

THE SOURCE AND IMPACT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN AN  
URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The achievement of Black students has repeatedly met only the lowest standards of performance on standardized assessments, which begs the question; do American schools have the capacity to educate Black children?

The purpose of this action research manuscript dissertation was to explore the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that developed a culture of high achievement among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse, immediately before and after desegregation, and in classrooms today. The examination of popular theories concerning the education of Black people in the early 1900's and narratives of individuals who attended segregated schools, provided a historical description of the state of Black education. In addition, the connection between student engagement and teacher dispositions was recognized. A review of relevant literature informed this study by providing a conceptual understanding and operational definition of student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse. Last, a case study was conducted to bring a local, practical focus to the research. The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of student engagement on student learning in an urban school with a majority Black student population, as evidenced by student actions and discourse. Data were collected through meetings and classroom observations using the Student Action Coding Sheet.

This research found student engagement to be highest in classrooms that balanced certain teacher dispositions and discourse.

This dissertation is dedicated to my champions. To my parents, thank you for cultivating my mind and heart, and nurturing my voice. To my sisters, thank you for your encouragement through this process, and for being examples of a standard of excellence that I strive to meet. To my beau, thank you for your unwavering support that picked me up again, and again. It means more than I can express with words. To my mentor and dissertation chair, thank you for recognizing and encouraging my voice before I knew of its importance.

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## CHAPTER 1

“The demographics are changing” was a phrase frequently exchanged between teachers and school personnel at Suburban Middle School in Central Florida (McIntosh, personal communication, 2008). As evidence, Figure 1 shows that within twelve school terms the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch grew by thirty-four percent. In addition, the number of minority, Black and Hispanic, students attending Suburban Middle School increased by thirteen percent (Florida Department of Education, 2014). For the collection and reporting of data, the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) uses *Black* and *African American* interchangeably to represent persons having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* describe people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

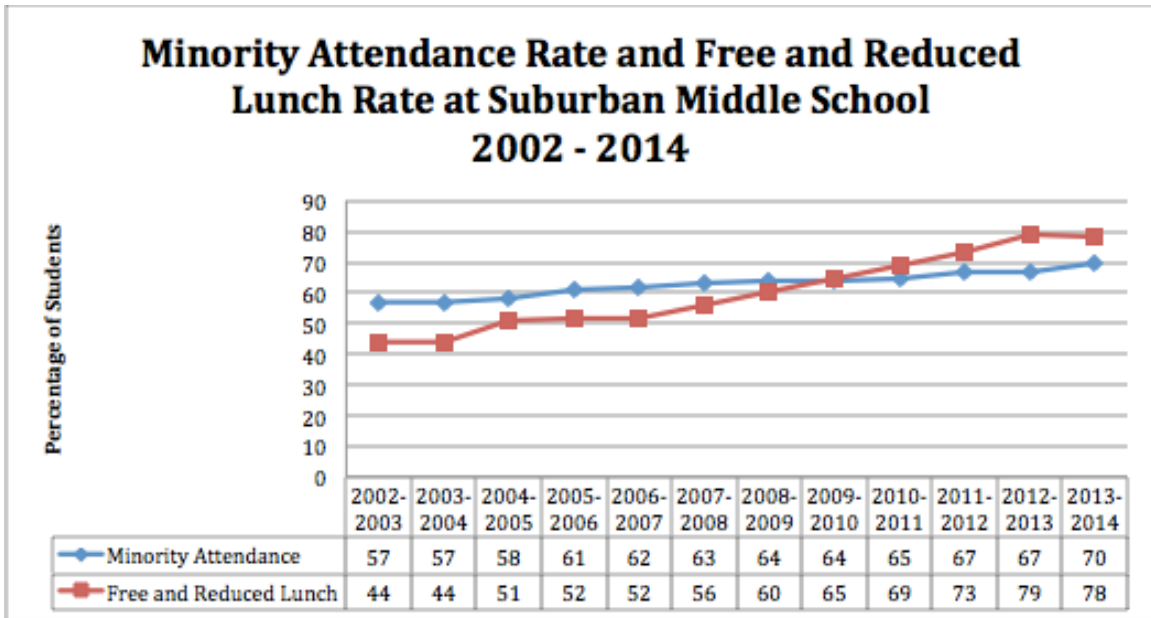


Figure 1: Minority Attendance Rate and Free and Reduced Lunch Rate at Suburban Middle School 2002-2014

Florida Department of Education. (2014). *School accountability report*. Retrieved from <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/default.asp>

In personal conversations and in school-wide meetings, “the demographics are changing” was used to explain student behavior problems and plummeting achievement scores (McIntosh, personal communication, 2008). Remarks such as, “these kids can’t,” “those kids won’t,” “they don’t care,” and “if only the parents,” dominated conversations between teachers. As a researcher and practitioner, I observed the strained discourse between teachers and students to be evidence of a growing schism between the school and its community.

As a teacher at Suburban Middle School, I developed Project Phoenix in the fall of 2010. It was a fifteen week mentoring and reading enrichment program, in response to low achievement scores among the school’s Black population. Project Phoenix participants

were Black students who scored at level 1 or 2 on the previous year's reading section of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Beginning in 1998, the FCAT was a criterion-based assessment administered to students in grades three through eleven to measure student progress toward meeting the Sunshine State Standards knowledge and skills benchmarks in reading, mathematics, science, and writing (Florida Department of Education, 2015.)

Project Phoenix engaged students in Reader's Theatre, book clubs, and various types of motivational and academic development workshops. The high level of student attentiveness astonished the principal and other teacher observers, including me. Out of five racial and ethnic subgroups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian), only the Black subgroup made learning gains that year. Through talking with students and observing their behavior, a stark contrast became apparent between the teachers' and students' perceptions and realities surrounding conduct, achievement, and expectations. I began to wonder why students chose to actively engage in Project Phoenix but shut down in their classrooms, or decided to engage in their classrooms as a result of their participation in Project Phoenix. Ultimately, I questioned how one teacher's performance could cultivate achievement while another's resulted in failure for the same students?

### **The Problem**

The NAEP is the largest nationally representative assessment that measures elementary and secondary students' skills and knowledge in mathematics, reading, science,



writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, foreign language, U.S. history, world history, and technology and engineering literacy at grades 4, 8, and 12. By using the same test across the nation, and remaining virtually the same year after year, the NAEP is able to show student academic progress over time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

An average scale score indicates student performance on the NAEP. Average scale scores are classified within one of three levels that represent student achievement expectations - *Basic, Proficient, or Advanced*. Therefore, the average scale score represents what students know and can do, and the achievement level represents the degree to which student performance meets the expectation of what they should know and be able to do (NCES, 2015). NAEP achievement levels are cumulative; thus, performance at each level indicates proficiency in the skills and knowledge of the previous level.

Average scale scores are based on a specific scale for each content area. Although the NAEP tests students in multiple content areas, only the reading and mathematics scores are discussed here because in practice, all decisions about students are made based on reading and math scores. The NAEP reading scale ranges from 0 to 500 for grades 4, 8, and 12. The NAEP mathematics scale ranges from 0 to 500 for grades 4 and 8, and 0 to 300 for grade 12. The NAEP is administered to grades 4 and 8 biannually, however, in grade 12 both tests are given every four years. Table 1 shows NAEP's achievement levels by grade for reading and mathematics. The numerical value represents the lower end of each level.

Table 1: The NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade

<b>NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade</b>			
	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
<b>4<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	208	238	268
<b>8<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	243	281	323
<b>12<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	265	302	346
<b>NAEP Mathematics Achievement Levels by Grade</b>			
	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
<b>4<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	214	249	282
<b>8<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	262	299	333
<b>12<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	141	176	216

National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). The NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/achieve.aspx#2009ald>

Figures 2 and 3 detail the reading and mathematics performance of Black students on the NAEP from 2005 to 2015. Student performance in reading and mathematics is represented by an average scale score and is disaggregated by test year and grade. When compared to the NAEP achievement levels shown in Table 1, average scale score data show that since 2005 Black students have performed slightly below or above the Basic achievement level in reading and mathematics. On the 2015 administration of the NAEP reading assessment, the following gaps developed between actual student performance at the Basic level and desired performance at the Proficient level: 32 points in grade 4, 33 points in grade 8, and 34 points in grade 12. The results from the mathematics assessment showed a similar performance gap of 25 points in grade 4, 39 points in grade 8, and 44 points in grade 12. The achievement of Black students on the NAEP reading and mathematics tests revealed significant gaps between actual performance at the Basic level and desired performance at the Proficient or Advanced level.

The data in Figures 2 and 3 beg the question; do schools and teachers have the capacity to educate Black students so that their overall achievement levels demonstrate proficient and/or advanced performance?

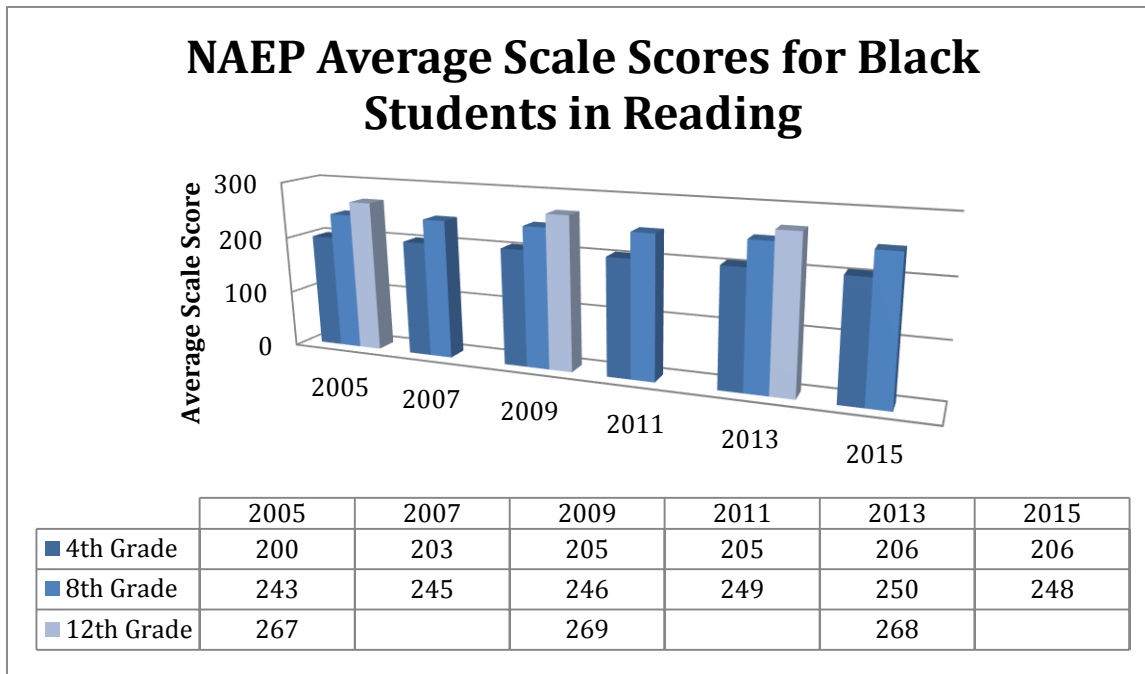
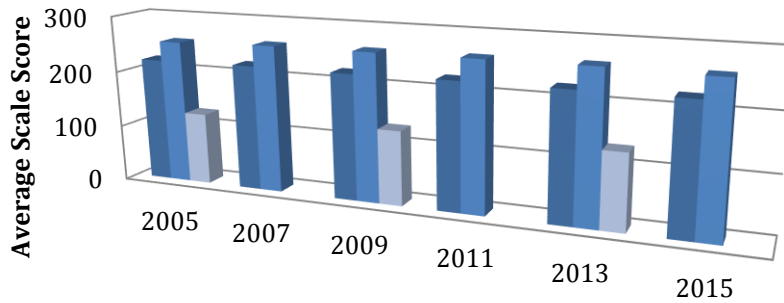


Figure 2: NAEP Average Scale Score for Black Students in Reading, Grades 4, 8, and 12

National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). The Nation's Report Card. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx>

## NAEP Average Scale Score for Black Students in Mathematics



	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
■ 4th Grade	220	222	222	224	224	224
■ 8th Grade	255	260	261	262	263	260
■ 12th Grade	127		131		132	

Figure 3: NAEP Average Scale Score for Black Students in Mathematics, Grades 4, 8, and 12 National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). The Nation's Report Card. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx>

Black is defined as persons having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The term African American is used to describe Black people who are natives to mainland North America, but who trace their heritage to Africa as a result of a history of enslavement. Prior to changing immigration laws in 1965, most Black people in the United States were African American. However, during the 1990's, 900,000 Black immigrants came from the Caribbean and 400,000 came from Africa (Berlin, 2010). While these groups of Black people do not share a common history, as Black individuals who live in the United States, they are all subject to the same racial inequities (Berlin).

Within the United States, Black students primarily represent African Americans and individuals from Africa, or the Caribbean. For the purpose of this dissertation, Black and African American are used interchangeably to describe Black people, primarily students, who reside and attend schools in the United States.

### **Problem Statement**

Due to the longstanding low performance of Black students on the NAEP, the problem of practice that this Dissertation in Practice addressed was the inequitable education that has fostered low achievement among Black students. Noguera (2007) defined equity as—the quality of an education that results in equal educational outcomes and long-term results for all students. Banks and Banks (1995) advocate for an equity pedagogy in which, “teaching strategies and classroom environments help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society (p. 152).

This dissertation in practice examined elements of practice, pedagogy, and teacher behaviors that have engaged Black students. The following exploratory question informed this dissertation:

What are the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that develop a culture of high achievement among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse?

## **Factors that Impact the Problem**

This section examines the factors that contribute to inequitable educational experiences for students of color. According to Banks and Banks (1995) the existing educational system fosters inequity. However, some attempts to explain low performance scores of Black students identify student culture and genetics as the problem. Conveniently, this rhetoric alleviates educational institutions of the responsibility for finding, or being, the solution (Noguera, 2001). The manner in which schools organize educational opportunities creates and sustains racial inequity that is evident in access to rigorous coursework and disciplinary practices (Noguera, 2001). Inequity is the core of a cycle that perpetuates low achievement caused by the omission of an African American agenda in teacher preparation programs, the prevalence of the deficit theory, limited access to effective teachers, and limited rigorous educational experiences (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

### **Omission from Teacher Preparation Programs**

Historically, the education of Black youth has not been a national priority, thereby, placing them in the zone of indifference – an area only a few people care about, rendering Black youth and their teachers politically powerless (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Early literature describes minority youth from urban communities as deprived and disadvantaged (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The initial mainstream invalidation of minority cultures caused the omission of a Black agenda in teacher preparation programs (Delpit, 2012). As a result of organizational

learning – evolving goals of the organization - social justice and diversity elements have been added to teacher preparation program standards (Chapman 2011). However, because of a limited time frame to include course work, internships, and licensure requirements, a large number of teacher preparation programs limit a multitude of diversity topics to a single course (Chapman, 2011). Thereby, teacher preparation programs superficially address issues of race (Ladson-Billings, 2001), leaving teachers feeling unprepared to teach students from cultures different from their own.

The limited inclusion of diverse issues in teacher education programs also has symbolic implications. Despite inclusion in program objectives, social justice and diversity education is actually a small portion of an overall program because it is limited to a single course instead of permeating through an entire program (Chapman, 2011). In essence, the program vision is different from the enacted values and pre-service teachers do not internalize the importance of multicultural education instruction. Multicultural education and urban education become compartmentalized to specific schools, communities, and people that can be avoided by choosing to work in a “less needy school.” Teacher education programs must be changed to symbolize inclusion and be reflective of K-12 students’ racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. Limited education on multicultural issues has created teachers who are not prepared to work in racially diverse and economically depressed communities (Chapman, 2011).

## **Deficit Thinking**

Teachers whose culture is different from their students may not have examined their personal beliefs about race and culture, which can inhibit them from being effective teachers to students of color. This can cause teachers to perpetuate the *deficit theory*, which focuses on what students lack and blames underperformance on genes, culture, and parents (Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Low student achievement is often blamed on genetics, motivation, talent and preferences without considering how teacher words, attitudes, or the environment may be perpetuating commonly held cultural stereotypes. The belief in a stereotype may impact all aspects of a person's life and can either hinder or bolster performance; Steele calls this *stereotype threat* (Steele, 2010). Teacher education programs have the platform to help teachers shift how they perceive themselves and others, and develop knowledge of the community.

## **Access to Effective Teachers**

The U.S Department of Education's Institute of Education and Sciences produced a report entitled *Access to Effective Teaching for Disadvantaged Students* that measured student disadvantage using students' free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) status. Students receiving FRL are defined as disadvantaged and students who do not receive FRL are defined as non-disadvantaged (Isenberg, 2013, p. 14). Access to effective teaching was also measured by race and ethnicity. The report findings indicate that disadvantaged students have less exposure to effective instruction than non-disadvantaged students, and Black and



Hispanic students have less exposure to effective instruction than White students (Isenberg, 2013).

Based on teacher input (from personal conversations and experience with preservice teachers), teacher preparation programs do not consistently prepare teachers for high-poverty schools, where 76-100 percent of the student population is eligible for FRL (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Teachers and preservice teachers also discussed feelings of unpreparedness in teaching students who are from races and ethnicities that are different than their own. In the state where the research for this dissertation will be conducted, which is in the southern region of the United States, the majority of teachers, 71.41%, are White and only 13.16% are Black, while 58.36% of the students are Black (Florida Department of Education, 2013). White, middle class, women represent the majority of the teaching force (Watson et al., 2006). These teachers may lack sufficient cultural awareness and life experiences that compel them to analyze their worldviews and assumptions about race.

According to Ladson-Billings (2001), interspersing multicultural curricula through a teacher preparation program does not provide students with the opportunity to examine their perceptions of race and class. Consequently, once working as a teacher in an urban school, they perceive the majority of students in their class as “abnormal.” Low student achievement and varying levels of student readiness heavily influence teachers’ perceptions of students, and are contributing factors to the teacher shortage within urban schools (Masci & Stotko, 2006). Schools that serve low-income and minority students often experience high teacher attrition, caused by disproportionately staffing the schools with

inexperienced, untrained teachers who are underprepared to teach urban students (Neumann, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

### **Limited Rigorous Educational Experiences**

Educators' unaddressed biases and negative perceptions of students are a breeding ground for the development of deficit thinking – a belief that attributes low performance to students, families, and communities (Delpit, 2012). Deficit thinking is accompanied by low expectations that guide policy and practice. As a result, structural inequalities develop within schools that limit student access to the rigorous educational experiences needed to succeed in college and their future careers (Cowan-Pitre, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

For example, in some schools with diverse racial and ethnic populations, a significant number of Black students are assigned to lower level courses that are less rigorous in a system where teacher-student discourse is mainly focused on classroom management rather than academic success (Cowan-Pitre, 2014; Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Low expectations are evidenced through the voices of the students who say, “this is [an urban high school], they don’t expect me to do well (Student, personal communication, 2015).”

Within the urban school district that is the context of this study, inequity becomes manifest in student assignments to College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The district describes enrollment in the Advance Placement Program as an opportunity for

qualified students to take entry-level college courses (Orange County Public Schools, 2011). A passing grade in the course will be accepted for high school credit, and a minimum score of three, on a five point scale, may earn the student college credit at a postsecondary institution (Orange County Public Schools, 2007).

The reality of practice is that schools in urban communities with a large number of minority students offer less Advanced Placement courses than suburban schools (Orange County Public Schools, 2014). In addition, students are involuntarily placed in AP classes when they earn a passing grade of C or higher in a prerequisite course (Love, personal communication, October 2014). As a result, low achieving students who score at level two on the state's standardized exam are placed in AP courses, by way of modifications, accommodations, or exemplary teaching. When students fail these high level courses, for which they are not prepared, their GPA suffers, along with their academic self-efficacy, or their belief that they can be academically successful.

Instead of academic excellence, students of color maintain increased suspension and expulsion rates (Houchins & Shippen, 2012), are over represented in special education and remedial classes, and are under represented in gifted programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Teachers and principals are primary determinants of students' school experiences and how much they learn (Corbet & Wilson, 2002). Consistent quality instruction has the ability offset the difficulties that arise as a result of social and economic disadvantages (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Brown University, 2014). Schools with high poverty and high minority populations have less resources, less effective teachers, and less rigorous coursework, resulting in lower achievement. Students living in poverty

achieve at levels that parallel students living in developing nations (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Figure 4 provides a visual of the ideas discussed. It shows the ongoing relationship between the factors that foster an inequitable education for African American students. Each factor is independently significant and constantly interacting with the other factors.

