of oppression and trauma suffered by the African American community, and how that trauma results in the manner and mentality in which they respond, approach, and interact with the school system. Ultimately, this is often met with a lack of trust and fear of unfair treatment. One of the adapted behaviors or symptoms evident in PTSS is vacant esteem. Vacant esteem is the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority (Degruy, 2017) that exist in media imagery of Black schools, achievement gap data, top to bottom lists, and other measures of achievement handed down by state and federal governments. On one hand, African American parents have bought into these reports of the child’s inferiority and often display behaviors to combat this, such as cursing at the teacher, not attending parent-
teacher conferences, or being unresponsive to the school. On the other hand, Reynolds (2010) reminds us of the experiences that Black parents regularly have when attempting to engage the school and school officials in positive ways:

Though parents cited diverse examples of discriminatory treatment, they all cited racism as the root causes of the unpleasant experiences they had within schools. When interfacing with school officials, parents often felt that their exchanges were wrought with misunderstanding and unspoken hostility. More damaging and most effective in serving as an impediment to a healthy relationship were the implied negative messages Black parents received from school officials regarding their sons. (p. 152)

Engagement works to intentionally dismantle these projections and displays the schools’ belief in the success of the child. This can only be done by engaging the parents in supportive, authentic, and non-threatening ways.

What is unique about the Engagement category is the condition that it must include the parent or family unit in the child’s educational journey. In education, we are often taught to engage within our “locus of control,” indicating that we have no control over what happens at home. While it is true that the school cannot control most aspects of the home-life of their students, nothing prevents the school from working to reshape the school’s image, relationships, and interactions with marginalized parents and students at the school. Without engaging the parents, there is an imbalance that occurs in the strategy. Engagement involves identifying and meeting the needs of the student and parents and targeting the needs that serve as direct barriers to learning, such as food, clothing, and homelessness. This is not to suggest that the school can, or should, provide housing for families; however, schools will need to provide resources to support families in these circumstances, often through state or federal funding. There is also a
need to provide affection in the regards to actions of physical, social, and emotional gestures that reflect a teachers’ (or schools’) belief in and care for students. These gestures include things such as verbal affirmations; rewards and recognition; and appropriate physical touch, such as hugs, pats on the back, and holding a child’s face in your hands. Engagement strengthens a child’s ability to “thrive” in the areas of positive perspective and social connectedness.

**Experience.** The theoretical underpinnings of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) requires a teacher to help “students to be academically successful, culturally competent and socio-politically [conscious]” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 162). The premise of Experience lies in ensuring that students can access the content and demonstrate academic learning. It is pertinent to point out the connection between Experience, or accessing the content, and the three tenets of CRP. In academic achievement, teachers recognize and acknowledge that students bring knowledge and information to the table that informs the content and builds on that knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1995b) discusses her observations of CPR in action, “In these teachers’ classrooms, teacher-student relationships are equitable and reciprocal. All of the teachers gave students opportunities to act as teachers” (p. 480). This was observed in multiple classes, even in kindergarten, during my observations at the school.

Cultural competence necessitates that the teacher understands, appreciates, and welcomes the students’ culture as necessary to the teaching and learning process. This was heavily demonstrated by the overwhelming amount of African American teachers and other staff members who naturally wove the culture in their language, examples, and instructional interactions. As well, it was observed that White teachers, who also lived and/or worked in the community for several years, had committed to understanding and valuing the culture as a value of the learning process. These teachers have immersed themselves in the culture and have a
higher level of cultural competence and knowledge than even some of the students’ own family members.

Socio-political consciousness aspires to educate children in a way that will help them identify, address, and challenge social norms, as well as other injustices. The teachers at this school expressed a desire to foster an education that will empower students to change the trajectory of their lives and help to change their families’ lives as well. Experience aligns well with the tenets of CRP in making teaching and learning accessible to all students. Two of the five factors of thriving are relevant to the Experience component of the E3 Strategy---engaged learning and academic determination. When teachers use CRP practices, it produces engaged learners, students who are engaged actively participate in their own learning and make connections about their learning within their own lives.

**Exposure.** Exposure directly correlates to the idea of diverse citizenship in the Thriving Quotient. The core of exposure is to connect students to experiences, opportunities, and information outside their present sphere of influence. This can look like field trips, virtual experiences, career days, or even ongoing exposure to something like being educated by African American professionals, an observation that may not otherwise be experienced in their immediate neighborhood settings. Diverse citizenship reflects exposure to diversity in culture, interests, and perspectives that students can encounter in their daily lives. Students who demonstrate this attribute have heightened levels of curiosity and openness by learning from the lived experiences of people around them. Further, this factor also reflects students’ desire to contribute to their community (Schreiner, 2013). Diverse citizenship also wards against racist socialization, as described in PTSS. Exposing students fosters a sense of overcoming the internalized and imposed negative images of self and community, by allowing students to see
and experience new and different situations, ideas, and opportunities. When students see something different, it not only raises their curiosity, but it can dispel and dismantle the racialized images of who they are and can be, a product that has been adopted by the nature of America’s racialized society.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is evidenced by over 10 billion school-aged African American children in the United States, whose parents have a hope for their children’s future; these children are being educated predominantly by people who don’t look like them, or come from the same neighborhood as them. All children deserve opportunities to achieve success, but the vast majority of our African American students are attending schools that are failing them. Without a quality education, these children are left with minimal choices—poverty, crime, inability to attend higher education institutions, etc.—with negative consequences to match, including prison, homelessness, lack of quality healthcare, and inability to obtain employment or qualify for promotions. The 14 participants in this study, who represented staff and parents of an urban school, gave voice to challenges, practices, points of pride, and concerns of working with, or parenting, these youth. Their collective stories unexpectedly highlighted the importance of relationships within the community between teachers, parents, students, and community members. Schools are preparing students to merely survive, and expect a life of exhaustion, violence, and doubt (Love, 2019), which does not provide opportunities for education and success. Love (2019) challenges:

Racism literally murders your spirit. Racism in traumatic because it is a loss of protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance—all things children need to be educated…

Schools are mirrors of our society; educational justice cannot and will not happen in a
vacuum or with pedagogies that undergird the educational survive complex. We need pedagogies that support social movements. (pp. 38-40)

The American school system was built on a foundation of racism. While it may now physically house students of all backgrounds, there has been little wavering in the fundamentals that built this system---one that was never developed to serve in the success of minoritized populations. In order to change the narrative of equitable education for our marginalized youth, it is critical to incorporate significant changes to the way education is viewed, assessed, and practiced.

**Unexpected Findings**

As the interviews were conducted, several of the participants disclosed that multiple staff professionals have family members, including children, nieces, nephews, or grandchildren, who attended the school. This is a bold finding as it places several staff members as simultaneously taking on the role of parent. What I quickly learned was that in all actuality, this obscurity served to better inform how the school positively engages parents. Additionally, this dual positionality enacted an uncommon investment for all staff, to be entrusted with the education of their child(ren). Further, by enrolling a child (niece, nephew, grandchild, etc.), staff members become parents, thus showing a vote of confidence in the staff or belief in the education being provided at this school. This could likely establish common ground among staff and parents. Although less frequently disclosed, there are staff members who are related to one another.

An equally unexpected finding rests in the overall idea that “it’s cool to be smart.” When asked how children cope with issues surrounding peer pressure (as it relates to their involvement in learning performance), it was not expected to receive a response that learning, and achievement was the students’ definition of “cool.” This idea is reinforced by the school through
activities of championing students through public recognition and rewarding them for various achievements directly related to learning goals. The school has been to emulate an environment that “education pays” through benefits and privileges offered at the school to those who achieve. This environment breeds a desire for academic success and achievement.

Limitations

Qualitative research comes with its own limitations, due to the nature of data collection, time constraints, and the need for a smaller sample size. Other unavoidable limitations within qualitative studies are the presence of the researcher in the interviews, and its potential impact on the participants' responses. During interviews, avoiding such bias was mitigated in multiple ways. These measures included an attempt to limit the amount of “off-topic” interjection by the researcher and by using pre-developed concrete questions from which to lead the interviews (see Appendix F). By utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol, it provided flexibility to the researcher to gather unique, spontaneous information. This protocol also allowed for questions to be asked of some participants, instead of all participants, which doesn’t always consider the narratives of all participants around a particular question. Time constraints and budget were also limitations of this study. With more time related freedoms and a larger budget there could have been a deeper, long-term, even possible multi-year gathering of data to enrich and deepen the findings of this study.

Another limitation to this study was that all the participants who were interviewed were women. Participants were solicited without regard to gender; however, those that responded to the call for interviews happened to all be female. This study is limited to a single gender perspective and does not represent the thoughts and opinions of the male staff. Further, as this
research was conducted at one school site, located in a large city, it does not provide data from multiple sites or neighborhoods with similar demographics.

**Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study call for a concerted effort by school districts to hire and retain the “right” staff. The “right” staff implies high-quality teachers and staff who understand the students’ culture, have the passion to improve the outcomes for this population, and can make a long-term commitment. Hiring and retaining quality staff has budget implications, and it creates a necessity for new funding policies for schools with considerably marginalized populations. Funding and tax policies subject largely marginalized populated schools with fewer or inadequate resources and unequal distribution of funds, (Darling-Hammonds, 2001; Darling-Hammonds 2013; Dumas, 2017), which in turn lends to higher rates of inexperienced and under-qualified staff. Districts must (a) prioritize funds in these schools to recruit and hire quality teachers, reserving a significant number of spots for African American teachers; (b) foster creative solutions for staff retention; and (c) create policies to ensure that the students with the greatest needs, get the best teachers in the district. Often White teachers enter the classroom with a deficit perspective about Black children’s ability to achieve and are ill-prepared to teach Black students (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008) and a teachers’ belief in a student’s ability is a key factor in achievement.