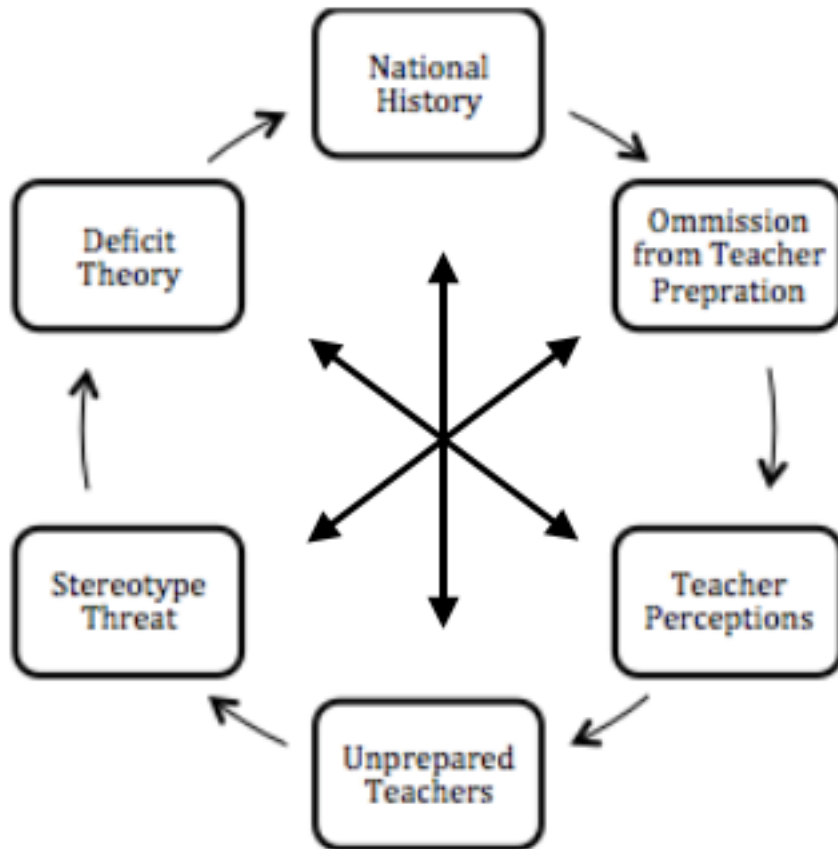


Figure 4: Factors That Impact the Problem of Practice

## Significance of the Problem

The Equity and Excellence Commission's report, *For Each and Every Child - A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*, describes education as the birthright of all children. Through education, one may transcend the circumstances of birth because it holds the hope of social mobility (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Unfortunately, for many minority and disadvantaged youth an equitable education is a dream deferred. America is in the midst of what Slavin (1997) called a *crisis of equity* - educational institutions are no longer thought of as equalizers, because they amplify economic and ethnic differences just as much as they help to overcome them.

As of 2009, thirty-nine percent of elementary and secondary students in America are either Black or Hispanic. Across the nation, the Southern States and the Border States have the highest concentrations of Black students, with 23.7% and 20.7% respectively (Orfield and Chungmei, n.d). Border States – Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia – are geographically located between the North and South during the Civil War (National Park Service, 2015). Orfield and Chungmei (n.d.) also reported that 34% of students in the West are Latino. With Black and Hispanic youth comprising such a large percentage of the student population, America will be weakened internally, economically, and morally if these students do not receive an equitable education (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

## Pipeline to the Juvenile Justice System

This problem is of national significance because an inequitable education will result in negative life outcomes for students of color. Ramey (2015) conducted a study to investigate the association between student race/ethnicity and the use of *criminalization* or *medicalization* strategies to control student behavior. Table 2 defines each term and describes its application in schools.

Table 2: Definition and comparison of the criminalization and medicalization strategies used to manage student behavior.

Behavior Management Strategy	Definition	Application
Criminalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mirrors the juvenile justice system</li> <li>• Misbehavior is subject to punitive zero-tolerance policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspension</li> <li>• Expulsion</li> <li>• Surveillance</li> <li>• Isolation</li> </ul>
Medicalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mirrors mental health institutions</li> <li>• Misbehavior is defined through medical or psychological terms such as “disorder”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes the use of medicine and therapy</li> <li>• Supervises and controls the movement of students</li> </ul>

Ramey, D.M. (2015). The social structure of criminalized and medicalized school discipline. *Sociology of Education* 88(3), 181-201.

The damaging difference between the two methods of student control is that the medical response provides individualized education plans, modifications to the curriculum, extra school personnel, enhanced learning environments, and additional time to complete assignments, while the criminal response mandates removal from the classroom without

additional academic assistance. Ramey (2015) found that teachers, school officials, and society at large have low expectations for the behavior of Black children. Additionally, in comparison to White and Hispanic children, their conduct is seen as more criminal, unchanging, and the outcome of poor parenting and cultural deficiencies. As a result, adolescents of color are more likely to receive swift and consistent punishment that may be unpredictable and lack fairness. Ramey's study found that schools with higher Black and higher disadvantaged populations used higher rates of criminalized school discipline and lower rates of medicalizations (2015).

Wald and Loosen (2013) argue that by the end of the century there will be more Black males in prison than colleges and universities. The School-to-Prison-Pipeline (STPP) is a punitive pathway that starts with school disciplinary measures, as described by Ramey's (2015) study above, and ends with incarceration. It is comprised of disenfranchised youth, with an overrepresentation of poor minorities (Houchins & Shippin, 2012). A short list of systematic obstacles that fuel the STPP include inadequate resources, retention policies, inappropriate behavior interventions, and the bias of gatekeepers - school and court officials who make critical decisions about youths' futures (Wald & Loosen, 2003).

### **Low Graduation Rates**

Graduation rates are also impacted by the quality of the education students receive. The data displayed in Figure 5, from the National Center for Education Statistics (2015),

show that the overall changes in graduation rates are positive, with the national rate increasing from 79% in 2011 to 81.4% in 2013. Between 2011 and 2013 each racial or ethnic subgroup, White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian/Pacific Islander, also improved its rate of graduation.

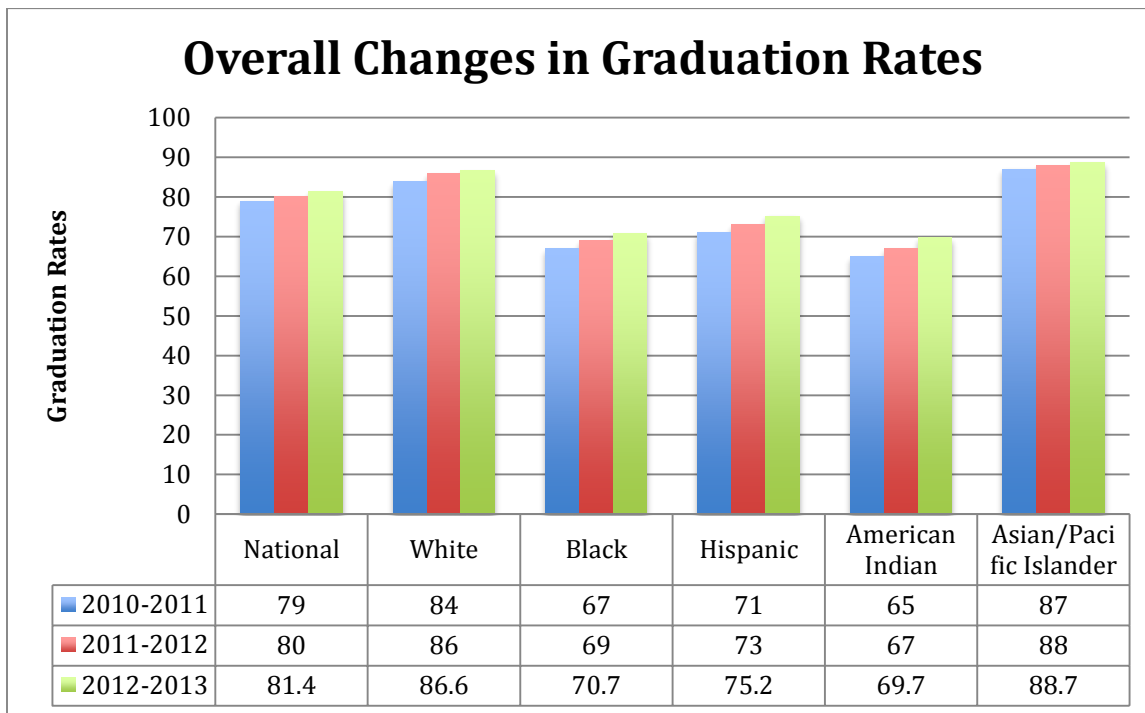


Figure 5: Overall Changes in Graduation Rates

National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). Achievement Gap Narrows as High School Graduation Rates for Minority Students Improve Faster than Rest of Nation. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/achievement-gap-narrows-high->

Despite the overall increase, in 2013 Black students graduated at a rate of 70.7%, which is 10.7% below the national average. This is particularly problematic because to ensure a strong economy, a country's students must graduate ready for college or a career, which is occurring less in the African American community.



## **The Reality**

In the shadows of national reports that show increased graduation rates, is the haunting reality that all students don't graduate in the traditional four-year time frame. When schools are pressured to improve test scores and graduation rates, and are not given adequate resources to do so, low achieving students are excluded.

In a study conducted to examine minority student progress toward graduation in Texas high schools, Heilig (2011) found that the majority of students did not advance to graduation, particularly minority, English Language Learners, and economically disadvantaged students. Heilig (2011) and Tuck (2001) concluded that accountability policies and accompanying high-stakes tests decrease graduation rates while producing school push-out. School push-out is described as the factors that pressure students to leave school, disrupting high school completion. Push-out factors inside the school include disrespectful treatment from teachers and school staff, peer violence, arbitrary school rules, and high stakes testing (Tuck, 2011). A common option for pushed-out students is the General Educational Development (GED) credential, which is equivalent to the high school diploma and maintains the possibility of employment and higher education (Tuck, 2011). Schools benefit from the withdrawal of students who may not graduate. According to Heilig (2011), standardized test performance increased the most in schools that pushed-out students.

## **Decreased Economic Opportunities**

Because students of color, those who are non-White, are relegated to less rigorous instruction, especially in technology (Ladson-Billings, 2001), they are more likely to be underprepared for college and careers in a global community than their White and middle class peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Low graduation rates result in decreased economic opportunities. Among 25-34 year olds, the following unemployment rates existed between 2000-2013: 13.7% with less than high school completion, 10.5% with high school completion, and 3.7% with a bachelor's degree (Kena et.al, 2015). These statistics demonstrate that employment rates are higher for those who do not graduate high school. Without an equitable education, a large percentage of the population (15.7% of students in American schools are Black) will have bleak futures, which will threaten the economic future of the United States. The United States Department of Education (2013) warns that the persistence of an inequitable education can result in an economic impact equivalent to a permanent recession, disparities in economic distribution, and a limited number of postsecondary graduates needed to grow a 21st century economy due to the underdevelopment of human capital.

## **Threats to Domestic Tranquility**

Slavin (1997) posits that the educational equity gap between students from different social classes, races, and ethnicities underlies some of the United States' most polarizing issues. If the income gap, caused by differing levels of education, continues to

increase, society will not be peaceful or just because a large segment will be without hope (1997). Such was the case in the mid-1900's as racial tension grew between White and Black people. Hurston (1943) detailed a segment of a meeting among leading African American businessmen in Florida who commit to collaborate with respected leaders of the Black community. One spokesman said, "we must confer with these people, and cooperate with them to prevent these awful outbreaks that can do no one any good and everybody some harm" (Hurston, 1943, p.603).

Brewing racial tensions reached a boiling point during the years of 1963 – 1967 as 164 serious to minor civil disorders, also referred to as riots, erupted in 128 cities across the nation (U.S. Department of Justice, 1967). At the request of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the U.S. Department of Justice commissioned a task force to investigate what happened, why it happened, and what could be done to keep it from happening again; essentially the cause, course, and solutions to the civil disturbances, also referred to as riots.

### **The cause of civil disturbances.**

The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders resolved that the root of the issue was a history of racial injustices, segregation, and poverty against "Negroes" that was created, maintained, and condoned by White Americans. This perception of society was well known by Black people and virtually unknown by Whites (U.S. Department of Justice, 1967). Compared to White Americans, people of color

experienced less education, low and under employment, poverty, poor living conditions, and inflated housing costs. Interviews revealed that rioters sought fuller participation in society, along with the benefits enjoyed by the majority of American citizens (Maryland Crime Investigation Commission, 1968; U.S. Department of Justice, 1967).

### **The course of civil disturbances.**

The riots occurred following a series of tension-tightening social incidents that Black people perceived as injustices. The pinnacle event most often involved a police officer whose actions were perceived by the Black community as harmful and unjust. Police met gunshots, firework explosions, rock throwing, looting, and firebombs from rioters; and responded with tear gas, water hoses, additional gunshots, physical beatings, and arrests (U.S. Department of Justice, 1967). Except in the case of Baltimore, where the rioters were 30+-year-old underemployed males, the rioters were teenagers and young adults who were largely undereducated (Maryland Crime Investigation Commission, 1968; U.S. Department of Justice, 1967).

### **The consequences and planned solutions of civil disturbances.**

To squelch the riots police presence was increased. In severe situations the National Guard was summoned to the city in which the riot took place and a curfew was imposed. In the aftermath of the civil disturbances, solutions were developed to prevent future occurrences; the following are local and national examples of such:

- Local (Maryland Crime and Investigation Commission, 1968)
  - o Assemble task force to dispel rumors that may cause civil disorder
  - o Increase police presence in the ghettos to dispel Negro belief of a dual standard of law enforcement
  - o Improve programs to insure community support for law enforcement
  - o Recruit more Negroes into the police force and review promotion policies
- National (U.S. Department of Justice, 1967)
  - o Create social programs to increase economic opportunities for African Americans
  - o Aim the programs to be immediately impactful to close the gap between promise and reality
  - o Start new initiatives to change the system that causes the failure and frustration that permeates African American communities and weakens society

The riots caused fear within White America that was evidenced by an increase in the number of firearm applications, and the prevalence of *White flight* – White Americans relocating from the city to suburban communities. In *A Report of the Baltimore Civil Disturbance of April, 1968* White Baltimoreans felt that the riots, “harmed the Negro cause, made them seem irrational and explosive,” as well as, “decreased their personal competence and responsible group strength” (Maryland Crime Investigation Commission, 1967, p.19-20). They believed that the Black people should have worked to achieve goals that the White race considered valuable instead of using their strength for destruction, at

least in that way they would not have mobilized counter hostility from White people (Maryland Crime Investigation Commission, 1967).

### **Current civil disturbances.**

The causes, courses, solutions, and consequences of the 1960's civil disturbances are eerily similar to the 2014 riot in Ferguson, Missouri after the death of Michael Brown and the 2015 riot in Baltimore, Maryland after the death of Freddy Gray - young African American males who died at the hands of the police. 55 years later the patterns are the same. Frustration grows in the Black community as a result of perceived, and real, social inequalities – multiple Black males killed by White police officers, or civilians, who are not criminally charged with their deaths. Repeated injustices continue to enrage the community until after a single incident, a riot ensues. Public and police responses have also paralleled the 1960's. Minority communities are blamed, vilified, and left to solve the problems on their own.

Friere (1970) says that when oppressed people react to the violence of their oppressors, they are called savages, barbaric, violent, and wicked. Even as young children the behavior of African youth is criminalized due to a history of racial oppression and growing rates of incarceration (Ramey, 2015). Delpit (2012) urges society to understand that negative aspects of the Black culture are not cultural traits; rather they are reactions to oppression. In society today, as in the early 1900's, no political power resulted in crime and

lawlessness among Black people (DuBois, 1903). With this understanding, an equitable education is vital because it will liberate the Black community.

### **History and Conceptualization of the Problem**

This section is a concise outline of federal and state legislation that influenced policy and funding in regards to the education of Black Americans. More specifically, it highlights the impact of legislation on the social infrastructure of America in relation to the schooling and lived experiences of students of color. In addition to the terms Black, minorities, and of color references cited in this section, the term “Negro” is used to refer to people of African origins, who are the descendants of Africans who were brought to America as slaves. In modern language, Negro is an offensive description of a Black person, however, it was commonly used to describe the Black race until the mid-1900s.

### **Slavery**

Described by Lane (1932) as The Great American Error, slavery in the British colonies began in the early 1600’s. Over the course of 200 years, millions of Africans were forcibly migrated to the Americas and enslaved into a system of forced domestic and agricultural labor. Laws that governed the movement, gathering, relations, and education of slaves were called slave codes. Slave codes provide insight into the severe lengths state governments took to maintain order and control (Rugemer, 2013).

South Carolina serves as an example of the nation's view towards the education of slaves. Due to growing concern about the balance of power as South Carolina's slave population grew to outnumber the White population, South Carolina adopted Jamaica's Slave Act of 1684. The state legislature drafted a total of fifty slave codes. Code forty-five specifically addresses the education of slaves:

"Whereas, the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it therefore enacted by the authority aforesaid, That all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereinafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person and persons, shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money" (1740 South Carolina Slave Code, No. 45)

Similar codes adopted by other states set the legal precedent for the education of Negro people until the end of slavery in the mid 1860's.

## **Emancipation**

The status of millions of Negroes was changed from "slave" to "free" on January 1, 1863 when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. Ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865 made slavery illegal, and the adoption of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1868 secured citizenship for every person born in the United States. Negroes were free – free of



skills, tools, political power, and education (DuBois, 1903). The new American political structure caused a myriad of problems for people of color. According to DuBois (1932) life in the early 1900's was extremely difficult for African Americans because their experiences consisted of grueling work for minimal wages, without voice in their own government or education, all for the profit of White people (DuBois, 1932). A critical question began to arise – what should be done with children of former slaves (DuBois, 1932)?

New England normal schools were established for teaching Negro children during the day and adults, who would one day become teachers, at night. The New England school's mission was to teach civilization, life and culture, so that Negroes would learn the meaning of life; education could make them men (DuBois, 1932). At this time, it was essential for education to relate to the real life of the race and advocate for increased social responsibility within the race. The goal was for African Americans to unite and better themselves so they could be seen as the equal of White people (DuBois, 1903).

The education of former slaves and their children awakened fear and doubt. White society resisted the education of African American people on the premise that it was dangerous, meaning it would lead to revolution, discontent, and dissatisfaction. White politicians questioned the purpose of educating a working class of people (DuBois, 1903; DuBois, 1932). Despite White opposition, the children of former slaves pursued an education. In 1895 less than 1,000 Negroes were in school. By 1932, there were 19,000 in college and 150,000 in high school (DuBois, 1932). In 1939, 3 million of 130 million Negro persons were enrolled in school (Thompson, 1939). In addition, literacy rates among the youth increased 35% in 37 years (DuBois, 1932).

## **Funding Negro Schools**

The *Report of the National Advisory Committee on Education and the Problem of Negro Education* discusses the federal and state policies for funding public schools in relation to Negroes (Lane, 1932). Initially states were given unrestricted funds for education from the federal government. Gradually, the federal government transitioned into granting stipulated funds requiring changes to the curriculum, equipment, teacher training, or any area the funds were used for. The states saw the requirements as an encroachment on their rights. The report recommended that specially designated federal aid not be granted to states specifically for the education of the Negro. Instead, it advised that the Negro would better benefit from state money than from the federal government, which would be under federal supervision (Lane, 1932).

Within the report, a small committee of three Negro scholars of education authored recommendations for the improvement of Negro education. Due to historic, social, and political conditions, Negro children were educated in inadequate facilities and less per capita was spent on their education. The committee argued that moral, historical, and practical obligations required the federal government, not the state, to remedy the disadvantages. They suggested that for a limited number of years, special grants be given to states, in excess of their standard allotment, to help with the development of Negro education (Lane 1932). The additional financial relief was based on the following special circumstances that impact the Negro (Lane, 1932):

- The 17 Southern States and the Border States are home to over three fourths of the Negro population. These are also the poorest states, and least able to support even White education.
- Due to racism and discrimination, the average expenditure was \$14.68 on every Negro student, compared to \$45.45 on White students.
- Evidence of inequitable distribution of funds – 10 southern states spent a total of \$23,631, 910 on education in 1923-1929, but it should have been \$39,688,052.

Across the nation, schooling was separate and unequal. In the north, students attended mixed race schools in theory, but not practice. Inequities that reinforced deficits were present in less rigorous learning activities presented to Negro children (Thompson, 1939). In the south, separate schools facilitated the discrimination of Negroes because their educational opportunities were unequal to White students in the same community. For example, Negro school years were up to two months shorter than White schools in the same southern communities (Thompson, 1939). In addition, the 1935-1936 teacher to student ratio was 1:41 in Negro schools compared to 1:31 in White schools (Thompson, 1939).

### **Benefits of Effective Teaching**

Despite social and political inequities that negatively impacted the education of Negro children, scholars DuBois (1903; 1932) and Thompson (1939) believed that effective teaching would improve the social status of the race. The self-sacrificing work had to be

done by college graduates (DuBois, 1932) like DuBois (1903) who would teach reading, spelling, and writing, in small community schools. As a teacher, DuBois also told stories about life in other places to help students see beyond their current situation (1903).