Another finding that has financial implications would be in the realm of providing opportunities for student exposure. Districts can partner with community organizations and businesses, apply for grants, or solicit additional board funds to create unique opportunities for students to “see the future” beyond their current realities. These experiences don’t all have to be outside of the school building, while that is preferred. Students also need opportunities to
develop leadership skills, interact with new people, explore colleges and careers, and learn about new places and the world outside of their comfort zone. This exposure will open the world up to students in ways that can change their lives in the present and the future.

Parent engagement requires some careful thought and restructuring of resources. Some schools have begun supporting a position called parent liaison or parent support specialist. These roles are often held by a parent within the school to make intentional connections with other parents. Beyond including staff positions like these, it is critical to focus on intentionally connecting with parents in ways that are authentic, supportive, and relevant. These developments cannot be left to happen-stance, but rather it is crucial to create an area of focus and intentionality in order to develop meaningful, positive, and effective relationship with parents.

**Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to analyze effective practices and strategies, from a whole-school perspective, that would inform educational leaders and teachers on successfully educating African American students that are low-socioeconomic status. The data collected from 11 interviews, a focus group including three parents, and over 15 hours of participant observations, led to the development of a new theory, the E3 Strategy: Engagement, Experience, and Exposure. This strategy provides guidance and direction for district and building leaders alike. There are some systemic considerations that should be prioritized before or during implementation. The following are recommendations for school and district leaders to consider based on the findings of this research.

First, a robust plan for engaging African American parents that empowers, values, and honors them; a plan that does not center around traditional middle-class values of the school. This plan requires the school to engage parents in authentic and meaningful ways. Second, a
strategic plan for recruitment, hiring, and retention of high-quality staff, whose demographic reflects that of the student population, needs to be created and implemented as a priority. Considerations of such plan should include competitive salary and possible retention bonuses, a commitment to diversity, and alternative recruitment efforts. This may require engaging in a partnership with a university to develop and funnel talent. The third recommendation is an allocation of funding earmarked toward closing the opportunity gap, by exposing students to things outside of their neighborhood, as well as providing experience, or access, to the curriculum for all students. Community partnerships and connections may support opportunities for exposure and foster creative ideas. Providing curriculum access to all students, requires additional staffing, multi-level resources, and professional development. Last, policy review, analysis, and adjustment are needed. School policies should be reviewed periodically to ensure antibias and culturally appropriate policies.

**Future Research**

In this study, I examined one urban school’s approach, actions, practices, and beliefs for successfully educating African American, low socioeconomic students, but there is still much work to be done. Multiple research studies can be launched as a result of the findings and limitations of this study.

Further research is necessary to better understand the Thriving Quotient among college students, as compared to secondary students, and what are the correlated attributes from one level to the other. A study to support this would include creating new definitions of thriving as it relates to the K-12 population. By conducting a broad study of students from the K-12 arena, a more concrete set of components can be realized, improving the application of Thriving standards as they relate to successful primary and secondary educational efforts.
Directly related to the study of this single school, there are future studies which could eliminate the potentiality of bias, including the addition of research from the male staff and parent perspective and an investigation of the student perspective. Enlisting more participants and gathering data to include the male population of this school will serve to enrich the data and prevent the possibility of being biased toward an all-female perspective.

Additionally, a gap in this study is the lack of student perspective. Performing an investigation into the student perspective, ideas, and lived experiences, as they relate to obtaining an equitable education that defines success, would add powerful perspective to this research. By including the student perspective in this study, the voice of these African American youth would lead to stronger, richer, and more compelling findings, as well as other unexpected truths.

Ultimately, a comparable study is needed that involves multiple schools in urban areas with similar population statistics, as well as comparing other marginalized populations to one another. By creating comparable studies, more concrete themes and commonalities will emerge through the data, leading to stronger definitions and procedures to ensure the equitable educational success of American marginalized populations.

**Concluding Statement**

The findings of this research derived from one essential question, thought to foster a theory grounded in the data, and become the crux of educational success among African American school-aged children, who are also of low socioeconomic status. The question was “In educational spaces that successfully educate African American, low socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?” The theoretical framework for this study combines two theories culturally relevant pedagogy and post traumatic slave syndrome, as a lens to examine the critical issue of the
miseducation of African American children and their ultimate success. Success was defined as thriving and evidenced by five qualities: positive perspective, social connectedness, diverse citizenship, academic determination, and engaged learning. The fundamental prerequisites of success for this population of students, was not found to be CRP alone, while it proved an essential component. CRP as a classroom practice is effective; however, the research focused on the school as the unit of study, and therefore, the classroom was only one component of the whole.

This study presented a variety of findings that all point to how educators behave, what they believe, and who they interact with, that fosters success among African American, low socioeconomic students. The findings of this study did not provide a step-by-step guide through a program, nor a magic formula for success. Rather, it produced three components that can be adopted by schools to ensure the success of students meeting this demographic. The components of Engagement, Experience, and Exposure, or simply, the E3 Strategy, provides a guideline (or a set of principles) by which schools can operate, in order to foster success in all students. Ultimately, while the E3 Strategy is critical in creating equal and equitable educational solutions resulting in success for African American, low socioeconomic students, the principles and components from which it is defined are equally successful in the education of various marginalized student populations.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: IRB Approval

Date: 3-4-2020

IRB #: UHSRC-FY19-20-103
Title: Reimagining Schools: A Descriptive Analysis of Effective Practices for Educating Marginalized Students
Creation Date: 10-5-2019
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Tamela Brown
Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee
Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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Appendix B: Request to Conduct Research

RE: Request for to Conduct Research (Location)

October, 2019

Hello Principal ________________,

My name is Tamela Brown and I’m the MS Dean at River City Scholar Academy in Grand Rapids, MI. I am currently pursuing my PhD in Educational Leadership and have begun my dissertation process. I believe that NHA has some pillars of success that we can all learn from and that can inform educational research. My research focus is looking at the phenomenon of the success of low-income, African American children and is driven by the research question:

In educational spaces that educate marginalized, low-socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?

I am looking to identify educational sites that have a student population of 70% or higher African American students and 70% of students that are classified as low income, with a level of success as defined by having a thriving population (not just test scores).

I’m requesting your permission and support to use (name of school) as a research site. I would be honored to observe what makes (name of school) successful. I’m using a qualitative research method which would consists of me observing day-to-day interaction of staff and students, as well as interviewing staff (teachers, administrators and other) and possibly a focus group of parents. Qualitative research involves me looking at the ‘lived’ experiences of the phenomenon through participant observations and interviews to capture the participants thoughts and ideas as a form of data.

If you are interested in supporting me in this research effort, and (name of school) meets the demographic parameters of my research (stated above) I can send you more detailed information on the research method, process and a research proposal. This process would be minimally invasive and would request that staff interview on a voluntary basis only. I will NOT interview students as a part of the data collection process. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and I hope I can document the great things happening at (name of school)! I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Tamela Brown
Appendix C: Request for Research Participation

Request for Participants for Educational Research

December 2019

Hello (Name of school) Family,

My name is Tamela Brown and I’m the MS Dean at River City Scholar Academy in Grand Rapids, MI. I am currently conducting research on how schools help students become successful. I have partnered with your school to do this research and believe I can learn a lot from you about your school. My research focus is the phenomenon of the success of low-income, African American children and is driven by the research question:

*In educational spaces that successfully educate marginalized, low-socioeconomic status students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly impact student success?*

I am honored to observe and learn what makes (Name of school) successful. I’m using a qualitative research method which would consists of me observing day-to-day interaction of staff and students, as well as interviewing staff (teachers, administrators and other) and possibly a focus group of parents, community partners/providers and other stakeholders. Qualitative research involves me looking at the ‘lived’ experiences of the phenomenon through participant observations and interviews to capture the participants thoughts and ideas as a form of data.

I am writing to request your participation in my study. Participation would include (1) a one-on-one interview for less than 60 minutes (for teachers/administrators/staff) OR (2) participation in a Focus Group for approximately 90 minutes (for parents/community members or partners). All information shared in interviews and focus groups will be kept confidential. I am requesting participants on a voluntary basis only. Students are NOT eligible for participation in this data collection process. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and I hope I can document the great things happening at your school and your personal perspective! If you are willing and interested in supporting this research effort by sharing your story, please contact me at [95.tbrown@nhaschools.com](mailto:95.tbrown@nhaschools.com). I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Best Regards,

Tamela Brown

Tamela Brown
Appendix D: Informed Consent for Interviews

RESEARCH @ EMU

Informed Consent Form for Interviews

Project Title: Reimagining Schools: A descriptive analysis of effective practices for educating marginalized students
Principal Investigator: Tamela Brown, Doctoral Student
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rema Reynolds, Department of Leadership & Counseling

Invitation to participate in research
You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Important information about this study
- The purpose of the study is to observe and identify the effective practices used to make African American, low-income students successful.
- Participation in this study involves interviews of teachers, staff and administrators, as well as a focus group involving community stakeholders.
- Risks of this study include potential breach of confidentiality.
- The investigator will protect your confidentiality by using research ID# instead of participant names, and store and lock any collected data.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and if you decide to participate, you can stop at any time.