An effective teacher of this time would have been firmly rooted in the content and his/her understanding of the real world in which students lived. It would have been their job, and their desire to help students transcend the restrictions African Americans faced due to racism. Teachers would have imparted knowledge with the realization that the students' place in the world is important (DuBois, 1932; Thompson, 1939).

In addition, teachers would be conscious of student problems and needs, and help to do something about it. Effective teaching in this context implies that the teacher recognized the need to motivate students, and helped them situate a place in the world (Thompson, 1939).

Unfortunately, there was not consistent effective teaching of African American students. Possible reasons deficits occurred is because teachers lacked knowledge about the Negro's experience and problems in America, or the methods that have been used to make social improvements on behalf of the race (Thompson, 1939). DuBois (1932) attributes inequities in education to the fact that college students are not concerned with solving the problems of the race.

The consequences of social, political, and educational inequities were revealed within the Negro community. Chronic student absences were evidence of the older generation's skepticism of book learning. Students missed school to take care of younger siblings or to work in the fields (DuBois, 1903). A pattern of working class people became evident

amongst the students and their families; a student becomes an unskilled laborer because that is what his father is (Thompson, 1939). Students did not see the significance of an education because the only economic opportunities available to them were domestic or agricultural (DuBois, 1903).

## **Desegregation**

In the 1954 United States Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the court ruled that state laws segregating schools for White and African American students was unconstitutional. Legislatures of southern states formed agencies to circumvent integration (Valien, 1956). Leaders of the resistance groups were political leaders, or heavily influenced the political leaders to thwart integration. This enabled them to have the support of executive, judicial, and legislative branches of state governments (1956). The following declarations were proposed, and some enacted, to prevent the desegregation of public schools:

- Assign each individual pupil to a school
- Make advocating for integration illegal
- Create laws stating that public education is not an individual right or a state obligation
- Censor textbooks that support desegregation or racial equality
- Require teachers to sign a loyalty oath that prevents them from joining the NAACP
- Restrict teacher appointment to year-to-year

- Abolish the state public school system

Numerous cases were presented to the federal court to enforce the integration ruling. A standard pattern in court desegregation cases developed. States were informed that (1) threats of violence did not constitute non-compliance of the federal ruling to desegregate, (2) cases would be judged as class action suits, (3) state segregation laws were declared void by the United States Supreme Court, and (4) a deadline was established for compliance by the school board (Valien, 1956).

The public school desegregation process was arduous and slow. Despite the ruling, *de jure* segregation kept disadvantaged African American students in schools with less funding, and less quality teachers. After *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka*, the education of White and African students fell under a single public school system. From this moment forward federal and state legislation changed the words used to describe the education of African American students. Terms such as “disadvantaged youth,” “low-performing schools,” and “urban education” are politically correct terms used to discuss students of color, primarily African Americans.

### **Federal Education Policy**

The role of the federal government is consistent with the change made in the early 1900's to set requirements on federal dollars given to states in the form of grants. Table 3 details the most significant educational policies from 1965 to 2015.

Table 3: Significant Educational Policies, 1965 – 2015.

Year	Policy	Policy Characteristics
1965	Elementary and Secondary Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve education for disadvantaged youth</li> <li>• School libraries and instructional material</li> <li>• Supplementary educational centers and services</li> <li>• Educational research and training</li> <li>• Strengthen state departments of education</li> </ul>
2001	No Child Left Behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase accountability for states, school districts, and schools</li> <li>• Increase choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools</li> <li>• Increase flexibility for states and local educational agencies spending of Federal education dollars</li> <li>• Increase emphasis on reading</li> </ul>
2009	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$4.35 billion to Race to the Top Fund</li> <li>• Mission: “to encourage and reward states that create conditions for education innovation and reform, achieve improvements in student outcomes, and implement plans in four core education reform areas.</li> <li>• Reform Areas: Standard Assessment, Data Systems to Support Instruction, Great Teachers and Leaders, and Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools.</li> </ul>
2015	ESEA Bill (No Child Left Behind Reauthorization) <i>proposed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College and career ready students (raise standards, better assessment, complete education)</li> <li>• Great teachers and leaders in every school (effective teachers and principals, best teachers and leaders where they are needed most, strengthen teacher and leader preparation and recruitment)</li> <li>• Equity and opportunity for all students (rigorous and fair accountability for all levels, meeting the needs of diverse learners, greater equity)</li> <li>• Raise the bar and reward excellence (Fostering a Race to the Top, Supporting effective public school choice, promoting a culture of college readiness and success)</li> <li>• Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement (fostering innovation and accelerating success; supporting, recognizing, and rewarding local innovations; supporting student success)</li> <li>• ESEA Flexibility - gives states and districts flexibility in how they spend federal dollars in return for improved outcomes</li> </ul>

United States Department of Education. (2015). *Laws & Guidance*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/landing.jhtml?src=image>

As leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers are expected to develop students who can thrive as critical thinkers in a multicultural and democratic society. As a precursor to this existence, both teachers and students must become critically conscious. Freire (1970) defines being critically conscious as having the ability to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions in society, and to take action against elements found to be oppressive. Through dialogue, teachers and students should question structural inequalities, racism, and injustices in society; this practice is especially important for Black students (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings 2009). Critical consciousness is developed through culturally relevant teaching. In a culturally relevant classroom, student experiences are validated because they form the core of the class. It requires teachers to learn who students are, and incorporate their culture into the classroom (Delpit, 2012). Using student experiences allows them to make personal investments in the content as they construct knowledge by building on what they already know. Using the principle of critical consciousness, teachers can create equitable classrooms.

### **Exploratory Question**

The following exploratory question informed this dissertation:

What are the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that cultivate learning among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse?



## Dissertation Plan

As action research, this dissertation will naturally adopt a narrative style, which allows the researcher more reflection on the process and the findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This document is also a manuscript dissertation. The manuscript dissertation allows the student-researcher to cultivate research and writing skills, in preparation for an academic career, under the mentorship of a dissertation committee (Krathwohl, 1994). Table 4 describes the content of each chapter in this action research dissertation.

Table 4: Dissertation Outline by Chapter

<b>Dissertation Outline by Chapter</b>	
<b>Chapter One</b>	Proposal - An introductory chapter to explain the overall research approach
<b>Chapter Two</b>	Manuscript – A Centennial Perspective of the Education of Black Students
<b>Chapter Three</b>	Review of literature that focuses the research
<b>Chapter Four</b>	Case Study – the impact of student engagement on student learning, evidenced by student actions and discourse, in an urban school with a majority Black student population.
<b>Chapter Five</b>	Summary, conclusion, and implications for future research

The introductory chapter of this dissertation centers on the identification of a problem of practice. The significance of the problem and factors that impact the problem were identified, an exploratory question to focus the examination of the question was articulated, and a research approach was outlined. Following the introductory chapter, each of the next three chapters will stand as a separate manuscript ready to be submitted for publication upon completion of the dissertation (Duke & Beck, 1999).

Chapter 2 is a conceptual manuscript entitled “A Centennial Perspective of the Education of Black Students.” Through the writings of African American scholars from the

early 1900's, the voices of adults who attended grade school during the desegregation process, and the contributions of current educational researchers, this manuscript describes the educational journey of Black students. Particular attention is paid to the role of teachers in the academic engagement of Black students, and the impact engagement had on learning.

Chapter 3 is a review of the literature that focused the study, based on the question, "what is the impact of student engagement on student learning." The review of literature also discusses the role of teacher dispositions and discourse in cultivating engagement.

Chapter 4 is the narrative of a case study that was conducted in an urban school in the Southern United States. Through school based meetings and classroom observations, the researcher examined the impact of student engagement on student learning, evidenced by student actions and discourse, in an urban school with a majority Black student population.

Similar to a traditional dissertation, chapter 5 will contain a summary, conclusion, and implications for future research. Appendices will be used for additional information about the data or research design (Krathwohl, 1994).

## **Positionality**

This dissertation is action research, which Herr & Anderson (2015) define as, "inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them" (p.3). In collaboration with others who were invested in the problem, the researcher conducted this study examine the impact of student engagement on learning for

students in a majority Black urban high school, as evidenced by student actions and discourse

Herr and Anderson (2015), describe positionality as the relationship between the researcher and the participants. In determining positionality, the researcher must ask, “who am I in relation to my participants and my setting” (p.37)? This research was conducted through the lens of an African American female, whose role as a teacher resulted in an awareness of the inequalities in the way Black children are educated, and a curiosity to explore the conditions that cultivate academic achievement for Black students. In regards to positionality, one can either be an insider to the organization, an outsider, or in the middle, which represents collaborative research. While the positionality of the researcher changed invariably during the study, the relationship was largely defined as “outsider in collaboration with insiders” (p.49). This type of positionality entails a researcher, who is an outside to an organization, collaborating with participant insiders to conduct research that will contribute to the knowledge base on the topic of study. Both the investigator and participants worked together to determine the priorities of the research, but it was the responsibility of the researcher to guide the study. Overall, positionality is fluid, so the researcher occupied different or multiple positions on the continuum at any given time during the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Perspective on society can also determine positionality. This research was conducted through the lens of an African American female, who is also a teacher employed within, and is indigenous to, the city where the case study in this dissertation takes place. Academic research is often concerned with how scholars who share common identities

with study participants such as occupation, language, race, and culture can remain objective. Aldridge (2003) advances the writings of W.E.B. DuBois and John Hope Franklin who argue that researchers are sometimes members of the communities they investigate, and they do not have to separate themselves to produce quality work. They must, however, use sound research methods.

### **Research Study Design**

The case study reported in Chapter 4 is a significant component of this action research dissertation, therefore the context and research plan are more thoroughly described in this section. The purpose of the case study was to examine the impact of student engagement on student learning, evidenced by student actions and discourse, in an urban school with a majority Black student population.

### **Research Organizational Context**

The case study was conducted a large urban school district in the southern portion of the United States that for the purposes of this dissertation, will be called Chapman School District. The district educates a racially and economically diverse student population. The race/ethnic demographics are listed in Figure 6.

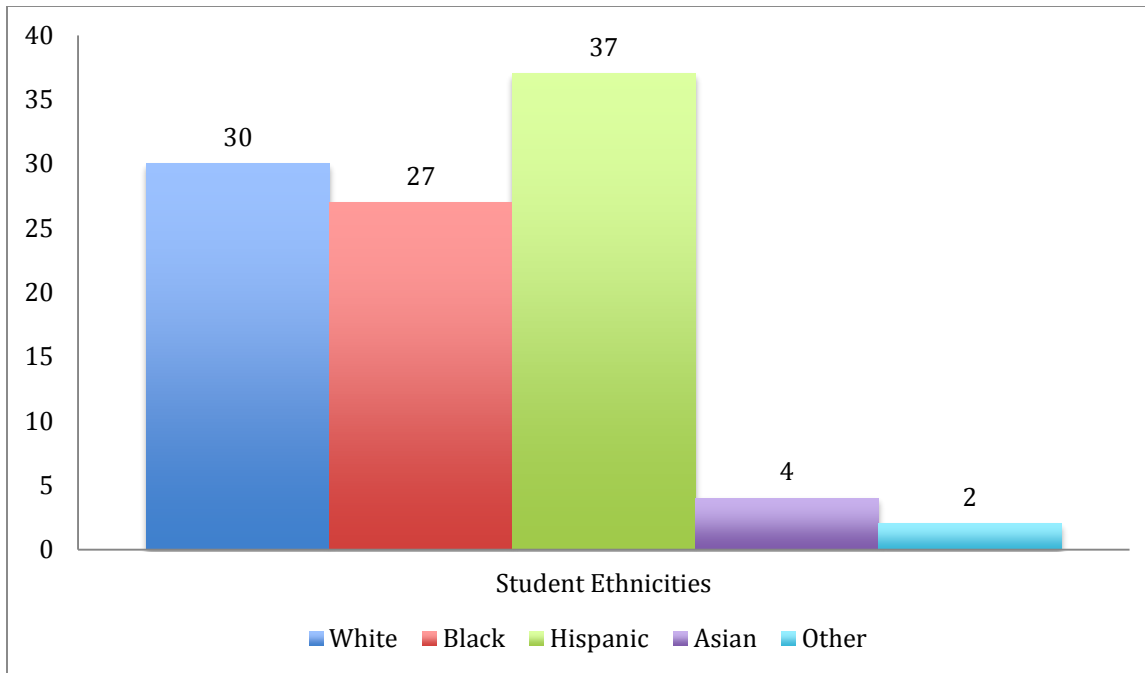


Figure 6: School District Demographics by Race/Ethnicity

Orange County Public Schools. (2014). *Pocket Guide*. Retrieved from <https://www.ocps.net/es/cr/Documents/PocketGuide2014-15.pdf>

The vision statement of Chapman School District is to be the top producer of successful students in the nation. It serves 191,942 students in 225 schools. As a former co-recipient of the Broad Prize for Urban Education, the district was acknowledged for demonstrating the greatest overall performance, improvement in student achievement, and reduction of achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color. In 2014 the estimated population of the county was 1,253,001, with an average number of 1,268.5 inhabitants living per square mile.

Chapman School District is under the jurisdiction of the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE). The FLDOE aims to (1) increase the proficiency of all students within

one seamless, efficient system, (2) provide students with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents, and communities, and to (3) maintain an accountability system that measures student progress (Florida Department of Education, 2015).

The FLDOE believes that establishing ambitious goals for teachers will increase student achievement. Therefore, the Florida Senate passed Senate Bill 736, also known as the Student Success Act, which is aimed at revising the evaluation, compensation, and employment practices for classroom teachers, other instructional personnel, and school administrators (Florida Senate, 2011).

The Florida state-approved model for evaluation is the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Framework. The Marzano Teaching Model is a research-based teacher evaluation model, which identifies the direct cause-and-effect relationship between teaching practices and student achievement. Marzano's theory is that student growth occurs when teachers consistently implement high yield strategies over time with practice, support, and evaluations of instruction that give specific feedback (Learning Sciences International, 2015). Teacher effectiveness is assessed using Marzano's Teaching Model in Chapman School District.

To measure and communicate whole school effectiveness, schools receive a letter grade ranging from an A to F based on each year's performance. The following formula is used to calculate the school grade for schools that are the context of this study. Fifty percent of the grade is based on the state assessment performance and learning gains, and fifty percent is based on "other" components. The performance and learning gains category is further

divided so that fifty percent comes from performance, and the other fifty percent from learning gains, as explained in Figure 7.

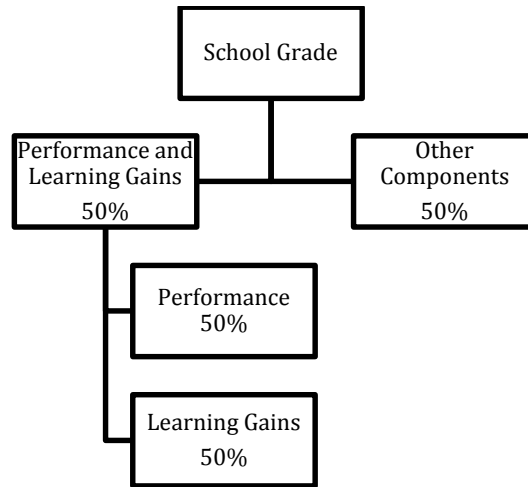


Figure 7: High School Grades Model 2013 - 2014

Florida Department of Education. (2014). *Grading Florida's Public Schools 2014*. Retrieved from <http://schoolgrades.fdoe.org/pdf/1314/Guidesheet2014SchoolGrades.pdf>

Student performance is measured by the percent of students scoring satisfactory or higher on the state assessment. The criteria for demonstrating learning gains are more complex. The minimum requirements are that students either maintain a score of level 3 or higher on the state assessment, increase their score by 1 or more achievement levels, or, for students who score a level 1 or 2, demonstrate more than a years' growth (Florida Department of Education, 2014). In theory this formula appears benign. However, in practice it results in schools intensely focusing on learning gains in order to earn a higher school grade, instead of on cultivating achievement.

Table 5 displays the components and scores that were used to calculate the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school grade for Reed High School. Reed, a historically Black high school, is the research site for this dissertation in practice.

Table 5: Reed High School Grade Calculations for the 2011 – 2012 and 2013 School Year

<b>School Grade Components</b>		<b>2011 - 2012</b>	<b>2012 - 2013</b>
FCAT Components	Reading 3 or Above	32	33
	Math 3 or Above	44	46
	Writing at Standard	87	55
	Reading Gains	65	59
	Math Gains	62	66
	Reading Gains of Lowest 25%	76	70
	Math Gains of Lowest 25%	64	70
	<b>Total</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>459</b>
High School Components	Graduation Rate	92	88
	Graduate Rate 5 Year	87	92
	Graduation Rate At-Risk	86	80
	Graduation Rate 5 Year At-Risk	83	86
	Acceleration Participation	56	65
	Acceleration Performance	11	26
	Readiness Reading	56	64
	Readiness Math	37	50
	Bonus Points	30	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>564</b>
<b>School Grade</b>		<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>

Florida Department of Education. (2014). *Grading Florida's Public Schools 2014*. Retrieved from <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/pdf/1314/Guidesheet2014SchoolGrades.pdf>

As shown in Table 5, the school earned a letter grade of C in 2011-2012 and a B in 2012-2013. When comparing the weight of achievements versus gains, in calculating the school grade, it appears that learning gains are more important. Based solely on the number of components, achievement is only measured by itself in three of the fifteen



categories. The remaining twelve categories measure achievement, but only in its relationship to gains. The FCAT achievement scores in both years are relatively the same, aside from a twenty-two-point increase in the 2012-2013 writing score. Similarly, the reading and math gains of the general population and lowest twenty-five percent are balanced between the years.

The difference is apparent when comparing the FCAT and High School (HS) components, both of which compromise fifty percent of the school grade. In the 2012-2013 year, the school earned less FCAT component points (where achievement is measured) and more HS component points than the previous year, 2011-2012. In the HS components section, Reed High earned fifty bonus points, to help it solidify a B. Bonus points are awarded or deducted in each category for an annual increase or decrease in points per component. Student gains are rewarded with up to ten points per component, and a deduction of five points occurs if student performance decreases by ten percent or more (Florida Department of Education, 2014). This award system based on student learning gains causes principals to encourage teachers to focus on just helping students earn one year's worth of growth, instead of making sure every student meets achievement standards and has an equitable education.

## **Research Site**

This research will take place within a large urban school district in southern United States. Specifically, the site is a historically urban school that has 89.1% Black/African

American student population (Florida Department of Education, 2014). Most of the history of African Americans in the city can be traced back through the school (Cook, 2013).

## **Research Participants**

The participants in the study were the school leadership team. The leadership team was comprised of content area and academic coaches, and the professional development coach. Individuals were selected for the leadership team by the school's new principal. Additional participants were teachers whose classrooms were recommended for observation by the leadership team. Within the classroom observations, the researcher assessed students' response to teacher action. Additionally, students responded to a reflection that inquired about instruction within their most and least favorite classrooms.

## **Methodology**

Within this research I am an outsider in collaboration with insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This will be a participatory action research dissertation, that uses a social justice perspective to address the underlying causes of inequity while at the same time focusing on finding solutions to specific concerns (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The purpose is to create practical knowledge that teachers may use in their classrooms daily (Reason, 2004).

Table 6 describes the data collection process. It outlined the type of data that was collected, the approaches that were used in the collection process, as well as the strengths and weakness of each approach.

Table 6: Data Collection Process

<b>Data Collection Process</b>			
<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Planned Approach</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Observation	Semi-structured field notes  Gather field notes by first observing as a participant-outsider, and then as a participant-insider	Can record information as it occurs  Unusual aspects can be noticed during observation,  Useful in exploring topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss	Challenges may occur in gaining rapport  Researcher may have weak observation skills
Meetings/Conversations	Planned and unplanned conversations will occur while at the research site	Participants can provide historical information  Useful when participants cannot be directly observed, or questioned, as in students	Information from the views of interviewees  Researchers presence may bias responses  Not all people are equally articulate or will participate equally
Audio Visual Materials	Video tape or film classroom instruction	Captures data visually	May be difficult to interpret  Presence may be disruptive to participants

Creswell, J.W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

## **Instrumentation**

The Student Action Coding Sheet (SACS) developed by Erdogan, Campbell, & Abd-Hamid (2011) was the primary instrument used in the development of this research. The purpose of this instrument is to investigate the extent to which student-centered actions occur in classrooms as a result of instructional practices. As an observation tool, the SACS will document the frequency and quality of student actions that reflect engagement. The SACS classifies student actions into three cognitive domains, *lower*, *medium*, and *highest*.