What is this study about?
The purpose of the study is to provide insight and guidance for educators, specifically those serving in environments with a large population of marginalized students. The identified practices and strategies will serve as the catalyst for new ways of schooling and improved student achievement, specifically in urban schools characterized by a large population of low-socioeconomic, minority students with low achievement.

What will happen if I participate in this study?
Participation in this study involves:
- Answering a series of interview questions during an interview that should not take longer than one hour to complete.
- Interviews will be documented by an audio recording device to obtain accurate information from all participants, for this study. If you are audio recorded, it may be possible to identify you through your voice. If you do not want to be audio recorded, please inform the investigator and your interview will not be recorded.
- You may be asked to conduct a follow up interview to clarify an answer, if the investigator is unclear about something said on the recording.
- We would like to audio record you for this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your voice. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you may not be eligible to participate in this study.
What types of data will be collected?
We will collect data about instructional strategies, educational practices and classroom/schoolwide processes used with students; as well as your thoughts or interpretations of student engagement and response to the educational process. In addition to answering the interview questions, each participant will be provided a background form and asked to identify the years of experience, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and gender in order to determine impact of these characteristics on the phenomenon.

What are the expected risks for participation?
The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. But we will take steps to reduce this risk. Some of the interview questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. If you are upset, please inform the investigator immediately. There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation.

Some of the interview/focus group questions ask about your personal thoughts and beliefs about education and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. If you are upset, please inform the investigator immediately.

Are there any benefits to participating?
You will not directly benefit from participating in this research, but teachers and staff members may be led to self-reflection and organizational reflection after reading their transcripts after the study. This research can be used to inform school leaders, teacher preparation programs and various stakeholders in education.

How will my information be kept confidential?
We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify you.

We will keep your information confidential by not disclosing of any identifiable information in the interview and only using first names during the interview. The audio recordings will be transcribed within 2 weeks of the interview and then immediately destroyed. Your name will be changed in transcribing the audio recordings, at which point we will not have any information that identifies you. The data will be stored in password-protected computer files, and audio recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until they are destroyed. We may store your information for at least five years after this project ends or may store your information indefinitely.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The principal investigator and the research team will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration.
The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that you are at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming yourself or others, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be required by law that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

The investigators will ask you and the other people in the group to use only first names during the focus group session. The investigators will also ask you not to tell anyone outside of the group about anything that was said during the group session. However, we cannot guarantee that everyone will keep the discussions private.

**Storing study information for future use**
We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file and may be stored indefinitely.

We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

**What are the alternatives to participation?**
Interviews can be conducted over video conferences as an alternative to face-to-face, if requested. However, the only true alternative is not to participate.

**Are there any costs to participation?**
Participation will not cost you anything.

**Will I be paid for participation?**
You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

**Study contact information**
If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Tamela Brown, at throw124@emich.edu or by phone at 616-204-8011. You can also contact Dissertation Chair/Adviser Dr. Rema Reynolds, at rreynde15@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-2713.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

**Voluntary participation**
Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any
time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

**Statement of Consent & Signatures**

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

______________________________
Name of Subject

______________________________ Date
Signature of Subject

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

______________________________
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

______________________________ Date
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
Appendix E: Informed Consent for Focus Group

**Informed Consent Form for Focus Group**

**Project Title:** Reimagining Schools: A descriptive analysis of effective practices for educating marginalized students  
**Principal Investigator:** Tamela Brown, Doctoral Student  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Rema Reynolds, Department of Leadership & Counseling

**Invitation to participate in research**
You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

**Important information about this study**
- The purpose of the study is to observe and identify the effective practices used to make African American, low-income students successful.  
- Participation in this study involves interviews of teachers, staff, and administrators, as well as a focus group involving community stakeholders.  
- Risks of this study include potential breach of confidentiality.  
- The investigator will protect your confidentiality by using research ID# instead of participant names, and store and lock any collected data.  
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and if you decide to participate, you can stop at any time.

**What is this study about?**
The purpose of the study is to provide insight and guidance for educators, specifically those serving in environments with a large population of marginalized students. The identified practices and strategies will serve as the catalyst for new ways of schooling and improved student achievement, specifically in urban schools characterized by a large population of low-socioeconomic, minority students with low achievement.

**What will happen if I participate in this study?**
Participation in this study involves:
- Answering a series of interview questions during a focus group session that should not take longer than 90 minutes to complete.  
- Interviews will be documented by an audio recording device to obtain accurate information from all participants, for this study. If you are audio recorded, it may be possible to identify you through your voice. If you do not want to be audio recorded, please inform the investigator and your interview will not be recorded.  
- You may be asked to conduct a follow up interview to clarify an answer, if the investigator is unclear about something said on the recording.  
- Focus group sessions will be video recorded to obtain accurate information from all participants, for this study. If you are video recorded, it may be possible to identify you through your image. If you do not want to be video recorded, please inform the investigator. This may impact your eligibility to participate.
The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that you are at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming yourself or others, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be required by law that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

The investigators will ask you and the other people in the group to use only first names during the focus group session. The investigators will also ask you not to tell anyone outside of the group about anything that was said during the group session. However, we cannot guarantee that everyone will keep the discussions private.

**Storing study information for future use**

We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file and may be stored indefinitely.

We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

**What are the alternatives to participation?**

Interviews can be conducted over video conferences as an alternative to face-to-face, if requested. However, the only true alternative is not to participate.

**Are there any costs to participation?**

Participation will not cost you anything.

**Will I be paid for participation?**

You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

**Study contact information**

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Tamela Brown, at tbrown124@emich.edu or by phone at 616-204-8011. You can also contact Dissertation Chair/Adviser Dr. Rema Reynolds, at rreynol5@emich.edu or by phone at 734.487.2713.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.
What types of data will be collected?
We will collect data about instructional strategies, educational practices and classroom/schoolwide processes used with students; as well as your thoughts or interpretations of student engagement and response to the educational process. In addition to answering the focus group questions, each participant will be provided a background form and asked to identify the years of experience, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and gender in order to determine impact of these characteristics on the phenomenon.

What are the expected risks for participation?
The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. But we will take steps to reduce this risk. Some of the interview questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. If you are upset, please inform the investigator immediately. There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation.

Some of the focus group questions ask about your personal thoughts and beliefs about education and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. If you are upset, please inform the investigator immediately.

Are there any benefits to participating?
You will not directly benefit from participating in this research, but teachers and staff members may be led to self-reflection and organizational reflection after reading their transcripts after the study. This research can be used to inform school leaders, teacher preparation programs and various stakeholders in education.

How will my information be kept confidential?
We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify you.

We will keep your information confidential by not disclosing of any identifiable information in the focus groups questions and only using first names during the focus group. The video recordings will be transcribed within 2 weeks of the focus group and then immediately destroyed. Your name will be changed in transcribing the video recordings, at which point we will not have any information that identifies you. The data will be stored in password-protected computer files, and video recordings will be stored in a secure drive provided by EMU until they are deleted. We may store your information for at least five years after this project ends, or may store your information indefinitely.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The principal investigator and the research team will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration.
Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent & Signatures

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

_________________________________________________________
Name of Subject

_________________________________________________________   _______________________
Signature of Subject                                      Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

_________________________________________________________
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_________________________________________________________   _______________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent                      Date
Appendix E: Interview Protocols

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Teachers

Introduction Script: I’d like to thank you for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, my study seeks to understand how educational institutions are successfully educating low income, African American students. The study also seeks to understand how learning sociological concepts shapes the way students think about themselves, their community, and society. The aim of this research is to document the possible process of learning sociological concepts and applying them to one’s life. Our interview today will last approximately 30-40 minutes during which I will be asking you about this school as it relates to student success.

Research Question:
In educational spaces that educate marginalized, low-socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?

Interview Questions

1. What motivated/persuaded you to pursue a career in education?
2. In general, how would you describe your students (i.e. skills set, prior knowledge, general characteristics, parental involvement, support structure, academic performance)? Follow-up: How do you learn about your students and their backgrounds?
3. Describe the learning styles of your students. Follow-up: What strategies do you use to accommodate the diverse learning styles of your students?
4. What do you see as the greatest barrier to your students’ learning? Follow-up: What do you do to off-set or address these barriers in your classroom?
5. How do you communicate high expectations for all your students?
6. How do you use culture to help students learn?
7. How do you challenge students to critique social norms (i.e.: racism/prejudice, low achievement among students of color, assumptions about low-income people, etc.)?
8. Describe the role of education and particularly the role of teachers in the social make-up of our country.
9. How would you define culture? Follow-up: a. Describe the links, if any, between culture and learning. b. What do you do to draw upon these connections? How is culture/diversity reflected in your classroom, i.e. curriculum, instruction, or activities?
10. Describe the cultures of your students. Follow-up: a. How do you use your knowledge of your students’ cultural backgrounds during instruction and/or interactions with them? b. Do you think it is necessary? Why or why not?
11. How would you describe your level of communication and interaction with parents?
   Follow-up: a. What are your strengths? b. How could you improve upon parental engagement to support student learning?
12. How do students negotiate academic achievement alongside peer acceptance?
13. How would you describe your students’ level of ownership of the content?
14. How would you rate yourself in the following areas on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the greatest?
   a.) Having intimate knowledge of students
   b.) Having a positive perspective on parents and families
   c.) Maintaining high expectations
   d.) Understanding student perception
   e.) Using cultural & cultural difference as a catalyst for learning.
Follow-up: What were your thoughts when you assigned yourself this rating? Tell me about some of the challenges you’ve encountered while implementing CRP?
15. Is there any other information that you would like to add, or you would like for me to know that I did not ask?