An additional instrument used in this research will be the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form developed by University of Missouri Kansas City's Institute for Urban Education, IUE. IUE is recognized as one of the best urban teacher preparation programs in the nation. The purpose of the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form is to assess the development of the preservice teachers' professional dispositions throughout the program. Professional disposition is described as the preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes that inform professional decision-making, observable character, and teaching practices in an urban environment (Jennifer Waddell, personal communication, June 12, 2014). In this research, the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form will be used to identify the dispositions influencing teacher actions that appear to cultivate engagement. The participating teachers' dispositions and resulting actions will be identified through observations, formal and informal conversations, and student reflections about learning.

## **Conclusion**

By nature of the action research process, this dissertation in practice was a collaboration between the researchers and those who teach and work on behalf of Black students. Due to the longstanding low performance of Black students on the NAEP, the problem of practice that this dissertation in practice addressed was the inequitable education that has cultivated low achievement among Black students. The exploratory question that guided the work of this dissertation was - Prior to and immediately after desegregation, and in classrooms today, what are the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that develop a culture of high achievement among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse?

The next chapter is the first of three manuscripts that were written in completion of this dissertation in practice. It is a conceptual manuscript entitled "A Centennial Perspective of the Education of Black Students," that describes the condition of education for Black students in the early 1900's, again in the late 1950's and early 1960's around the implementation of the time of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* ruling, and finally in 2016. Through the writings of African American scholars from the early 1900's, the voices of individuals who attended grade school prior to and immediately following desegregation, and the educational component of a report published by the United Nation's Working Groups of Experts on People of African Descent, this manuscript describes the conditions under which Black students have been educated for the last 100 years. This

manuscript was essential in addressing the problem of practice because one has to understand the origins of inequities in the education system in order to confront them.

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## **CHAPTER 2: A CENTENNIAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE EDUCATION OF BLACK STUDENTS**

Educational researcher Lisa Delpit often writes about the skills needed to teach culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students. Her research draws on personal experiences as an African American female, as well as a mother. Like Lisa Delpit (2012), I too was drilled in the “intentional community” of achievement which says that, “you have to be twice as good as White kids if you want to go twice as far” (p.42). Although I don’t remember being explicitly told that my, “ancestors sacrificed too much for [me] not to do [my] best” (p.42), hearing stories of my parents’ upbringing in Jackson, Alabama always made me feel like I had a torch to carry.

My mother was raised in Los Angeles, California and relocated to Jackson as a teenage, where she had trouble making sense of the Southern culture and navigating relationships with White people. One summer, she marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and excitedly explained the story of shaking his soft hand to the White woman whose house she worked in the next day, when casually asked if she went to the march. After working a full day, she was fired. Upon finding a new job, she was fired again, when her original employer stopped by her new employer’s house for lunch.

Family trips to Jackson always included my father driving us past his old school and my uncle’s mechanic shop in the Black population’s downtown. The most exhilarating part of every trip was zipping up and down the winding dirt roads of Rockville, Alabama, a small Black community in the hills right outside of Jackson. He recounted running from the police on the very same roads we traveled. His running was not a result of wrongdoing,

rather it was a protective measure to prevent being stopped by the police and never coming home, like some of his family members.

Jackson, Alabama was a rural community deeply plagued by racism. When describing the climate of the 1950's and 60's my father said Black families were essentially under the ruler ship of White men, who owned everything and controlled Black people through employment, the distribution of resources, and coercion. Although older Black people would encourage the younger generation to get ahead, their own efforts to secure better housing and more money were thwarted by fear. A Black citizen's only options were to do what White society requested or leave town. Those who stayed blended into society, bummed around, and were overcome by alcohol and drugs. My father believes they didn't feel educated enough or like they could advance, so they just accepted what was there. A rift of bitterness developed between them and those who left. My father left Jackson, Alabama a month before his high school graduation ceremony to enlist in the United States Air Force. He went on to become a Civil Engineer and Sergeant in the Air Force, and then a Diesel Mechanic for Caterpillar, Inc. Eventually, he fulfilled a longtime dream of owning a landscaping business when he settled in Orlando, FL.

From the stories and encouragement of my parents, I came to deeply value education and the opportunities it affords. Intrigued by the educational history of Black people in America, I sought to examine the educational aspects that contribute to the success of Black students. The remainder of this manuscript described education for Black people through the lens of African American educational and social leaders of the early 1900's, the lived experiences of men and women who attended school during the



desegregation process of the 1950's and 1960's, and an assessment of the current status of education for Black students in the United States.

### **History of Schooling**

Due to America's history of colonialization, European influences on education have to be considered when examining education in America. In Europe, during the seventeenth century, significant socio-economic changes occurred as a result of the decreasing power of the church and the end of the guild system. Schools were one of many institutions between adolescence and adulthood that offered an education. Other bodies of education were based in, "apprenticeship, salvation, rehabilitation, cure, and the art of war" (Deacon, 2006, p. 179).

Originally aligned closely with confinement, or jail, "schools functioned chiefly to contain disorder and neutralize dangers, and were justified in terms of the presumed capacity to prevent ignorance, idleness, and insubordination" (Deacon, 2006, p.179). Early schools taught morality and self-control as a way to manage social problems and maintain order. However, overtime schools served to separate people from society in order to connect them to associations of power and knowledge. Various instructional methods were used and specific disciplines with curricula were developed. School became a way to mold individuals' ideas and behaviors by way of controlled, influential, and consistent communication. By the 1960's and 1970's social reproduction studies conducted in the United States, Britain, and France found that while schools were perceived to be equitable

institutions that fostered opportunity, they in fact, “reinforced the inequalities of social structure and culture order found in a given country” (Collins, 2009, p.34).

One may wonder what this has to do with the education of Black people. First, if schools reinforce societies’ inequities then American schools have been underpinning a history rooted in racism and evidenced by prejudice since the establishment of the first public school in 1635. Second, if schools connect people to power and knowledge, then laws that prevented the education of slaves and later relegated Black children to under resourced schools, can be seen as an intentional effort to deny Black people access to power and knowledge. Despite efforts by some to establish and maintain an inferior race in the early 1900’s, many Black and White people worked collaboratively to improve the quality of education for Black youths. In the next section, these efforts are described through from the perspective of African American educational and social leaders of the early 1900’s.

### **Black Leaders’ Perspectives on Education**

The separation from power and knowledge Black people experienced was acutely felt by African Americans during the early 1900’s. Black leaders of the time debated about the best course of action to obtain political and educational power. This section summarizes the educational philosophies presented by three social leaders during the early 1900’s, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson.

## **W.E.B. Du Bois**

In *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903a) described the state of existence of African American people. Du Bois argued that forty years after emancipation, freedom for Black people still had not been found because they did not have political or educational power. He called for an education that related to the real life of the people, and that produced skilled laborers, as a result of developing men intellectually and culturally. Primarily, Du Bois (1903a) encouraged a philosophical education that taught the meaning of life, culture, patience, humanity, taste, and manners. He believed that peace would occur if both Black and White people were educated on these topics. Du Bois argued that education is the panacea that trains White and Black people to live together because, in his opinion, color prejudice could only be eradicated by an expansion of human reason.

Specifically, DuBois advocated for the development of the Talented Tenth (1903b). The Talented Tenth represented the most capable African American men and women, the top 10%, who would become the teachers and social leaders of the race. By listing Black leaders in education, abolition, medicine, law, and politics, Du Bois (1903b) argued that the frontrunners of the Black race had always been the most educated, or exceptional, people. The Talented Tenth would attend colleges and universities, and be educated in academic disciplines, as well as life and culture. They would then serve as public school teachers, teachers in industrial schools, and as developers of teachers in colleges and universities. The work of the Talented Tenth would be to lead, inspire, and acculturate the general

population, and most importantly raise the next generation of leaders, or members of the Talented Tenth.

Du Bois (1903a) was critical of Washington's advancement of industrial education as the best path for Black people, because it required agreement to political and civil inequality. According to him the effects of Washington's plan were disenfranchisement, which Du Bois claimed legally created inferiority, and resulted in the withdrawal of financial aid from institutions of higher education for Blacks. He believed that White people supported Washington's plan because they didn't mind an education for African Americans that kept them subordinate, and taught them to be faithful servants and laborers. In his opinion, White Southerners were against the type of education he suggested because they feared it would make Black people discontent with their current place in society, and thereby, incite a revolution.

Du Bois (1903a) described a rural schoolhouse he visited as a dilapidated log hut, and the overall public school facilities in the South as "meager" (Du Bois, 1903b, p.64). He asserted that public schools, in their current state, were unable to provide adequate training for Black children. Using the state of Georgia to describe a national problem, Du Bois explained that for every \$4 the state spent on the education of White students, \$1 was spent on the education of Black students (Du Bois, 1903a). He believed the national government was needed to intervene in the distribution of funds for education. As a result of funding, the quality of education for Black students varied. In some places, the school curriculum consisted of reading, spelling, writing, singing, and the teachers told stories about life in other places. However, overall, in 1903 only a third of school age children

attended school and sessions only lasted a couple of months (1903b). Public school advocacy was essential for Du Bois because, he held that, outside of the home, public school was the place for ordinary men, or children, to learn how to be citizens (Du Bois, 1903a).

### **Booker T. Washington**

Booker T. Washington (1913) believed the greatest gift of emancipation was to start public schools in the south for Black people. In his paper “Industrial Education and the Public Schools,” Washington reviewed the progress of education for Black people and made a case for industrial education. An industrial education instructed students on the development of practical skills and crafts needed to fulfill everyday needs such as mechanics, carpentry, building, and tailoring. Washington believed that applying school learning to common industrial tasks, overtime, Black people would generate financial security that would afford opportunities for a more leisurely life.

Washington (1913) explained that between 1865 and 1870, 2,677 schools were started in the South by the Freedman’s Bureau, a government agency organized to aid former slaves. Schools educated people of all ages and were located in abandoned buildings, churches, old army barracks, and outside under trees. Some students attended school during the day, others at night, and still others on Sunday. Generally, Washington (1913) described schools as lacking sufficient financial resources.

According to Washington (1913), schools in the North were not much better than the South, and Black students were mostly ignored in school legislation. In many states,

money raised from Black taxes was earmarked for Black schools. Sometimes the schools received the meager amounts of money, and sometimes the money was disbursed even though there was no Black school on record. The city of Baltimore was an exception; it had 63 schools for Black children. The majority of schools were primarily supported by private philanthropy, but also by churches, other organizations, and individuals.

Washington (1913) argued that Black people's perspective of education was formed by what they saw of it during slavery. Educated Whites belonged to the aristocracy, while uneducated Whites were poor, and education was denied to slaves. Therefore, upon emancipation Black people rushed to obtain that which they had been refused, an education. Washington contended that post-slavery, Black people discarded industrial work because they were told Black people were destined to be slaves and labor, so freedom was interpreted as a release from labor. Washington wanted Black people to see that education was not a means of escaping labor. Rather, he believed education would bring improved skill and thus, dignity to industrial labor. He believed that the way to build up a race was to start with the everyday experiences of the most common people, not at the top as suggested by W.E.B. Du Bois.

Washington (1913) trusted that through industrial education, Black people see labor as honorable. He also hoped industrial education would persuade White people to view the education of Black people as worthwhile, believing that higher skilled African American laborers, would make the South richer. Additionally, graduates from industrial schools like Hampton and Tuskegee went to work in rural communities as teachers and

leaders. Washington planned to use industrial schools to build up the life of the community.

### **Carter G. Woodson**

At the time of writing *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson (1933) believed the education of Black people had not produced satisfactory results. The quality of education varied from place to place, and schools were inadequately funded. Immediately following emancipation, education was largely left to philanthropy and White people in the South, where most Blacks lived, were not philanthropic. However, Julius Rosenwald was a philanthropist who supported Black education in a significant way. He gave scholarships to Black teachers for self-development who were experienced, evidenced good judgment and showed potential for growth. He also, at the request of Booker T. Washington, build 5320 schools, vocational shops, and homes for teachers across the South and Southwest from 1912 – 1932.

After the war, missionaries went to the South to teach but their lack of knowledge of Black people or understanding of the task at hand outweighed their enthusiasm. Woodson (1933) believed that the race of the teacher didn't matter as long as teachers understood and continually sympathized with the students they instructed. However, he understood that the nations tradition of race, hate, and segregation prevented people off different races from having the same attitudes and perspectives. Nevertheless, Woodson advocated for teachers that inspired pupils to begin with the life they had and improve on

it. Regardless of the race of the teacher, Woodson said students should be approached through a deep understanding of their environment and teachers should deal with students conditions as they are, not as they would like for them to be.

As for curriculum, Woodson (1933) believed that Western education was antiquated and ill suited for all races. However, the education system worked better for White people because it was created to conform to their needs, and even justified slavery. Woodson reasoned that a Black person's mind could not be liberated while being taught the same academic subjects as White people. Instead of liberation, the presumed the education continued to make Black people feel inferior. An education for Black people should be determined by the characteristics of the people and demands of their environment. Woodson advocated for an education that would teach people how to think and do for themselves, because he held that the sheer impartation of knowledge was not education.

In regards to curriculum, Woodson (1933) discussed the absence of political science and a history that included and accurately portrayed the experiences of African American people. Black children were not allowed to read books with the US Constitution or the Declaration of Independence out of fear they would fight for the rights that it guaranteed. Instead, the history curriculum was structured to affirm White supremacy and exclude or belittle African Americans. Additionally, Black communities that feared retaliation from local White people shunned Black teachers who spread democratic ideas. As a result, government was not taught and some Blacks stopped contemplating politics (Woodson, 1933), a problem that plagues the race even today. Woodson contended that teaching



students their race was a curse constituted a crime worse than lynching, because it killed aspirations, awakened hopelessness, and resulted in violence.

Woodson (1913) resolved that a lack of education was a way to control people from without. Limited political and educational power resulted in Blacks becoming content and accepting whatever they were being given. Therefore, he recommended an education for Black people based on a scientific understanding of who they were, so that they could liberate themselves. He charged teachers to know the students and parents, and to study poor performing students instead of punishing them. Woodson believed the education system should work to better the community because students are products of their parents. Schools should teach African history so that social problems can be dealt with based on an understanding of Black people. The contributions of Black scholars in art, folklore, philosophy, and literature should be added to the curriculum. Based on a student's background, a teacher should consider: what he is today, what his possibilities are, how to begin with him as he is, and how to make him a better version of himself. Woodson's analysis of education is very applicable to the teaching practice today.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington both prioritized developing the skill of Black hands and cultivating Black minds. However, they differed on which method of education should be paramount. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903b) advocated for the creation of the Talented Tenth, the best 10% of the race who would be educated in colleges and universities then return to Black communities to uplift them through academic, industrial, and cultural education. While Booker T. Washington (1913) suggested that education for Black people be aimed at cultivating their skills in work that is known to them such as

agriculture, mechanics, or domestic services. Writing decades later, Woodson (1933) provided a critique of the progress made in educating Black people. His practical approach recommended qualities of teachers and elements of curriculum that are essential for an equitable and self-liberating education.

The next section of this paper discusses the narratives of African American individuals who attended grade school prior to or immediately after desegregation. Their voices provide insight into the state of Black education during the late 1950's and early 1960's, as well as, an opportunity to determine the extent to which the ideals of Du Bois, Washington, and Woodson were realized.

### **Experiences of Students During Desegregation**

Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas was a landmark United States Supreme Court Case. The ruling stated that segregated public schools for White and Black children were unequal, and thus unconstitutional. The educational facilities, funding, and resources were undeniably unequal. However, considering African American's significant social, economic, and educational advancements of the 1960's (Westcott, 1982) one wonders if the education Black students received inside of the school was in fact inferior? African Americans in the workforce during the 1960's were educated in the segregated and unequal schools of the 30's and 40's, especially if they lived in the South. This realization led one to wonder, what aspects of their schooling experience cultivated achievement?

To explore this question, conversations were initiated with two African American men and two African American women who attended school prior to and/or immediately following desegregation. Each person was asked to describe his or her experiences in a segregated school. As each conversation progressed, individual were asked to discuss instructional strategies, the dispositions of the teachers, their most memorable teacher, and strategies teachers used to engage students. In addition to developing an understanding of their school experiences, I listened for evidence that the ideals advocated for Washington, Du Bois, and Woodson, were alive in the teachers of Black children in segregated schools. If their recommendations for education were actualized, schools for Black children may have been unequal in resources only.

In addition to my father, who was introduced at the beginning of this manuscript, I interviewed the CEO of an educational organization, a professor of education in the nation's second-largest University, and the Founder and Director of a Master's degree mentoring program. The latter three have an insider's perspective of education as a result of working as teachers in the early parts of their careers. Additionally, they are currently employed at the university or national level in the field of education.

The CEO of the educational organization was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1944. She attended a segregated elementary school, and when schools in Louisville began to desegregate in the early 1960's she was the only Black student during her first year in junior high school. She can be described as a civil rights activist due to her participation in integration demonstrations as an adolescent. Her advocacy was also developed through experiences as a classroom teacher, and at the university, and national levels. Through

many leadership positions, she has worked to improve education for minority and disabled students. In 2005, she was selected to be the president and CEO of a national educational organization, an office she still holds today.

The professor of education was born and raised in Monticello, Florida, a small rural farming community near Tallahassee, Florida. She described Monticello as, “separate and highly unequal.” In Monticello, the desegregation process started in the 1950’s but it didn’t make a difference until students started rioting. In an effort to stop integration, the White families fired all of their Black housekeepers, one of which was her mother, and dumped trash in the yards of families bold enough to send their children to the White school. She, however, graduated the year before desegregation. Now, she is a professor of urban, multicultural, and exceptional education at the nation’s second-largest university. She was the first African American woman to achieve the rank of professor at the institution.

The founder and director of the Master’s degree mentoring program was born in Altura, Florida in 1937. His family moved to Orlando, FL in 1944, where he attended a segregated elementary and high school. He became a teacher at a local Black school, and during the desegregation process was asked to be the first Black male teacher at Winter Park High School. Additionally, he was the first African American male elected to the Florida Legislature from Orlando. Currently, the program he directs aims to give Veterans a second career and decrease the shortage of qualified teachers.

The responses from all four interviews that relate to the teaching and learning process were grouped according to common themes and presented in the following sections.

## **Teacher Behaviors in Segregated Schools**

During individual conversations, all four persons espoused positive thoughts and feelings about their education in segregated schools. One contributor enjoyed having things in common with other students and the family environment that was fostered. Another described it as, “educationally engaging, best experience I ever had. They instilled a sense of pride and self-worth, just knowing that the world is possible.” For three of the contributors to conversations, desegregation occurred the year after they graduated, and they were thankful.

In Jackson, Louisville, and Monticello the teachers were from nearby colleges or universities such as Tuskegee Institute, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Purdue, and Indiana. Two persons stressed a strong community – school connection. Teachers were known from church and other aspects of the community.

In the rural communities of Jackson and Monticello teacher attitudes were geared towards empowering students with the belief that with an education, they could have a better life than the one lived by adults in their community. In Jackson, Alabama, teachers encouraged students to educate themselves in any way possible, and to do their very best, no matter what they chose to do.

One gentleman was particularly inspired by a principal who, in one of his weekly meetings with students in the gymnasium, told students that they would always be Black, but to look beyond that and don't believe the stereotype that because they were Black, they were nobody. He told students that they could make something of themselves if they

applied themselves. The current professor remembers being inspired by teachers who saw something in her that she couldn't see in herself. They encouraged her by telling her that she was smart and was going to be somebody someday because she quick and a good reader.

All four persons discussed teacher expectations similarly, by saying that teachers pushed students to be better than what they were. Students were expected, "to improve on whatever we had, and to always strive to become more educated." A contributor explained that pre-integration teachers expected her to identify what her, "best effort was and give it a push more." Additionally, teachers advised students to find out where the pressure is in life (where things are happening) and go towards the pressure, take action. Which by teaching in a segregated school during the 1960's, they modeled.

### **Teacher Instructional Strategies**

Resources in segregated schools, especially in rural areas, were limited. Buses, books, athletic uniforms, and band instruments were handed down from the White school. As a result of limited resources, teachers used the radio and newspaper clippings to help them learn and make sense of the world. A contributor that was raised in a rural community recounted that teachers used examples of things that were happening around them to motivate them to think about how to rise above their surroundings. Despite limited resources, the education was described as very rigorous. The curriculum included

literature from Black Americans like Benjamin Banneker and Booker T. Washington.

Teachers were credited with making concepts come alive.

One segregated high school developed an academic track for students headed towards college, and a vocational track that focused on cosmetics and industrial art. According to the student of this school, the vocational track was not a “dead end”, graduates were successful because it was a combination of, “inclination, energy, and talent.

In a segregated but middle class environment, another contributor experienced a strong education by well-educated teachers from Purdue University and Indiana University. She described a traditional, classic education heavily focused on grammar, math, problem solving, music, and performing arts.