Format for Informal Interviews

In addition to the interview questions above, semi-structured informal questions might include questions related to the classroom observations. These questions will be derived from the researcher’s classroom observations. Below is an example of the type of questions that will be asked: Today I observed ______________________, can you tell me a little more about ______________________.
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Administrators

Introduction Script: I’d like to thank you for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, my study seeks to understand how educational institutions are successfully educating low income, African American students. The study also seeks to understand how learning sociological concepts shapes the way students think about themselves, their community, and society. The aim of this research is to document the possible process of learning sociological concepts and applying them to one’s life. Our interview today will last approximately 30-40 minutes during which I will be asking you about this school as it relates to student success.

Research Question:
In educational spaces that educate marginalized, low-socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influence student success?

Interview Questions
1. What would you say are the common beliefs held by staff about the students at this school?
2. What actions or attributes of the school leader, contributes most to the schools’ success (based on thriving quotient)?
3. What programs help you and your students acquire knowledge about their future?
4. How do parents engage in the learning process for students?
5. In what ways does the school do to engage families?
6. How do the relationships among school leaders and stakeholders (students, teachers and community) influence school culture and student achievement?
7. If I define success as: 1) making personal connections to your learning; 2) investing a lot of effort; 3) having a confident hope in the future; 4) relating to others with different backgrounds; 5) feeling a sense of ownership & belonging for one’s community, how would you rate your students (or typical student) as being successful on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the greatest?
8. What school-wide practices are used to create a sense of belonging for students?
9. What ways do students get connected within the school community?
10. What activities informed your teaching staff’s understanding of culturally relevance in the classroom?
11. If I define cultural competence as: 1) having intimate knowledge of students; 2) positive perspective on parents and families; 3) maintaining high expectations; 4) understanding student perception; and 5) using cultural differences as a catalyst for learning, how would you rate yourself and your staff overall as being culturally competent on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the greatest? Follow-up: What were your thoughts when you assigned your staff this rating? Tell me about some of the challenges you’ve encountered while implementing CRP?
12. Before we conclude this interview, is there something else about your experience in this school that you think influences the success of your student population that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

**Format for Informal Interviews**

In addition to the interview questions above, semi-structured informal questions might include questions related to the classroom observations. These questions will be derived from the researcher’s classroom observations. Below is an example of the type of questions that will be asked: Today I observed __________________, can you tell me a little more about __________________.
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Focus Group

(parents, community partners, other stakeholders)

1. What are the goals you have for your child? OR the children at this school (if a non-parent participant)?

2. What goals and aspirations does your child have for themselves?

3. What do you think are the strengths of the school?

4. What do you think are the challenges facing the school?

5. How would you describe the relationship you have with the school?

6. How does the school keep you informed about programs, activities, and the progress of your child?

7. How would you describe the relationship between teachers and students?

8. How well do your child’s teachers know or connect to your child? How do you know?

9. In what ways is your child connected in his or her classes?

10. In what other ways might teachers connect the classroom to your child and their culture?

11. Please describe how this school helps students learn.

12. How often does your child “bring home” the language of the classroom in the form of new vocabulary, concepts, or questions?

13. How well does your child speak about what they learn at school or answer your questions about what happens at school?

14. How safe is the school campus? What concerns do you have about safety?

15. Describe what you see or hear when you enter campus, in terms of campus environment.

16. How does the school address the socioeconomic needs of your child, for example health care, free/reduced lunch, connections to community resources?

17. What programs or activities is your child involved in at school?

18. How is the community involved in the school?

19. When does the school contact you? For what reasons?
Reimagining Schools: A Descriptive Analysis of effective practices for educating marginalized students.

Focus Group Protocol

Date/Time: December 12, 2019

Moderator: Tamela Brown

Introduction: Thank you for coming today. My name is Tamela Brown and I’m going to be the moderator for this focus group this morning. My goal today is to better understand the parent and/or community perspective as it relates to the work that the school does towards student success. I’d like to go over a few important things, before we start.

Informed Consent: Before we begin, I need to ask you to sign the informed consent document you have in front of you. Would anyone like me to read it out loud? Do you have any questions about it? This session will be video recorded as indicated in the consent form. We will use the recording only for making the transcripts of the information shared. These transcripts will not contain your last names. After that, the recording will be destroyed. Does anyone have any questions or objections? Additionally, there is a half sheet of paper that I’d like you to fill out. This paper provides me with more specific information about your role and demographic background, that we won’t have time to discuss during our time together.