### **Favorite Teacher**

When asked to describe his favorite teacher, one contributor remembered, “she was strict but she knew how to get it out of you, and she knew how to make you mind even though sometimes you weren’t interested in the teaching. She knew how to pull you in and make you a part of it. She was like a mother in a sense. She involved you in what she was teaching. She took an interest in the students and found something to kick it with you about. She would tell you what it was like for her as a kid, she identified with you, which drew you in.” He appreciated a male teacher because he related academic principles to real life.

Another contributor described her favorite teacher as the first Black professional she saw, who encouraged her and taught her how to read. Another favorite teacher was described as, "Strict. She was determined to get us ready for the world and we loved her for that." The teacher was preparing students for desegregation that was pending, and neither the students nor teachers knew what that would entail.

### **Experience in Integrated School**

As the contributor who now leads a national education organization entered junior high school, desegregation arrived in Louisville and she was rezoned to attend the White school. Until her siblings arrived in years to follow, she was the only Black student at the school. In her opinion, this is when tracking began. Students were placed in academic courses according to their social class. So, even though her father was a businessman and her mother was a teacher, she was initially put in the class with the blue-collar workers and janitor's children because she was Black. Due to her strong academic skills, she was moved to a more advanced class by Christmas. After desegregation she no longer had Black teachers. She believes that pre-integration teachers had higher expectations of her academic performance, and that after desegregation the expectations were never high enough. She acknowledged that, "If I depended on those teachers for motivation based on their expectations of me I might not have been as strong a student as I was. It was my expectations of myself that led me."



## Summary of Narratives

Evidence from the conversations with individuals who attended public schools in the late 1950's and early 1960's suggest that teacher behaviors and instructional strategies engaged students in learning in segregated schools. In addition, they indicate that many of the ideas of both W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington may have come to fruition. As advocated for by Washington, graduates from industrial schools like Hampton and Tuskegee, and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University went to work in rural communities as teachers. Additionally, industrial-based programs existed in some public schools. The urging that schools develop citizenship was evident in all narratives, but indicators of an education of culture were most prevalent in the story of the contributor who was raised in a middle class environment. As Carter G. Woodson suggested, the quality of education varied from place to place. His philosophies most closely related to teacher behaviors. The narratives indicated that teachers understood and continually sympathized with the students they instructed, were knowledgeable of students and the socio-political environment that students had to navigate outside of school, and teachers inspired student to begin with the life they were given and to improve on it.

Based on the conversations with individuals who attended school during segregation, school seemed to be a refuge from the discrimination faced in everyday life. It is apparent that some Black schools had unequally resourced, however, the caliber of teaching was discussed in high regard. Learning was rigorous and relevant, and taught by teachers who were invested in student success. The only contrast to this narrative came

from claims that the expectations of teachers after integration were never high enough. It is interesting to note that after integration, Black students were no longer taught by Black teachers. The race of the teacher does not matter as long as teachers have the capacity to identify with their students. However, this can be difficult in a nation with a history of racism and segregation that makes it difficult for people of different races to identify with each other (Woodson, 1913).

The introduction of this dissertation in practice discussed factors that led to the problem of practice, an inequitable education being received by African American students that results in low achievement. One of those factors is access to effective teachers, meaning teachers who are prepared to teach Black students, particularly those in urban school. Limited education on multicultural issues has created teachers who are not prepared to work in racially diverse and economically depressed communities (Chapman, 2011). When educators, of any race, possess biases and negative perceptions of students it is common for them to develop deficit thinking – a belief that attributes low performance to students, families, and communities (Delpit, 2012). Deficit thinking is accompanied by low expectations that guide policy and practice. As a result, structural inequalities develop within schools that limit student access to the rigorous educational experiences needed to succeed in college and their future careers (Cowan-Pitre, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

The next section of this paper presents a perspective of education for Black students in 2016. It highlights the structural and institutional inequities in and out of schools that may contribute to low student performance.

## **Current Status of Education for Black Students**

The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD) is a subsidiary of the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. The group was formed, “to study the problems of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in the African Diaspora and make proposals for the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent” (United Nations, 2016). During a visit to the United States in January of 2016, the WGEPAD identified the following areas of concern that directly or indirectly impact the education of Black students.

- Racially-motivated discrimination rooted in a model of economic development that negatively impacts the poorest African American communities in relation to education, health, employment, housing
- 26% of African Americans live in poverty, 12% in deep poverty
- Poor students arrested in school for minor offences because of Zero tolerance policies
- Penalization and harassment due to racial profiling
- Black children more likely to face harsh discipline than White children
- Under-funding and closure of schools in poor neighborhoods with significant African American populations
- Insufficient teaching of colonialism and enslavement
- De facto segregated schools nurtured by an insufficient acknowledgement of the history of enslavement and the Jim Crow Law
- Inadequately addresses the root causes of racial inequality and injustice
- Concentrations of African Americans in low income neighborhoods
- Correlation between racial segregation and disparities in access to health, education, and food security
- Displacement due to gentrification
- Unemployment rate is twice that of the national unemployment rate
- Increased participation in temporary jobs with lower salaries and less security
- Disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards impacting health (United Nations, 2016)

As previously discussed in this dissertation in practice, low student performance is the result of compounded social and educational inequity. The present-day conditions described by the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent are eerily similar to descriptions of life in the United States provided by the writings and narratives about Black life and education in the early to mid-1900's. Despite, or perhaps because of, inequitable political and economic circumstances, the teaching and learning discussed in this manuscript engaged students during a time of oppression. Perhaps the same teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that engaged students during oppressive and segregated times can be effective with Black students in urban high schools today.

The next manuscript is a review of literature that informs the research based on the exploratory question, which is - What are the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that cultivate learning among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse? In addition to defining student engagement, as it will be used in the remainder of this dissertation, the literature presented suggests a relationship between student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse.

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## **CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE THAT FOCUSES STUDENT ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH**

The national focus on accountability has contributed to an increased prevalence of student engagement research. Achievement outcomes are higher for students who are engaged (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Marks, 2000). Therefore, engagement has been included as a goal of school improvement, the connection between disengagement and dropping out has gained attention, and student engagement has become the intended outcome of programs and interventions (Fredricks, 2011). As school and district improvement processes aim to increase student engagement, a concrete definition and instruments to measure the concept are necessary.

### **Definition of Student Engagement**

A definitive definition of student engagement eludes researchers who bestride the fields of education and psychology to understand the concept and its implications (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Table 7 provides examples of student engagement definitions from psychology that have been applied within educational research.

Table 7: Definitions of Student Engagement

Student engagement is...	Source
The extent to which students participate in the academic and nonacademic activities of school, feel connected at school, and value the goals of education.	Li & Lerner, 2011
The quality and extent of students' involvement in schooling and their connection to the people, activities, goals, and values that comprise it.	Turner, Meyer, & Patrick, 2011
Students actively processing and communicating information in ways that show they are focused and involved during class	Early, Rogge, & Deci, 2014
A state of being that is influenced by the multiple contexts experienced by students such as school culture, peers, and family.	Wallace & Chhuon, 2014
A complex relationship between students and their learning environments that shapes educational outcomes.	Sharkey, Quirk, & Mayworm, 2014

Broadly, student engagement is a multidimensional construct that encompasses students' behaviors, feelings, and thoughts in response to the learning environment (Sharkey, Quirk, & Mayworm, 2014). In a widely used review of engagement literature, Fredricks et al. (2004) deconstructed the broad term of student engagement to be behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. This dissertation in practice used a hybrid definition of student engagement that encompasses the meanings used by Sharkey et al. (2004) and Fredricks et al. (2004). This dissertation in practice defined student engagement as students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive response to the learning environment.

Fredricks et al. (2004), describe behavioral engagement as student participation. It includes conduct, involvement in academic tasks and social activities. Behavioral engagement is critical for positive educational outcomes including dropout prevention. Behavioral engagement is most commonly measured through attendance records, conduct



reports, teacher ratings, and self-reporting. Observing participation, enthusiasm, and attentiveness is an additional means to measure behavioral engagement. However, observations limit assessment to student's outward appearance and doesn't provide information on effort or thinking.

Emotional engagement focuses on students' affective reactions to the school environment, teachers, students, and academics (Fredricks et al., 2004). Reactions associated with emotional engagement, such as interest, boredom, happiness, and anxiety, are more deeply deconstructed in motivational research. Emotional engagement is often measured in conjunction with behavioral engagement. Issues in measuring engagement are that scales don't identify the source of emotion (task, family, or teacher), and they do not report the intensity of emotional change related to a particular activity.

Fredricks et al. (2004) describe cognitive engagement as students' investment in learning that will result in effort applied to mastering challenging concepts. Its roots in both psychology and learning literature are equally important. The psychology aspect includes evidence of internal investment such as exceeding requirements, preferring hard work, valuing knowledge and striving for mastery. While the learning literature outlines the metacognitive strategies that invested students employ to work successfully such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Measuring cognition can be challenging because it has to be inferred from observed behavior or assessed through self-reporting. Additionally, it doesn't report on students' full capacity because it can only be observed at the depth the learning activity requires. In addition to observation and self-reporting,

cognitive engagement can also be informed by rating the quality and depth of classroom discourse.

### **Trends in Student Engagement Research**

Most popularly described as a combination of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, the concept of student engagement has often been described as “multidimensional” or as a “meta” construct (Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks, 2011; Sharkey et al., 2014). The term’s complexity is both its strength and source of numerous weaknesses. While the study of all three dimensions can provide a rich representation of learning and insight into how students behave, feel, and think (Frederick et al., 2004; Fredericks, 2011), there are significant limitations in its measurement and definitions. This section also discusses student engagements’ foundations in psychology and motivation research.

### **Measurements and Definitions**

As noted in the introduction of this manuscript, measures and definitions of the individual aspects of student engagement are different. The breadth of the construct ultimately dilutes conceptual clarity and complicates the synthesis of results (Fredericks et al., 2004; Sharkey et al., 2011). In a review of 21 instruments used to measure student engagement, Fredricks (2011) found that 67% of the instruments required students to self-

report, 19% were observational, and 14% asked teachers to report their perceptions of students. As the most widely used method of data collection, self-reporting is efficient and can be easily administered to a large sample, however, self-reports can also create bias due to participants giving socially desirable responses (Sharkey et al., 2011).

An additional weakness is that student engagement combines constructs that are usually studied separately in different disciplines. For example, emotional engagement includes feelings, values, and interests, which are studied more deeply in the discipline of psychology, particularly in motivation literature (Fredericks et al., 2004). The separation of the concepts prevents them from being studied concurrently and the development of knowledge concerning their collective impact on teacher practice.

### **Psychology and Motivation**

The goal of engagement research is to promote academic competence. Numerous educational and psychological perspectives are integrated towards this aim (Furlong et al., 2003). In Table 8, Skinner and Belmont (1993) list psychological theories and teacher behaviors from educational research that impact student engagement by cultivating motivation.

Table 8: Psychological Theories and Teacher Behaviors that Cultivate

Psychological Theories	Teacher Behaviors
Attribution	Guidance
Self-efficacy	Modeling
Perceived ability	Enthusiasm
Perceived control and competence	Choice
Self-concept	Sincere Praise
Intrinsic motivation	Reinforcement
Interest	Curiosity
Goal orientation	Dissonance
	Attention focusing
	Relevance
	Confidence Building
	Satisfaction

Skinner, E. A., & Belmont, M. J. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 85*(4), 571-581.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) advance a model of student engagement that combines research in psychology and education around the construct of motivation. The authors suggest that motivated students are highly enthusiastic, interested, involved, and persist through obstacles. They argue that motivation is internal to the student, and it can be cultivated by certain teacher behaviors. The extent to which teacher behaviors and classroom practices meet students' psychological needs, of competence, autonomy, and involvement, determines students' sense of self. Sense of self is predictive of motivation, and motivation determines whether or not students are engaged (Furlong et al., 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Brophy (1987, 2008) contends that a distinction between intrinsic motivation and motivation to learn must be honored. Intrinsic motivation involves doing an activity for the

enjoyment of it, whereas, motivation to learn involves participating in an activity to gain knowledge or learn a skill without necessarily enjoying the activity. In contrast to Early, Rogge, and Deci (2014), who suggest educators aim for intrinsic motivation, Brophy believes that because schools are compulsory, teachers should seek to develop a motivation to learn which is evident when students find activities meaningful and they pursue intended learning outcomes regardless of interest (Turner, Meyer, & Patrick, 2011). To further his argument, Brophy (1987) insists that intrinsic motivation is not enough; it will increase students' enjoyment of the activity but it will not increase their motivation to take academics seriously. In short, it inspires fun but does little to engage students cognitively and develop their appreciation for learning (Brophy, 1987).

Brophy (1987) claims that motivation to learn predicates learning and performance. Learning is defined as, "the information processing, sense-making, and comprehension of mastery advances that occur during the acquisition of knowledge or skill" (p.41). Learning is followed by performance, which is the, "demonstration of such knowledge and skill after it has been acquired" (p.41). Learning includes teaching students how to be, "thoughtful learners" by imparting to them the information processing strategies that aid in acquiring knowledge or learning a skill (p. 41), which according to Fredricks, (2011) is an element of cognitive engagement. Motivation to learn is an ability that is cultivated through experience, particularly "modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction by significant others, especially parents and teachers" (Brophy, 1987). As suggested by Brophy (2008), researchers measure motivation but rarely seek to cultivate motivation where it does not exist, which is the focus of early engagement literature.

## **Problem of Immediate Interest**

Research conducted in the mid 1980's and early 1990's described students as being disengaged from learning. Students reported feeling bored and surviving their day by having fun with friends (Shernoff, Csikzentmihalyi, Shneider, & Shernoff, 2003). Foundational student engagement literature focused on the disengagement, delinquency, and academic failure of at-risk students. It was believed that engagement was a precursor to success, and that improved relationships within the school context would decrease delinquency (Furlong et al., 2003; Sharkey et al., 2014). Historically, engagement was seen as a fix for low achievement and dropout, however, overtime it has been generalized to all students (Fredricks et al., 2004; Furlong et al., 2003).

Current research continuously indicates student engagement as a problem for teachers that is evidenced by truancy, incomplete assignments, boredom, apathy, and dropping out (Turner et al., 2011). Research documents a decline in student engagement and motivation from elementary to high school that is most drastically experienced by students of color, especially African American males, and students attending urban (Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks, 2011; Li & Lerner, 2011; Turner et al., 2011; Wallace & Chhuon, 2014).

Milner (2012) defines urban schools as institutions that, by way of the students who attend them, are adversely affected by issues of transportation, concentrated poverty, high student mobility rates, and underfunding. Often urban schools are surrounded by businesses, as opposed to being positioned in residential neighborhoods. Additionally, urban schools disproportionately serve students of color (Milner, 2012; Talbert-Johnson,

2006; Wallace & Chhuon, 2014), who are defined as non-White individuals from non-dominant communities (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). Wallace and Chhuon (2014) add that community problems impacting urban schools are linked to larger sociopolitical issues, and the resulting perspectives on learning developed by urban youth must be considered in efforts to engage them.

Li & Lerner (2011) identify “minority students and students from low SES families [as those who] disproportionately attend crowded, understaffed, dysfunctional, and inadequately funded schools” (p.244). They also explain that these youth are more likely to be alienated from school and at risk of academic failure. In reference to engagement, the authors found that boys, students of color, and youth from disadvantaged families experienced the lowest levels of emotional and behavioral engagement.

The consequences of disengagement are severe for individual students as well as the nation. Youth who are marginalized due to race and class, disproportionately experience low grades, low graduation rates, limited employment opportunities, and an increased risk of poverty, poor health, and involvement in the criminal justice system (Fredricks, 2011). This is alarming because in preparation for college or the workforce, students need the ability to evaluate new information, think critically, and solve problems (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The study of engagement is important because it has the power to increase student involvement in school, influence achievement, promote positive educational outcomes and develop lifelong learners (Fredricks, 2011; Furlong et al., 2003). The good news for schools with disengaged youth is that engagement is malleable and can change based on

opportunities within the school context (Fredricks, 2011; Sharkey et al., 2014; Turner et al., 2011).

### **Research Question**

In consideration of the decline in motivation and engagement across middle and high school, this review of literature focuses on engagement in secondary schools and classrooms. This review also considers the impact that students and teachers in urban schools have on engagement. The exploratory question that guides this examination of literature is, what are the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that cultivate learning among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse?

Student engagement is defined as students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses to the learning environment. Student learning is defined as, "the information processing, sense-making, and comprehension of mastery advances that occur during the acquisition of knowledge or skill" (Brophy, 1987, p.41). In practice, student engagement stimulates learning, and the level of learning is evidenced by students' verbal and nonverbal response to instruction.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Literature reviews and conceptual writings were examined to define student engagement and develop a deeper understanding of the construct. While each concept of student engagement, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive, alone is significant, a deep



analysis of each concept individually was outside of the scope of this review. Rather, the literature represented in this manuscript focused on the relationship between student engagement, teacher dispositions, instructional strategies, and discourse. This is a review of quantitative and qualitative research studies that establish and expound upon the relationship between the combined dimensions of student engagement and their collective impact on student learning. Quantitative studies were used to establish a relationship between engagement and learning, while qualitative research offered descriptors of teacher and student perceptions of engagement.

### **Organization**

The content of this review is organized to discuss the stimulators of student engagement, which include the school environment, peers, the student, and the teacher (Early et al., 2014; Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks, 2011; Furlong et al., 2003; Sharkey et al., 2014; Shernoff et al., 2003; Turner et al., 2011; Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). The National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2004) claims that teacher instruction is the most closely related to and the most significant predictor of student learning. Therefore, the impact of the teacher on student engagement is discussed; particularly teachers' dispositions, their instructional choices, and their role in classroom discourse.

## **Contextual Cultivators of Student Engagement**

Wallace and Chhuon (2014) define student engagement as a state of being that is influenced by the multiple contexts in which students find themselves such as school culture, peers, and family. Sharkey et al. (2014) extend contextual influences to include the individual student and the classroom, arguing that a combination of the above elements should be considered by approaches that seek to increase student engagement. In a cyclical nature, these forces impact each other and contribute to the level of engagement students' experience. This review aims to offer a deeper understanding of the impact that the school environment, peers, the student, and the teachers have on the engagement of all students, and specifically students of color who attend urban schools.

### **School Environment**

According to Furlong et al. (2003), school climate is an essential component of engagement. The authors separate the school context into the physical environment and the regulatory environment.

Physically, Furlong et al. (2003) claims that small to moderate sized secondary schools, 600 to 1,200 students, are ideal for engagement and achievement. Small schools afford students greater opportunities to develop social relationships by participating in extracurricular and social activities. In addition to the small size, Fredricks, et al. (2004) suggest that a focus on increasing students' feelings of belonging within the school and authentic learning tasks will encourage engagement for at-risk students.

Furlong et al. (2003) also includes a school's racial and ethnic composition as an element of the physical environment. Further research is needed to determine if same race schools consistently yield higher achievement. However, minority students may experience stereotype threat in racially diverse schools. Stereotype threat refers to a situation in which individuals fear conforming to stereotypes held about their group. It frequently leads to negative performance outcomes (Steele, 2010). Furlong et al. (2003) asserts that students must perceive themselves to be a part of a positive learning environment. Culturally responsive teaching and perceptions of being known are demonstrations of care that negate stereotype threat (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). African American students in low-income urban high schools had higher grades and graduation rates when they felt interpersonally and institutionally connected to school (Sharkey et al., 2014).

School organizational structure is defined as the regulatory environment (Furlong et al., 2003). The way students perceive the structure of the classroom (norms, rules, procedures) impacts all 3 types of engagement, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Engaging students in learning creates more time on task and fewer discipline problems (Fredricks, et al., 2004).

The strict enforcement of school rules has earned the title, Zero Tolerance Policies. The objective of Zero Tolerance Policies is to create safe and secure schools. However, in practice rigid enforcement, regardless of severity, is strictly punished with suspension or expulsion (Furlong et al., 2003). Students are excluded instead of being taught how to solve problems. Students may begin to feel unwelcome, which can lead to drop out

(Furlong et al., 2003; Sharkey et al., 2014). Zero Tolerance Policies lead to the School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP), which is a punitive pathway that starts with school disciplinary measures, and ends with incarceration. It is comprised of disenfranchised youth, with an overrepresentation of poor African Americans and Latinos (Houchins & Shippen, 2012). Strong disciplinary procedures coupled with high expectations increase engagement, while strict and arbitrary procedures decrease engagement (Furlong et al., 2003; Sharkey et al., 2014).

## **Peers**

Social networks impact student engagement (Sharkey et al., 2014) in that, students tend to form relationships with people of the same engagement level (Fredricks, 2011). Engagement can be developed by sharing information, modeling academic achievement and motivation, and encouraging positive attitudes (Fredricks, 2011). Cognitive engagement is increased during collaborative learning activities such as discussion and debate (Fredricks, et al. 2004). Minority students who feel their race and class impact their educational opportunities are more likely to remain engaged if they have social supports that help cultivate strategies for dealing with discrimination (Fredricks et al., 2004).

## **The Individual Student**

### **Demographics.**

Although at-risk students have traditionally been the focus of engagement research, the study of engagement is generalizable to all learners (Furlong et al., 2003). Research has shown that typically females are more engaged than males, but engagement for all students decreases as youth progress into the upper grades (Shernoff et al., 2003).

### **Characteristics of Engagement.**

Brophy (1987) encourages teachers to cultivate students' motivation to learn. Skinner & Belmont (1993) describe the dispositions of motivated students as high in enthusiasm, interest, involvement, and persistence. These dispositions translate into observable actions in the classroom. Behaviorally engaged students interact and respond within the classroom, school, and during extracurricular activities. They select challenging tasks, and demonstrate concentrated effort. On the other hand, behaviorally disengaged students display passiveness, apathy, and give up when challenged. Emotionally engaged students respond to school in ways that display feelings of enjoyment, belonging, and attachment. The students are positive, enthusiastic, and curious; whereas emotionally disengaged students can be bored, angry, withdrawn, and rebellious (Furlong et al., 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

## **Internal and External Motivation.**

Motivation, a precursor to engagement, is cultivated by both internal and external factors. Personal factors that influence engagement are self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept, and perceived quality of relationships with others (Sharkey et al., 2014).

Autonomous motivation is based on the idea that actions are determined by an individual's goals and what one deems important (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Participating in learning tasks solely out of desire is positively correlated with behavioral and emotional engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Studies have shown that students who are high in intrinsic motivation are more engaged in deep conceptual learning and perform better on inquiry, as opposed to analytical tasks (Early et al., 2014).

Specific factors external to the student, have been found to influence motivation, and thus, engagement. First, family factors, such as involvement and expectations are significant even when considering past achievement (Sharkey et al., 2014). Within the school, engagement is influenced by the social climate of the classroom. Turner et al. (2011) provide questions for consideration:

- Is the classroom supportive or threatening?
- What are students' expectations that they can learn?
- To what extent do students value the opportunity to participate in learning activities?

Relationally, developing a sense of belonging for youth contributes to emotional engagement. This occurs when teachers create caring and supportive environments

(Fredricks et al., 2004). Instructionally, students are motivated by authentic work that is connected to their real life, inquiry-based instruction, and control over learning activities (Shernoff et al., 2003)

### **The Urban Student.**

Wallace and Chhuon (2014) conducted a study to examine student's interpretations of instructional interactions to understand the academic and developmental implications of pedagogy for urban youth of color. The authors found students of color attending urban schools are just as likely to experience engagement, as they are disaffection. Disaffection occurs when students feel misread and alienated by teachers. Student behaviors that are suggestive of disaffection are boredom, anxiety, frustration, disturbance, procrastination, and withdrawal. Wallace and Chhuon argue that disaffection and engagement are a direct result of student interactions with teachers. The study concluded that urban students want to feel heard in the teaching and learning process, students want teachers to facilitate genuine interactions and connections with them, and students want to be taken seriously and occupy a role as co-constructors of learning. Student voice in schools is an essential component of positive development, academic skill mastery, and knowledge attainment. Having their voice validated in school engages students and is particularly important for youth navigating issues of race and class (Wallace & Chhuon).

## **Teachers**

In a seminal review of engagement literature, Fredricks et al. (2004) identify teacher support, which can be interpersonal or academic, as a primary factor that influences behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The authors allude to developing research that suggests a balance of interpersonal and academic support is optimal for cognitive engagement. High social and low academic support is said to create low cognitive engagement. Whereas, high academic and low social support environments generate emotional disengagement because students fear failure. Management style, instructional strategies, and teacher dispositions are key elements of pedagogy that form a cyclical relationship, and when properly balanced they produce student engagement.

### **Pedagogy.**

Classrooms that are associated with engagement contain positive teacher-student relationships based on mutual respect, are community structured, and utilize cooperative learning as a primary instructional strategy (Furlong et al., 2003). Observational studies showed that behavioral engagement increased and students were more strategic about learning in supportive, respectful, and intellectually challenging classrooms (Fredricks et al., 2004). Brophy (1987) defined a supportive classroom as an effective learning environment that is organized, managed, and a precondition to motivation. Teachers must encourage, patiently support learning, and create a safe environment where students do not fear intellectual risks and failures (Brophy, 1987; Sharkey et al., 2014).



Fredericks (2011) expands the argument by suggesting that the primary benefit of well-managed classrooms is maximized learning time. Adequately structured classrooms are defined by procedures, routines, clear expectations, and the emphasis is on work. In these classrooms, the teacher provides security through consistent responses, high and consistent expectations, and clarity about rules and consequences of misbehavior. Students know what they need to do to be successful. In classrooms where this is not present, students perceive teachers to enforce rules arbitrarily, unfairly, and without care, which leads to disaffection and negative academic outcomes (Fredricks).

Brophy (2008) and Fredricks (2011) identify content, activities, instructional delivery, and modeling as elements of pedagogy that contribute to engagement. In engaging classrooms, students are encouraged to construct knowledge, instead of simply reproducing knowledge. Engagement is increased when the content is interesting and meaningful, tasks are varied and challenging, and students perceive autonomy and choice (Fredricks). Engaged students possess the mental strategies to exhibit the cognitive indicators of satisfaction and grit to persevere through intellectual challenges. Teachers can help students cultivate metacognitive strategies through modeling, verbalizing their own thinking, and explaining (Brophy).

### **Relationship.**

Classrooms with positive emotional relationships foster engagement (Sharkey et al., 2014). Skinner and Belmont (2003) conducted a study to examine the impact of three

dimensions of teacher behavior (structure, autonomy, and involvement) on students' behavioral and emotional engagement across a school year. The results of the study identified a positive correlation between teacher behaviors and student engagement.

Skinner and Belmont (2003) concluded that motivation flourishes when students' psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and involvement/relatedness are met by teacher behaviors. The psychological needs are competence, autonomy, and involvement/relatedness. Competence is cultivated when students perceived a structured classroom, which includes clearly communicated expectations, consistent feedback and support, and instruction adjusted to the student level. Autonomy is providing choice in learning activities and connecting the content to children's interests. Involvement/relatedness is relationship building between teachers and students, which requires spending time, affection, and purposeful interaction (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Skinner and Belmont (1993) recommend that education reform should prioritize teacher-student interactions. Teacher behaviors have been proven to boost student engagement, which is great for students who are engaged but detrimental for students who lack motivation. Teachers treat students who exhibit high behavioral engagement in a way that is likely to increase their class participation. Whereas, students who exhibit low behavioral engagement are treated in a way that will likely increase their withdrawal from class. Teacher behaviors must promote the engagement of discouraged students (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Teachers can build strong relationships by exhibiting care (Noddings, 1988), which is evidenced through honesty, fairness, considering student opinions in

decision making, and listening and talking to students (Fredricks, 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

### **The Urban Teacher.**

Fredricks et al. (2004) found that teacher caring and support increased behavioral engagement among diverse elementary, middle, and high students and in low performing schools undergoing reform. In the conclusion of a study that examined the impact of pedagogy for urban youth of color, Wallace and Chhuon (2014) recommend a practice-oriented training model for teacher preparation programs. The proposed model would embed relational aspects of teaching and enhance the teacher's ability to process information without judgment. It is hoped that focusing on these relational elements of teaching will improve teacher response to the multiple and competing demands of self, students, and content effectively.

Student engagement is a multidimensional construct that is influenced by an even larger group of complex and competing elements. Peers, the school context, the individual student, and teachers impact a student's level of engagement or disaffection. The remainder of this review will more thoroughly examine the role of an urban teacher through an analysis of teacher dispositions, instructional strategies, and discourse specific to urban schools.

## **Dispositions**

In the absence of a universal definition, researchers looking to examine the dispositions of teachers turned to lexical explanations. Generally, terms such as, “innate qualities, learned qualities, habits of mind, ways of behaving, values, beliefs, and attitudes,” were used in the literature (Thompson, Randsdell, & Rousseau, 2005, p.24). In addition, the standards of state or national professional organizations sometimes served as a guide to assess dispositions (Thornton, 2006). Researchers have proposed definitions to further develop the concept. Wenzlaff (1998) defines dispositions as intentional trends in actions that are equivalent to habitual frame of mind. According to Taylor and Wasiesko (2000), dispositions are perceptions or beliefs that guide action (as cited in Thompson, et al., 2005). Katz (1993) describes dispositions as the tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily, a pattern of behavior that is directed toward a broad goal.

While a common definition may not exist, researchers do agree that dispositions determine behavior. This belief is evidenced through Ritchhart’s (2001) definition of thinking dispositions. Ritchhart argues that thinking dispositions represent characteristics that motivate abilities toward productive thinking and are recognizable in the patterns of one’s frequently exhibited and voluntary behavior. Dispositions help activate relevant knowledge, and bring the knowledge to remembrance to understand and process situations. An important component for teacher practice is that Ritchhart believes dispositions are prerequisites for behavior, and that the very existence and influence of these dispositions make up our intellectual character.

Talbert-Johnson (2006) deemed qualified and effective teachers as the most essential element in improving student achievement, especially in urban schools. Teacher effectiveness has been linked to teacher behaviors, which Collier (2005) claims are governed by a special belief system, dispositions. In addition to guiding behavior, dispositions influence teachers' instructional decisions. The relationship between teacher dispositions and teacher effectiveness is made visible through successful teaching and learning (Johnson, 2005; Wenzlaff, 1998). Researchers highlight certain teacher dispositions that impact engagement such as having high expectations (Fredricks, 2011), being supportive (Turner et al., 2011), providing authentic and challenging pedagogical experiences (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014), exhibiting a positive and warm attitude (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), and being enthusiastic about the content and students (Early et al. 2014).

Thompson et al. (2005) conducted a study to determine the classroom dispositions that effective classroom teachers have in common. The study's sample consisted of fourteen urban teachers of grades kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup>. The participating teachers held the following common dispositions:

- Effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills
- Maintained an attractive and orderly classroom
- Dressed professionally
- Teacher-centered instructional style
- Helped students use prior knowledge to make connections to current learning
- Established rules and procedures
- Positive rapport with students

The researchers concluded that teacher dispositions are a manifestation of the teachers' intrinsic beliefs about their students. During interviews, the participants shared the belief that all students are capable of learning, expressing ideas, and academic success. The teachers valued students and believed both peers and teachers should respect them.

A single teacher in the study provided an anomaly to the results by exhibiting a lack of rapport with students and having a large number of behavior problems. The classroom was described as lacking rules and routines. When observed, the teacher appeared to reteach a lesson from the previous day. The teacher was described as unenthusiastic and consequently, the students were inattentive. Teachers' beliefs are manifested through interactions during instruction. Instructional interactions that make students feel judged and misunderstood cultivate disaffection and non-participation (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). Student engagement depends on the relationship between teachers and students. Katz (1993) reminds educators that not all dispositions are desirable, and we must work to support the desirable dispositions and reduce the undesirable dispositions.

Adkins-Coleman (2010) studied two teachers in an urban school with a 95% Black student population to identify the beliefs and practices of teachers who successfully facilitated engagement among Black students. The researcher found that teachers influenced student motivation to learn, which cultivated engagement, by creating an environment in which students knew their teachers were interested in them, perceived their teachers as strict but caring, and felt supported to reach the high academic and behavioral expectations teachers established. This study provides evidence of how teacher

dispositions can create effective learning environments in urban schools. Educators must realize that everything they do impacts student learning. (Adkins-Coleman, 2010).

### **Dispositions in Action**

Believing that dispositions are neglected in discussions about teacher quality and in teacher preparation, Thornton (2006) conducted a study to determine what could be learned about teacher dispositions in a model school for urban students. In this model school, sixteen educators were empowered to use best practices to create the entire context for learning. The study aimed to find ways that dispositions could be identified and evidenced.

Thornton's (2006) data collection methods included, participant interviews, observations, and the examination of teacher/student interactions through discourse analysis. Data analysis revealed that the teachers who made a difference with students demonstrated dispositions that made learning come alive in the classroom. Dispositions were represented on a scale from responsive to technical. Responsive dispositions considered the needs and actions of individual students, whereas, technical dispositions focused on the skill of teaching without consideration of individual students. The responsive dispositions identified by Thornton are the ability to be critical, challenging, facilitative, creative, empowering, and connected. Technical dispositions describe teachers who are assuming, accepting, directing, repetitive, controlling, and disconnected.

Participants and observers associated the responsive dispositions with positive learning experiences.

Another significant result of Thornton's (2006) study was the defining of a new construct, dispositions in action. Dispositions in action are defined as, "habits of mind including both cognitive and affective attributes that filter one's knowledge, skills, and beliefs and impact the action one takes in the classroom or professional setting. They are manifested within relationships as meaning-making occurs with others and they are evidenced through interactions in the form of discourse." (p.62). Dispositions in action are meaningful to researchers and practitioners because it is rooted in teaching practice and can be evidenced through classroom discourse (Thornton, 2006).

### **Instructional Strategies**

Instructional strategies are the activities educators use to engage students with the content and help them meet the learning outcomes (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.). Examples of instructional strategies are lectures, discussions, writing, cooperative learning, and individual or group projects. According to the National Research Council (2004), teacher instruction is the most closely related to and the most significant predictor of student learning. Fredrick (2011) theorized that behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, are cultivated by teachers through instructional activities and classroom management. As a result of this connection, student engagement is a measure of instructional quality (Fredricks, 2011).



Literature that conceptualizes engagement and motivation to learn also contributes effective instructional strategies that will cultivate the concepts in the classroom. Fredricks et al. (2004) and Brophy (2008) suggest that to increase student engagement and value in learning, educators must provide authentic activities that students perceive worthy of learning. In addition, educators should discuss the value in the knowledge or skills to be obtained to increase student ownership of the learning process. Through an examination of students' classroom experiences, Shernoff et al. (2003) reported that higher engagement, interest, and learning exists during instruction that students perceive as being relevant and during student-controlled activities such as cooperative learning. Fredricks et al. (2004) support the finding by suggesting that cognitive engagement is increased when students can work with peers on meaningful assignments that are instructionally supported by teachers. Shernoff et al., 2003 recommend that teachers support engagement by providing tasks that offer choice, connecting tasks to students' personal goals, and scaffolding content so students experience incremental success. Providing the appropriate level of risk and challenge is essential because, according to Brophy (1987), students will become bored if the task is too easy and frustrated if it is too difficult. He advises educators to begin instruction on student level and scaffold up while assisting learning through detailed and consistent feedback (Brophy, 1987).

Many studies note that teacher-centered instruction is the most common form of teaching observed in classrooms, specifically lecturing (Fredricks et al., 2004; Johnson 1995; Shernoff et al., 2003; Stephen, Varble, & Tait, 1993; Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). Teacher-centered settings are often focused on recall, repetition, and compliance, and

students are not cognitively engaged (Fredricks et al., 2004, Shernoff et al., 2003).

According to Stephen et al. (1993), urban minority students experience teacher-centered learning environments more than student who attend suburban schools.

Stephen et al. (1993) contend that how urban minority youth are perceived and instructed influences their academic performance. The researchers identified ineffective and effective instructional strategies for urban minority youth. Ineffective instructional strategies include the use of curricula that primarily reflects a European perspective, instructional decisions based exclusively on standardized test data, and teacher-centered learning environments centered on lectures, repetition, and worksheets. Effective teaching practices include establishing high expectations, using teaching material and classroom décor that reflects students' real lives, shifting to a student-centered learning environment, and embedding assessments that value multiple intelligences while monitoring individual students' academic and personal growth. The researchers recommend that teachers evaluate their perceptions of the potential of urban minority youth and refrain from making generalizations based on students' appearance.

As a research and teacher of at-risk urban students, Johnson (1995) documented the transformation of her classroom from a teacher-centered to student-centered environment, where student experiences are the basis for learning. Johnson realized that the school process is structured in a way that does not value student experiences and knowledge. Rather, the system is structured similar to what Friere (1970) calls the "banking concept," which is based on the idea that knowledge is a gift given by those who consider themselves educated to those whom they consider to be uneducated. This is evidenced through

restrictive and overloaded curriculum that doesn't connect with the lived experiences of students. Johnson (1995) advocates for connecting students' lives to teaching and learning in urban schools and creating an environment where both are student and teacher at the same time. Wallace and Chhuon (2014) argue that, "transformational learning happens when students feel like they have helped their teacher to learn through their efforts, accomplishments, and engagement in learning" (p.941).

Johnson based her classroom on Henry Giroux's (1992) concept of critical pedagogy – "an educational process that integrates issues of power, history, self-identity, and the possibility of collective agency and struggle" (as cited in Johnson, 2005). As a result of the instructional shift, Johnson observed that students became more vulnerable with the teacher, students, and academic risk taking; camaraderie developed between the teacher and students that extended beyond their assigned class period, and students felt empowered through problem-based assignments. Ultimately, the classroom transformed into an exciting community where teaching and learning occurred for both teacher and students.

Wallace & Chhuon (2014) examined urban students perceptions of their interactions with teachers during instruction, *instructional interactions*, in an effort to understand effective pedagogy for urban youth. Examples of instructional interactions are when teachers provide feedback on student work, instruct learning activities, facilitate classroom discourse, and manage student behavior. The researchers claim that students' interpretations of their experiences during instructional interactions establish the quality of student-teacher relationships, and leads to either engagement or disaffection.

Wallace and Chhuon (2014) found that the context in which teaching and learning occurs is more significant than a decontextualized facilitation of “best practices.” They perceive teaching to be a relational process that balances behaviors, decisions, and actions. Meaningful learning, and students’ perceptions of being competent and feeling known characterize teacher-student relationships, which the authors call developmental alliances. Developmental alliances are cultivated through authentic and challenging pedagogical experiences. An example of an ideal developmental alliance would be a teacher willingly adapting instruction in response to real time student feedback about not understanding the content. In this situation, the teacher listened to the students and met their needs.

Delivery of the content is just as important as the content. Wallace and Chhuon’s (2014) study participants confirmed that the most common modes of instruction were teacher-centered. The unfortunate reality is that autonomous learning opportunities are limited in urban classrooms that are highly focused on control. Teacher-centered instruction increases disaffection and alienation among students, especially when teachers assign work but do not take the time to explain, or attend to student questions and misunderstandings. Study participants preferred classrooms that provided choice and hands-on learning activities, instead of worksheets and commands such as, “you have to do this” (p.953). Discussion-based instruction also made students feel as though there were contributors to the lesson because their opinions and perspectives were heard and valued.

When giving examples of being heard in class, students described cognitive and emotional engagement with words such as, “My teacher keeps me interested... she keeps me engaged... we’re not doing lectures, we’re actually having discussions and charting and

[the teacher is] asking our opinions” (p.954). Students also described teachers who take the time to explain, use real-life examples that sometimes come from their own experiences, and find commonalities with students to deepen their connection (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014).

Disaffection and engagement are a result of teacher instruction. Effective teaching strategies typically represent a student-centered approach where students are heavily involved in the construction of knowledge. Teacher-centered classrooms that rely on the instructor as the disseminator of knowledge have been proven to engender disaffection. Teachers that cultivate engagement most likely take into account the knowledge and skills to be learned, as well as, who the students are as learners. These teachers adapt instruction to meet the developmental needs and individual interests of students (Shernoff et al. 2003). Student-teacher relationships heavily influence student learning. Having their voice validated in school engages students and is particularly important for youth navigating issues of race and class (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014).

### **Discourse**

The use of language to exchange thoughts and ideas is the lexical definition of discourse, according to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary. Gee (1999) explains how people use language to inform, act, and establish identity in an effort to obtain the things they value or to gain acceptance. Therefore, how one uses language and how one is responded to is significant. In addition to discourse, with a lower case “d,” Gee (1999) describes the use of Discourse

with a capital “D,” as a way to, “combine and integrate language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (Gee, 1999, p.29).” This review examines Discourse as it occurs between teachers in urban schools, as well as, classroom discourse between teachers and students, and between students.

### **Discourse Between Teachers**

Language supports groups, cultures, and institutions (Gee, 1999) such as the education system. When language is used to obtain a thing or acceptance within a group, the group is being upheld (Gee, 1999). It is assumed that the participants in the Discourse have adopted the views, beliefs, and values of the group (Paugh & Dudley-Marling, 2011).

Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) explored how teacher talk in an urban school can either bolster or stifle school-based initiatives. The researchers found that within the culture of education, a Deficit Discourse, which focuses on what students cannot do, is a powerful dominating force in teacher conversation. Resisting the Deficit Discourse challenges a teacher’s loyalty to the system of education that professes to have the ability to fix failing children, as if it is the children that must be fixed. Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) believe there is a correlation between thoughts, language, and student performance. They recommend that teacher education discuss the power of Discourse to help teachers challenge, rather than succumb to, Deficit Discourse.