Ground Rules for Group: Let me give you a few quick ground rules for the group. First, everyone’s opinion is valued and it’s OK to disagree with each other or with me. We are very interested in hearing about all points of view. It’s OK to talk to each other and not just to me. It’s OK to get up for more refreshments or to go to the restroom. Please silence your cell phone, and do not use them during the session. If you need to use your phone, I ask that you step out into the hallway to do so. Since our time is limited, I may need to ask you to stop and change topics from time to time. I’ll give you the “Time out” sign if we need to do that. During our time together, we will refer to each other using first names only.

Introduction of Participants: Now I’d like to go around the circle/table so each person can give me their first name only and your role at or connection to the school. Again, no last names or other information that would identify you and keep it short, please.

Introduction of Subject of Group: The primary reason we are here today is to talk about the work that the school does to foster student success, specifically with marginalized, low-income students. I am interested in how the school connects with students, parents and the community; specifically, practices used to support students, and foster parent and community involvement. The research question I am trying to answer is “In educational spaces that educate marginalized, low-socioeconomic students, what practices are enacted by school staff and leadership that significantly influences student success?”

General Discussion: In addition to video recording, you may see me writing or jotting down my own thoughts. Are there any questions before we began? We have approximately 90 minutes for the entire process and will end promptly at 11:45am. Let’s begin.
Interviewee Personal Background Survey

Thank you for agreeing to allow me to interview you for my research purposes. I want to honor the time you are giving me for this information, so I am requesting that you complete the 3-5 minute background form. I’d like to get to know a little more about your role and experience in education.

Research ID#: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

1. What is your Gender (circle one)? Male Female Not listed Prefer not to answer
2. What is your position at this school and how long have you worked at this institution/school?
3. How long have you worked in education?
4. How would you describe your ethnicity or race?
5. What is the highest level of education completed? If currently in school, what degree are you seeking?

Initial this section indicating that the researcher has permission to record the interview for research purposes, data collection, and accuracy. ____________
Interviewee Personal Background Survey (Focus Group)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group for my research purposes. I want to honor the time you are giving me for this information, so I am requesting that you complete the 3-5 minute background form. I’d like to get to know a little more about your role and experience with this school.

Research ID#: __________________ Date: __________________

1. What is your Gender (circle one)? Male Female Not listed prefer not to answer

2. What is your role (parent, community member, community partner, provider, etc.)?

3. How long have you been affiliated with this institution/school?

4. How would you describe your ethnicity or race?

5. If you represent an organization that partners with the school, please list the organization.

Initial this section indicating that the researcher has permission to record the interview for research purposes, data collection, and accuracy. __________

Interviewee Personal Background Survey (Focus Group)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group for my research purposes. I want to honor the time you are giving me for this information, so I am requesting that you complete the 3-5 minute background form. I’d like to get to know a little more about your role and experience with this school.

Research ID#: __________________ Date: __________________

1. What is your Gender (circle one)? Male Female Not listed prefer not to answer

2. What is your role (parent, community member, community partner, provider, etc.)?

3. How long have you been affiliated with this institution/school?

4. How would you describe your ethnicity or race?

5. If you represent an organization that partners with the school, please list the organization.

Initial this section indicating that the researcher has permission to record the interview for research purposes, data collection, and accuracy. __________
Pre-Screen Questionnaire to Determine School Success

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey related to student success. This survey will take about 5 minutes or less to complete. By submitting the completed survey, you are granting me permission to use your results to determine if your educational site qualifies as a viable data collection site for our research purposes. No individual information will ever be reported or released from this survey; only the researchers will see this data and use it to verify that your school site meets the criteria outlined to conduct research. Please rate your agreement with each of the following statement by using a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 -Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 - Disagree</th>
<th>3 - Neutral</th>
<th>4 - Agree</th>
<th>5 -Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers are intentional to connect students' culture and background to the learning in the classroom. (EL)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers are committed to helping students access prior knowledge at the start of a new learning/lesson. (EL)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There is a set of common strategies used to engage students in learning. (EL)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students take pride in their work and work really hard to do well. (AD)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time is provided for and students are taught to set goals and reflect on their accomplishments. (AD)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The school offers programs that help students acquire knowledge about college and/or careers. (AD)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The majority of students express a desire to attend college (or is career focused). (PP)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students interact with peers and teachers in a positive way. (PP)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Students take responsibility for their future by partnering in their learning and achievement. (PP)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Students express their desire to make a difference in their community (or the world). (DC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. There is cultural representation that reflects the students' culture within the school culture (building, instruction, staffing). (DC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Student-student interactions among different cultural backgrounds is positive and is a normal occurrence here. (DC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) is strong and active in our school. (SC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. There is a strong sense of community/family among staff and students. (SC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. We offer a variety of programs to help students feel like they belong (advisory, clubs, mentorship, orientation, academic teams, etc.). (SC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Most of our students participate and engage in programs, clubs, sports, leadership, etc. both in and outside of school. (SC)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This survey design is based on THE THRIVING QUOTIENT™ designed by Laurie Schreiner.*