## **Discourse Between Teachers and Students**

Teacher and student narratives enrich the learning environment and lead to deeper understanding (Zuengler, 2011). Communication between teachers and students can be a form of socialization, inspiration, and instruction.

Zuenler (2011) examined how classroom discourse influenced, and was influenced by, a culturally and linguistically diverse, low-income student body. Discourse served many functions, it was used to make students aware of the classroom norms, demonstrate student knowledge, engage ESL students through pop culture references, and establish behavior and work expectations. However, varying structures between groups, cultures, and institutions can be confusing to students. The author recommends that educators make students aware of and help them navigate situations with varying expectations. Zuengler (2011) describes an occurrence when a student's correct response was ignored because it was not given in the correct format. In this example, being rejected for not mastering academic language caused the student to refuse further participation. As the example shows, discourse is a factor in engagement orientation. Wallace and Chhuon (2014) determined that students feel known when their opinions are encouraged, and not being heard leads to resignation and withdrawal. Behaviors descriptive of teachers who don't listen include walking away and ignoring questions, not offering assistance, and overpowering students when they speak.

Gee (1999) says that, "to understand anything fully you need to know who is saying it and what the person saying it is trying to do." Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan, and Rosenthal

(2013) aimed to identify the instructional strategies employed by a respected Black, male, mathematics teachers to help his students find purpose in learning Algebra. The researchers observed the teacher use his real life experience to relate to students as someone who has been where they are. When students exhibited behaviors that were detrimental to the learning process, the teacher would stop instruction and give a speech and addressing the students' dispositions to learn. He recognized misbehavior as a strategy to avoid challenging academic tasks. The goals of the discourse between this teacher and his students were to encourage, exhibit care, redirect behavior, and motivate students to learn.

McNeil and Pimental (2010) investigated classroom discourse in three urban science classrooms. Their findings are representative of classrooms in multiple disciplines. Classroom discourse is most often dominated by teacher talk that follows a predictable pattern, the teacher asks a question, a student selected by the teacher responds, and the teacher evaluates the response. This style of discussion is not conducive to a student-centered learning environment. In the classrooms that were dominated by teacher talk, the students played a lesser role in discussion. Student comments did not reference their peers' ideas, which may be evidence that students were not thinking critically about the content (McNeil & Pimentel, 2010).

Instead, the researchers advise teachers to vary discourse depending on the goal of the lesson. Teachers should cultivate discourse through learning activities that stimulate conversation by strategically asking open-ended questions that challenge students to provide explanations (Fredricks, 2011; Johnson, Uline, & Perez, 2011; McNeil & Pimentel,



2010). Topics that students find interesting should be used as the basis for learning (Knaus, 2009). This practice acknowledges that value of students' prior knowledge and experiences by connecting to their life outside of the school (Fredricks, 2011). In practice, classroom discourse should sound like students developing, sharing, connecting, supporting, and clarifying ideas (Fredricks, 2011; McNeil & Pimentel, 2010).

### **Discourse Between Students**

Discourse between students is essential for learning and identity development. In a classroom that uses student discourse as a catalyst for learning one should hear a significant amount of talking, question asking, explaining, problem solving, grappling, and thought articulation (Johnson et al., 2011). Johnson et al. (2011) interviewed principals of high-achieving schools to determine what they notice when observing classrooms. The principals overwhelmingly identified discourse as their focus. In addition to being a learning tool, the principals and Fredricks et al. (2004) perceived student discourse to be a method of assessment that provides evidence of engagement and learning. Particularly, cognitive engagement can be assessed through discourse.

Mutual respect in classrooms is important to student identity development. Respect is significant because it creates classrooms where students feel safe enough to share their ideas without fear of insult from the teacher or peers (Furlong et al., 2003). Student relationships are strengthened as they listen to each other, edit each others work, and talk through life's issues (Knaus, 2009). Discourse in peer relationships can also cultivate

engagement by sharing information, modeling academic achievement and motivation, and encouraging positive attitudes (Fredricks, 2011).

Gee (1999) defines discourse analysis as, “the study of language-in-use” (p.8). If researchers examine the way language is used in urban classrooms, different ways of saying, doing, and being that relate to the lives of these youths will be discovered. Educators can then respond by creating environments where teaching and learning is responsive to the realities of urban students’ lives.

### **Conclusion**

Initial student engagement research was aimed at increasing student’s connection with school in an effort to decrease disengagement, delinquency, and dropout. Current research has evolved to view engagement as a pedagogical tool that, as catalyst for learning, benefits all students . In an example of effective pedagogy for students of color attending urban schools, Wallace and Chhuon (2014) used student voice to prove that engagement is highest in student-centered learning environments with teachers who have the capacity, dispositions, and desire to authentically know students and adjust instruction to fit their academic and social needs. Multiple studies prove that engagement is predictive of achievement across diverse populations (Early, et al., 2014; Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks 2011; Sharkey, et al. 2014).

In a report that described 21 instruments used to measure student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2011), 67% of the instruments were self-report, 19% observational, and

14% required teachers to report their perceptions of students. Future research should increase the amount of observational data that is collected in classrooms to provide a richer understanding of the classroom aspects that promote engagement. Additional research is also needed regarding engagement in older students and students of color.

Teacher dispositions influence student engagement and thereby impact learning. Cambourne's (1995) Conditions of Learning provide a framework for learning that is inclusive of teacher dispositions and engagement, and reflects the literature examined in this review. Cambourne theorizes that the following conditions must be present for learning to occur:

- Immersion – students must be immersed in what they are expected to learn.
- Demonstration – students must first observe what they are expected to learn.
- Engagement – students must actively engage with the content to be learned.
- Expectations – students must receive messages that they are capable of mastery from significant others who hold high expectations for them.
- Responsibility – students must have choice in the way they engage with the content to be learned.
- Approximations – students must feel free to make mistakes while learning.
- Employment – students must have the opportunity for authentic practice.
- Response – students must receive appropriate feedback from more knowledgeable others (Cambourne, 1995).

As Cambourne (1995) demonstrated, engagement and the role of the significant other, or teachers, are essential for learning to occur.

Through instructional decisions, teachers influence the way students interact with content. Engagement occurs when students believe they can learn, perceive a purpose for learning, and feels safe to take academic risks (Cambourne, 1995). Cultivating motivation to learn (Bropy 1987) is analogous to developing these dispositions in students, which as Cambourne (1995) suggests, “is difficult for teachers who dislike children” (p.187).

This review has examined the impact of student engagement on learning, especially the learning of African American students who attend urban schools. Future engagement research should further explore the impact of teacher dispositions on student engagement.

The next, and final, manuscript in this dissertation in practice is a case study that represents the researcher’s inquiry into the extent to which student engagement occurs in an urban school. Specifically, the case study examines the impact of student engagement on student learning in an urban school with a majority Black student population, as evidenced by student actions and discourse.

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## CHAPTER 4: AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN A MAJORITY BLACK URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

When asked to describe their least favorite class and make suggestions for its improvement, students at Reed High School, an urban school in southern United States, recounted learning experiences that are stereotypically characteristic of urban schools. The students' voices, captured in Table 9, support the popular narrative that educators in urban schools lack the capacity to engage students.

Table 9: Students Responses Regarding Their Least Favorite Class

Student	Student Reponses
Student 1	"My least [favorite] class is English because we don't really do as much as I thought we were going to do. Also, my teacher rarely teaches, she just sits at the computer and makes us read and assign[s] thousands of essay[s]. What can make it better is for her to teach and do actual work."
Student 2	"My least favorite class is my second period because my teacher does not provide the help needed for us to successfully pass her class. She refuses to teach she wants us to learn on our own but doesn't give us useful resources."
Student 3	"The class I like the least is Chemistry. What would make it better is if the teacher wasn't rude, intimidating, and piling work on top of work and giving back our work to study [from] them."

The purpose of this action research case study was to explore the impact of student engagement on student learning in an urban school with a majority Black student population. As action research, an educational practitioner took on the role of researcher and, in collaboration with administration and teachers at the research site, conducted this study in an effort to better understand and improve practice. As a case study, everything

the researcher experienced at Reed High School informed the study. Meetings and classroom observations primarily informed this exploration of the impact of student engagement on student learning. In addition, this research provided insight into the process of conducting research in an urban school.

Milner (2012) defines urban schools as institutions that, by way of the students who attend them, are adversely affected by issues of transportation, concentrated poverty, high student mobility, and underfunding. Additionally, urban schools disproportionately serve students of color (Milner, 2012; Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Students of color are defined as non-White individuals from non-dominant communities (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). Black students were the focus of this research study. The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably to represent people whose lineage connects them to the Black ethnic groups of Africa.

The NAEP is the largest nationally representative assessment that measures elementary and secondary students' skills and knowledge in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, foreign language, U.S. history, world history, and technology and engineering literacy at grades 4, 8, and 12. An average scale score indicates student performance on the NAEP. Figure 8 shows that between 1992 and 2015 the performance of Black students on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP reading test has not deviated more than seven points above or below the lowest score of the Basic level, which is 243. Even the highest score of 250 that was attained by students in 2013 fails to achieve the Proficient level of 281 by 31 points.

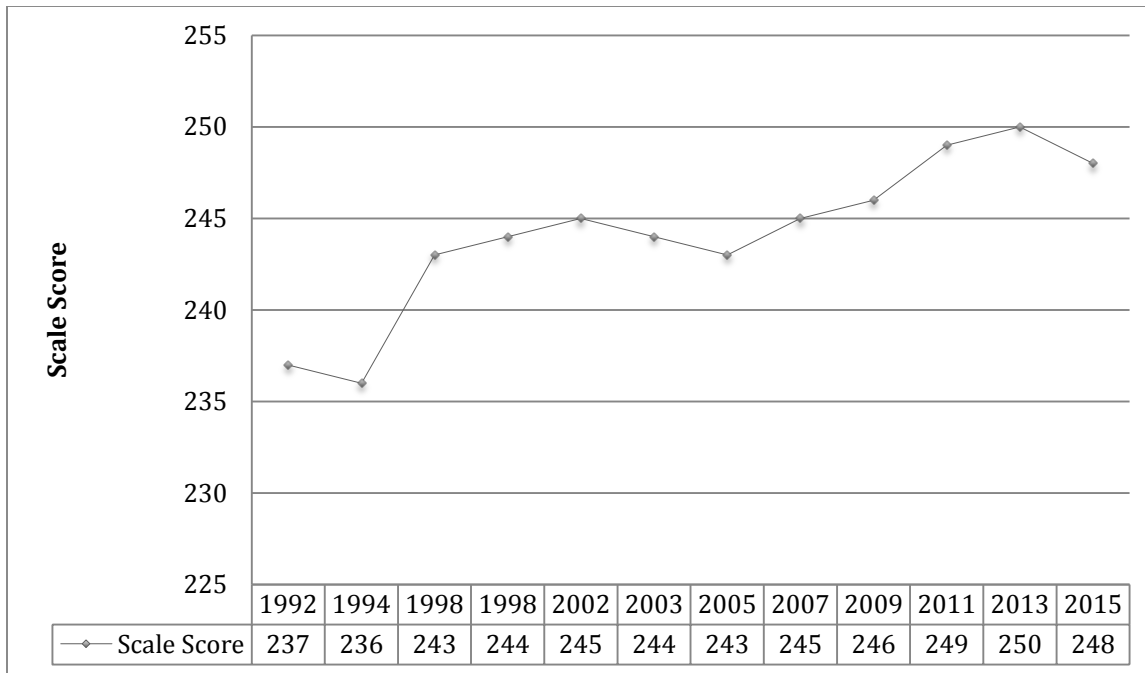


Figure 8: Trend in eighth-grade NAEP reading average scores for Black students

National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). The NAEP Reading Achievement Levels by Grade. Retrieved from [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_2015/#reading/groups?grade=8](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading/groups?grade=8)

Increasingly, achievement outcomes prove that the American education system does not universally educate Black children proficiently, especially students who attend urban schools. In spite of bleak achievement outcomes, voices of advocacy rise through the dissemination of research that shares the experiences of educators who effectively engage students of color (Delpit, 2002, 2006, 2012; Milner 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 2009; Meire, 2002; Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). Carrying the experiential knowledge of a practitioner, and armed with an understanding of urban education and engagement literature, the researcher entered Reed High School to gain an increased understanding of teaching and learning in a urban school through the lens of student engagement.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this case study is to explore the impact of student engagement on student learning at an urban school, with a majority Black student population. The topic will be explored through an inquiry of how student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse are represented in the school at large, and classrooms specifically. The conceptual framework that was used to analyze this study includes the constructs of student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse. This section provides the researcher-selected definition of each concept and a description of how the concept is evidenced in schools and classrooms.

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement is a multidimensional construct that is defined as a student's behavioral, emotional, and cognitive response to the learning environment (Sharkey, Quirk, & Mayworm, 2014; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Behavioral engagement refers to student participation, specifically conduct and involvement in academic tasks and social activities. Behavioral engagement is critical for positive educational outcomes including dropout prevention. It is most commonly measured through attendance records, conduct reports, teacher ratings, and self-reporting. Observing participation, enthusiasm, and attentiveness are additional means to measure behavioral engagement that will be used during this case study.

Emotional engagement focuses on students' affective reactions to the school environment, teachers, students, and academics (Fredricks et al., 2004). A few of the reactions associated with emotional engagement are interest, boredom, happiness, and anxiety. Emotional engagement is often measured in conjunction with behavioral engagement.

Fredricks et al. (2004) define cognitive engagement as students' investment in learning that will result in effort applied to mastering challenging concepts. Its roots in both psychology and learning literature are equally important. The psychology aspect includes evidence of internal investment such as exceeding requirements, preferring hard work, valuing knowledge and striving for mastery. While the learning literature outlines the metacognitive strategies that invested students will employ to work successfully such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Measuring cognition can be challenging because it has to be inferred from observed behavior or assessed through self-reporting. Additionally, it doesn't report on students' full capacity because it can only be observed at the depth the activity requires. In addition to observation and self-reporting, cognitive engagement can also be informed by rating the quality and depth of classroom discourse. Observations examining student actions and discourse will be used to measure cognitive engagement during this study.

## **Teacher Dispositions**

During the 1960's the Gallup Organization developed an instrument, the Teacher Perceiver Interview (TPI), to improve the selection of effective educators. The TPI focused on the following twelve themes identified to be possessed by talented teacher: Mission, Empathy, Rapport Drive, Individualized Perception, Listening, Investment, Input Drive, Action, Innovation, Gestalt, Objectivity, and Focus. In 1995, Martin Haberman created the Star Teacher Interview to improve the selection of teacher for urban schools. It rated teachers based on seven functions that represented personality traits and situational demands. The functions include Persistence, Protecting Student's Learning, Application of Generalizations, Approach to At-Risk Students, Personal/Professional Orientation, Burnout, and Fallibility (Haberman Educational Foundation, 2006). Both the TPI and the Star Teacher Interview were aimed at identifying the dispositions of teachers that would be effective in urban schools.

Researchers highlight certain teacher dispositions that impact engagement such as having high expectations (Fredricks, 2011), being supportive (Turner et al., 2011), providing authentic and challenging pedagogical experiences (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014), exhibiting a positive and warm attitude (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), and being enthusiastic about the content and students (Early et al. 2014).

This case study will use Thornton's (2006) definition of dispositions in action. Dispositions in action are defined as, "habits of mind including both cognitive and affective attributes that filter one's knowledge, skills, and beliefs and impact the action one takes in

the classroom or professional setting. They are manifested within relationships as meaning-making occurs with others and they are evidenced through interactions in the form of discourse.” (p.62).

## **Discourse**

In a definition of discourse, Gee (1999) explains how people use language to inform, act, and establish identity in an effort to obtain the things they value or to gain acceptance. He adds that, “to understand anything fully you need to know who is saying it and what the person saying it is trying to do.” Therefore, how one uses language and how one is responded to is significant. Gee (1999) also describes the use of Discourse with a capital “D,” as a way to, “combine and integrate language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (Gee, 1999, p.29).” This case study examined Discourse as it occurred at Reed High School between teachers, specifically the Deficit Discourse, and classroom discourse between teachers and students, and between students.

Puagh and Dudley-Marling (2011) found that within the culture of education, a Deficit Discourse, which focuses on what students cannot do, is a powerful dominating force in teacher conversation. Resisting the Deficit Discourse challenges a teacher’s loyalty to the system of education that professes to have the ability to fix failing children, as if it is the children that must be fixed. Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) believe there is a correlation between teacher thoughts, teacher language, and student performance.



Between teachers and students, teachers have the ability to cultivate classroom discourse through learning activities that stimulate conversation by strategically asking open-ended questions that challenge students to provide explanations (Fredricks, 2011; Johnson, Uline, & Perez, 2011; McNeil & Pimentel, 2010). Additionally, topics that students find interesting should be used as the basis for learning (Knaus, 2009). In practice, classroom discourse should sound like students developing, sharing, connecting, supporting, and clarifying ideas (Fredricks, 2011; McNeil & Pimentel, 2010). Between students in classrooms, discourse is learning tool. According to Johnson et al. (2011) and Fredricks et al. (2004) student discourse is a method of assessment that provides evidence of engagement and learning.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of student engagement on student learning in an urban school with a majority Black student population, as evidenced by student actions and discourse.

### **Research Site – The Community**

The site of this case study is Reed High School. It is located in a community with a rich history that is important for researchers and educators to consider when engaging with the community's youth. The Jackson community is located in the urban core of a large

metropolitan city in the Southern United States. A 2015 article by the city's most notable newspaper published troubling statistics about the predominantly Black community, calling it the city's worst neighborhood. The unemployment rate is 23.8%, one out of every five homes is vacant, the median household income is \$15,493, idle people walk the streets daily, and the neighborhood is without a grocery store. However, the community did not always have a negative reputation.

Research Historian Tana Porter (2004) documented the complex development of Jackson. On the least desirable land in the area, the segregated community was established in the 1880's for African American domestic workers to live near the houses of their White employers. Strict boundaries that African Americans were prohibited from crossing at night, particularly a railroad track and a street named "Division," separated them from wealthy White neighborhoods. The sense of community established among the Black population sustained them through the degrading Jim Crow era, a time of institutionalized segregation laws aimed at oppressing free Black people (Porter, 2004). Churches and schools were developed, and by the 1950's the neighborhood, "had grown into a thriving Black community with owner-occupied homes and Black-owned shops lining the streets" (p. 295).

Despite the progress, in the years leading to integration Jackson began to struggle. Limited employment opportunities, numerous low-income families, abandoned commercial buildings, poor housing conditions, and a high population density, as a result of the city building multiple apartment complexes and public housing projects, plagued the neighborhood. City development projects such as interstates, government buildings, and

athletic complexes displaced thousands of Black residents. At the time of integration in the 1960's Black people were no longer restricted to doing business in their communities with Black only clientele. Black businesses, shoppers, travelers, students, and homeowners dispersed within the larger city, leaving vacant houses, unsuccessful businesses, and people constrained by poverty.

### **Research Site – The School**

Reed High School is a public school located on the edge of the Jackson community, within one of the nations' largest urban school districts. Memorabilia, yearbooks, newspaper clippings, and art about Reed High and its students crowd a small room in the middle of the school's campus. A historical society was established in 1997 to provide a permanent site for artifacts that preserve the school's legacy. For the researcher, the story of Reed's development unfolded through various local newspaper articles conserved in the historical society's museum dating back to the summer of 1961.

Founded in 1895 Reed was the first public school for African Americans in the city and surrounding areas. The school's name and location changed multiple times. The latest relocation in 1952, which is the school's current site, occurred despite protest from neighboring White residents who didn't want the school built on land designated for White occupancy. Nevertheless, rich academic departments in science, home economics, business, agriculture, industrial arts, cosmetology, music, and theatre developed. Students at Reed High used second hand, outdated books that were discarded from predominately

White schools and the public library. Some books contained messages that were addressed, "Dear Nigger..." Ignoring prejudiced mindsets, the school aimed to build pride in students by emphasizing the achievements of Black scholars.

Reed was the only Black school in the city to survive integration. Efforts to populate the school with White students began in 1969. The school board would not mandate White students in the surrounding neighborhood to attend Reed. Instead it closed vocational programs in White schools and encouraged the White students interested in the courses to attend Reed. When this voluntary integration plan did not work the school board redrew the school zone lines to increase White enrollment. As a result, some White families matriculated to private schools and others rented or purchased homes in neighborhoods zoned for predominately White schools.

Black middle class students also transferred to predominately White schools because of Reed's reputation as being an academically and socially inferior institution. Rumors about crime (muggings, fights, rapes, beatings, intimidation) and discipline contributed to the school's negative reputation even though both Black and White students attending Reed said the claims were false. Reed High School never fully integrated, yet withstood the transition. Many schools in Black neighborhoods closed due to declining enrollment as Black students were bussed out of the community to neighboring White schools.

As time passed, Reed High School graduated numerous distinguished alumni including a school superintendent, professional athletes, actors, radio personalities, a chief judge, medical doctors, dentists, physicist, chemist, higher education administrators, as

well as, local and state politicians. The school and surrounding community took great pride in its championship athletics department and nationally known marching band.

Now, 46 years after initial integration attempts, the student population at Reed High School is still a product of the once de jure segregation. During the 2014 – 2015 school year, the student population was 89.1% Black or African American, 7.7% Hispanic/Latino, 1.4% White, and 1.4% Two or More Races. 82% qualify for free or reduced priced lunch, and 13.9% are disabled. A glance at the county’s School Attendance Zone Map shows a gathering of students from the city’s historically Black neighborhoods as far as eight miles away from the school. A recent rezoning attempted to increase Reed’s student enrollment, “but it didn’t pull any of the kids from [Bryant High School] nearby, those White parents weren’t having that” (Amari Ashton, personal communication, May 22, 2016).

Reed High School is characteristic of Milner’s (2012) definition of an urban school: an institution that, by way of the students who attend them, are adversely affected by issues of transportation, concentrated poverty, high student mobility rates, and underfunding. Often urban schools are surrounded by businesses, as opposed to being positioned in residential neighborhoods. Additionally, urban schools disproportionately serve students of color (Milner, 2012; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). Wallace and Chhuon (2014) add that community problems impacting urban schools are linked to larger sociopolitical issues.

Reed still bears problems that have afflicted the school since desegregation in the early 1970’s such as low student enrollment, an undesirable public perception, low student

achievement, and a small number of advanced courses compared to other schools. Table 10 displays the standardized test performance of Reed’s students from 2004 to 2015.

Table 10: Reed High School Standardized Assessment Scores in Reading and Math and School Grade, 2004 - 2015

School Term	School Grade	Percent of Students at or above grade level in Reading	Percent of Students at or above grade level in Math
2014 - 2015	C	20	19
2013 - 2014	C	24	39
2012 - 2013	B	33	46
2011 - 2012	C	32	44
2010 - 2011	C	19	57
2009 - 2010	B	20	59
2008 - 2009	D	21	63
2007 - 2008	D	22	60
2006 - 2007	D	22	54
2005 - 2006	F	14	41
2004 - 2005	F	8	31

Florida Department of Education. (2016). *Grading Florida’s Public Schools 2014*. Retrieved from <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/default.asp>

The reduced amount of advanced courses is attributed to low enrollment numbers and low standardized assessment scores. Since the 70’s school administration has faced the temptation to fill advanced classes with students who are not ready for the caliber of work just to justify offering the course.

Despite its challenges, Reed High School provides rigorous coursework through the International Baccalaureate program, a small number of Advanced Placement courses, and the Medical Arts Magnet Program. Each of these programs attracts high caliber students whose intellectual and social skills are then cultivated for higher education. Conversations with school leaders expose an urgency to restore the school pride of previous years, recruit

and retain quality teachers, and most importantly, drastically improve student performance.

## **Participants**

As a Graduate Research Assistant, the researcher collected data for a study that examined the usage of technology in classroom instruction during the school year prior to beginning this case study. Participation in the technology study resulted in the researcher building relationships with administration, academic coaches, and teachers. The principal recommended that this case study be conducted with the teachers who were participants in the technology research because of the previously established relationships.

Reed High School was the subject of this case study. Therefore, each formal and informal experience at the site informed the case study. Primary participants included the principal, the assistant principal, the science coach, the social studies/digital coach, a math teacher, a foreign language teacher, and a history teacher. The race/ethnicity of participants was not included in this research report to discourage the creation of general assumptions about teaching and learning in urban schools based on race/ethnicity. The aim of this research was to examine the extent to which student engagement was present in the learning environment. There were a total of 55 teachers employed at Reed High School. The number and percentage of teachers at each post-secondary degree level is displayed in Table 11. The degree level of the primary participants was unknown to the researcher.

Table 11: Degree Level of Teachers at Reed High School

<b>Degree Level</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of Teacher</b>
Bachelor’s Degree	36	65.5
Master’s Degree	17	30.9
Specialist Degree	1	1.8
Doctorate	1	1.8
Total All Degrees	55	100.0

Florida Department of Education (2015). *School, district, and state accountability report*. Retrieved from [http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbspar/year1415/nclb1415.cfm?dist\\_schl=48\\_5711#teacher](http://doeweb-prd.doe.state.fl.us/eds/nclbspar/year1415/nclb1415.cfm?dist_schl=48_5711#teacher)

Students were indirect participants of the research students. Their perspectives on teachers and instruction were gathered through a teacher-facilitated reflection.

### **Positionality**

This research study is a component of an action research dissertation, which Herr & Anderson (2015) define as, “inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them” (p.3). Since action research is best done in collaboration with others, participants from Reed High School were co-constructors of this case study.

Positionality describes the relationship between the researcher and the participants. The researcher can be classified as either an insider, outside, or in the middle, which is called collaborative research. The researcher planned this study to be reciprocally collaborative, conducted by a team composed of an outsider (the researcher) and insiders (the participants). However, as Herr & Anderson (2015) advised, insiders are sometimes too busy to participate in research and are not always rewarded by their organization for



doing so. Therefore, the positionality between researcher and participants was ultimately defined as “outsider in collaboration with insiders” (p.49). Both the investigator and participants worked together to determine the priorities of the research, but it was the responsibility of the researcher to guide the study. Overall, positionality is fluid, so the researcher occupied different or multiple positions on the continuum at any given time during the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Perspective on society can also determine positionality. This research was conducted through the lens of an African American, female, teacher who was employed within, and is indigenous to, the city where the case study takes place. Academic research is often concerned with how scholars who share common identities with study participants such as occupation, language, race, and culture can remain objective. Aldridge (2003) advances the writings of W.E.B. DuBois and John Hope Franklin who argue that researchers are sometimes members of the communities they investigate, and they do not have to separate themselves to produce quality work. They must, however, use sound research methods.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Student Action Coding Sheet.**

Erdogan, Campbell, & Abd-Hamid’s (2011) Student Action Coding Sheet, SACS (Appendix B), was the observation tool used to examine student engagement in classrooms. The purpose of the instrument is to, “investigate the extent to which student-

centered actions occur in a science classroom (p.1313). The SACS was developed based on student-centered instruction literature. It was used 67 times in 22 classrooms to establish reliability. National and international context experts reviewed the SACS to determine validity. The SACS helps teachers see the way instruction influences student actions.

The SACS has four main columns. In column one, student actions are classified into three cognitive domains based on Bloom's Taxonomy – Lower, Medium, and Highest. The Lower cognitive domain represents the skill of remembering and the initial stages of understanding. The Medium cognitive domain represents the higher stages of understanding and applying. The Highest cognitive domain represents analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Column two lists indicators of cognition in the form of student actions. In column three, an example of a student action is provided for each indicator. For example, the first indicator of student action listed in the lower cognitive domain is, "Positive interactions with the teacher." The example of student action that is used to describe that indicator is, "Discussing a topic of interest with the teacher to develop ideas or share interesting discoveries. Last, column four is used to code the number of times each student action occurs during a fifteen minute time period.

The SACS is based on the idea that students are best prepared to transfer academic knowledge to real life situations when it is learned through inquiry or authentic problem solving, rather than obtained through the memorization and repetition of teacher directed learning. Erdogan, Campbell, & Abd-Hamid (2011) contend that cognitive engagement and interest increases in student-centered learning environments where students are free to

construct knowledge. While the SACS was developed to observe instruction in science classrooms, its foundational principles are applicable to multiple disciplines.

The developers of the SACS granted the researcher permission to adapt the instrument for use in multiple content areas (Appendix C). The researcher adjusted the format of the document to include horizontal and vertical lines for visual separation between categories and add section to write notes. The most significant adjustment to the layout was combining the observation instrument and the Subcategory Indicator Explanation document that lists examples of student actions for each indicator. The modification allows the observer to view both student action indicators and examples of student actions while making decisions during observations. Contextually, the examples of student actions were modified to fit any discipline instead of being science specific.

The SACS observes student actions that occur while students are constructing knowledge. During an observation, a tick mark is added next to the student action as many times as it occurs in five minutes. This is completed for three – five minute intervals; thus, the duration of each observation using the Student Action Coding Sheet was fifteen minutes. For the remainder of the approximately fifty-five minute class period, the research made anecdotal notes using the two-column notes format.

### **Two-Column Notes**

In The MIT Center for Organization Learning's (1996) *Learning History Field Manual*, the two-column note taking format is described as an "annotated narrative" (p.4-3). This

format allows the researcher to distinguish between multiple voices in the context and record more than one narrative at a time. The narratives of primary participants, in this case the students, were recorded in the right column. Classroom dialogue and quotes by teachers and students. The left column was used to record the actions of the teachers. The two-column note taking format was used in this case student because it assists the researcher in effectively recording the voice of participants.

### **Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form**

An additional instrument used in this research was the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form (Appendix D) developed by University of Missouri Kansas City's Institute for Urban Education, IUE. IUE is recognized as one of the best urban teacher preparation programs in the nation. The purpose of the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form is to assess the development of the preservice teachers' professional dispositions throughout the program. Professional disposition is described as the preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes that inform professional decision-making, observable character, and teaching practices in an urban environment (Jennifer Waddell, personal communication, June 12, 2014).

The Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form provided a list of twenty teacher indicators and dispositions that are essential for effective teaching in urban schools. For this research, the director of IUE identified ten of the twenty indicators that are most frequently detected when observing preservice teachers in the field (Jennifer Waddell,

personal communication, June 12, 2014). Table 12 outlines the indicators and disposition that each indicator represents.

Table 12: Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form - Teacher Dispositions and Indicators

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Dispositions</b>
Speaks in a manner appropriate to the learning environment.	Respect
Demonstrates appropriate social skills in professional and social interactions with others.	Professionalism
Demonstrates appropriate command of both oral and written communication.	Skills
Relationships with students, peers, supervisors, family members, staff and faculty are emotionally, verbally, and physically appropriate.	Respect
Demonstrates an ability to work with ethnically diverse populations.	Respect
Demonstrates an ability to work with exceptional learners.	Respect
Demonstrated enthusiasm for his/her content area.	Enthusiasm
Exhibits a belief that all children can learn AND	Resiliency
Treats all students fairly according to their needs.	Perseverance
Holds all students to high expectations	Resiliency

University of Missouri Kansas City. (2014). Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form

The indicators and dispositions identified on the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form parallels those mentioned in student engagement and teacher dispositions research. In this case study both sources were used to identify the dispositions that influenced teacher actions that appeared to cultivate student engagement. The participating teachers' dispositions and resulting actions were identified through observations, formal and informal conversations, and student reflections about learning.

## **Research Design**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact of student engagement on student learning at an urban high school with a majority Black student population. Data were collected through preliminary research, informal and formal observations, and formal

and informal meetings. In total, the researcher spent eighteen days at the researcher site, completed nineteen classroom observations, conducted six formal meetings, and gathered data from numerous informal conversations and observations. The researcher's aim was to collect data that informed the components of the conceptual framework: engagement, dispositions, and discourse.

### **Preliminary Research – Relationship Building.**

Preliminary data consisted of experiences the researcher had at the site with participants prior to the start of the case study. The experiences guided the researcher towards the topic of student engagement, justified conducting the case study, and helped confirm the feasibility of the research. Preliminary data was collected through participation in a previous research study and classroom observations.

As a Graduate Research Assistant, the researcher collected data for a study that examined the usage of technology in classroom instruction during the school year prior to the start of this case study. The researcher was involved in emails between the Principal Investigator and the participants, classroom observations, focus groups, and informal conversations. Participation in the technology study resulted in the researcher building relationships with administration, academic coaches, staff, and teachers.

During the summer of 2015, a new principal was assigned to Reed High School. During a meeting with the technology research team Principal Randolph shared his philosophy about the academic condition of the school along with his vision for the

upcoming year. The researcher took this time to inquire about the possibility of conducting a case study to examine student engagement. Principal Randolph concurred that the topic was relevant and he agreed to more formally discuss the project in the future.

Preliminary data were also collected through two classroom observations. The observations helped the researcher learn how to use the Student Action Coding Sheet. Additionally, the observations provided baseline data about student engagement at Reed High School. All forms of preliminary data provided evidence that measuring engagement was possible and necessary to inform teacher practice and ultimately increase student learning.

### **Informal and Formal Observations.**

Reed High School is the single case for this study; therefore, everything the researcher observed was data. Informal observations were unstructured and unplanned opportunities when the researcher gained insight into engagement, discourse, and teacher dispositions at Reed. These opportunities occurred while waiting in the front office, traveling between classrooms, walking the campus with participants, and during afterschool tutoring. Data from informal observations were recorded in the two-column note format.

A total of seventeen formal classroom observations were conducted during the course of this study based on the availability and preference of the classroom teacher or academic coach. Both Ms. Lucy and Mr. Alexander allowed the researcher to enter their

classrooms at her discretion. Observations with the other participants were either planned or occurred when the researcher was invited to accompany an academic coach on a brief classroom visit.

Each class period lasted fifty-two minutes on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and forty-four minutes on Wednesday. During each formal observation student engagement was measured using the SACS, which took fifteen minutes of the class period. The researcher spent the remainder of the class period chronicling teacher and student actions and learning activities via two-column notes. During classroom observations, the role of the researcher varied between Complete Observer and Observer as Participant (Creswell, 2014). During times as a Complete Observer, the researcher observed without participating. Occasionally the researcher participated in classroom activities, however, her role as researcher was always known, which can be classified as an Observer Participant.

### **Informal and Formal Meetings.**

Informal meetings were the unplanned conversations that occurred between the researcher and participants either face-to-face or via email. At times, the informal conversations included teachers at Reed who were not themselves participants in the study but worked closely with those who participated. These conversations contributed to the researcher's understanding of teacher dispositions and teacher Discourse.



Formal meetings occurred during specific dates agreed upon by the researcher and participants. The researcher conducted individual formal meetings with the principal, teacher participants, and the science department. Similar to informal meetings, they provided data regarding teacher dispositions and Discourse.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

The next section of this paper contains the data collected from preliminary experiences, informal and formal meetings, and informal and formal observations. The data was analyzed according to the elements of the conceptual framework – engagement, dispositions, and discourse. Each data source was coded in three cycles. During the first cycle of coding, participants' beliefs regarding student engagement, evidence of student engagement in the classroom via student actions, and teacher behaviors that stimulated engagement were marked with an "E." The second cycle coded teacher dispositions that were evidenced through actions and language with "DP." Lastly, data that represented instances of teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, and student-to-student discourse were coded with "DC." Coded data were organized according to teacher, and then by observation. Significant occurrences, situations or conversations that provided evidence of student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse were analyzed. Each element of the conceptual framework was synthesized to denote the overall impact of student engagement on student learning at Reed High School.

## **Findings and Analysis**

This section reports the findings and analysis of the case study in relation to student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse. The findings are an account of specific actions in the setting, and the analysis represents the researcher's interpretation of the findings based on the definitions of each construct previously outlined in the conceptual framework. In this case study, the findings and analysis are reported together because individual observations and conversations often represented student engagement, dispositions, and discourse simultaneously. To separate the findings and analysis would dilute the representation of how the constructs inform one another and jointly impact student learning, as evidenced by student actions and discourse.

### **Preliminary Research**

Preliminary data were collected through participation in a previous research study that examined technology usage in the classroom, as well as, classroom observations aimed to assess the viability of student engagement research. The technology project had six participants who, for the most part, used the same technology applications, yet, yielded different student outcomes. The most notable difference between these teachers was their dispositions that drove their instructional choices, which led to different levels of student engagement.

During observations, students were frequently excited about using technology for learning. They asked if technology would be used while entering the classroom and

cheered when they noticed the iPads. One student even commented that she liked learning with technology better than, “the regular way.” Despite the proven increase in student engagement, some teachers used behavior to determine which classes would be allowed to use technology. One teacher’s comment represented the sentiments of the majority, “5<sup>th</sup> period is something else to say the least. I’m not there yet with them. I’m using 3<sup>rd</sup> period because they are the most well behaved.”

Participants of the technology study often used Kahoot!, a game based learning application and Nearpod, an interactive presentation application for desktops or mobile devices. Kahoot! cultivated behavioral and emotional engagement that was expressed through students’ laughter, excited participation, and discourse with comments such as, “Wow! We did good!” “Dang, we should have put a graph on that one,” and “Y’all wrote some good questions!” Similar to PowerPoint, Nearpod is a presentation application with enhanced interactive components. In addition to displaying content through a slide show, the facilitator can imbed polls, quizzes, and videos. Both learning applications automatically increased behavioral and emotional engagement, and provided an opportunity for cognitive engagement. However, the level of cognitive engagement was determined by the facilitation style of the teacher.

Ms. Nicole, the science teacher, and Mr. Alexander, the math teacher, had similar dispositions and instructional styles. Both teachers frequently used technology regardless of the conduct of the class period. Behaviorally, students in both classes worked in small groups of two or three to complete their assigned tasks. Both teachers and students seemed to feel emotionally safe and comfortable. Laughter and joke telling characterized

the classrooms, and students appeared happy and interested in the activities. Irrespective of the instructional activity, cognitive engagement was most frequently displayed through the quality and depth of classroom discourse.

During structured and unstructured classroom discussions students asked questions to clarify understanding, shared the connections they made with prior knowledge, and contributed their thoughts on the content as learning occurred. In both classrooms, it was common for students to hold casual conversations while working. One afternoon in Mr. Alexander's classroom, students even sang church songs to, "help them do the work." As students were working, Ms. Nicole and Mr. Alexander circulated the classroom to respond to student needs and explain content.

Mr. Alexander's disposition to support learning was displayed when, as he agreed to help two students from another teacher's class with their math homework, his student said, "Mr. Alexander will help them, he is like the daddy of the school." Ms. Nicole consistently showed a disposition towards having high expectations by holding student accountable for completing work despite the rigor and demanding increased effort.

The preliminary data collected from Ms. Nicole and Mr. Alexander's classrooms show that teacher dispositions and instructional choices influence student engagement and thus, student learning. Students applied themselves to complete assignments that were within their Zone of Proximal Development. Through encouraging and supportive teacher-student relationships, both educators exhibited dispositions of respect, resiliency, and enthusiasm for their content.

The foreign language teacher, Mr. Rogers, serves as an example of teachers who select potentially engaging learning activity, but facilitate them in a teacher-centered instructional style. Even though technology was being used in the lesson, students were compliant, yet bored, as they followed the teacher's instructions. Students showed no evidence of emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement was unknown because they never spoke about the content. Mr. Rogers' method of instruction did not show the value in the use of language in learning.

Mr. Rogers' dispositions, however, told two stories. On one hand, there was limited interaction between him and the students. He circulated the classroom peeking over students' shoulders to monitor learning and he answered questions when asked. The rapport between Mr. Roger's and his students was nice and respectful but far from personable, authentic relationships were not evident. On the other hand, he repeatedly and calmly tried different ways to help a frustrated, struggling student. His actions should care and the ability to differential learning based on student needs.

The most severe example of student disaffection was observed in Ms. Wonder's AP Human Geography classroom. Students were singing, sleeping, eating, selling food, having side conversations, and doing work from other classes during Ms. Wonder's instruction. The obvious low engagement was presumably caused by an overall lack of pedagogical skills including clear directions, established procedures, and interesting instructional activities. Very few students worked to complete the assigned task, most were uninterested. Discourse in the classroom was used to create community among the students. When Ms. Wonder asked the whole group if they had questions about the

assignment no one responded. Instead, they asked each other how to do the work and asked for her assistance when necessary.

Additionally, Ms. Wonder's dispositions were not appropriate for an urban school. She was polite but not personable, repeatedly used vocabulary that the students did not know, and provided students with answers instead of letting them grapple with the content. When discussing international birth rates, Ms. Wonders said, "we have better family planning than Mexico, we plan our families here." Her dispositions reflect a generalized perspective and do not exhibit an ability to teach diverse learners.

Findings from the preliminary research made a case for further exploration of student engagement. Observational data exposed the spectrum of student engagement and made apparent its connection to teacher dispositions. The next step required the researcher to obtain formal permission from the principal and solidify study participants. This was accomplished through a series of formal meetings that laid the foundation for the research and further informed teacher dispositions, and discourse as they relate to student engagement.

### **Formal Meetings**

After permission to conduct the study was obtained from Principal Randolph, a meeting was conducted with the primary participants, Ms. Nicole, Mr. Archer, and Mr. Rogers. All three teachers were participants in the previous years' technology research project. Over the summer, the new principal promoted Ms. Nicole to be the science coach

and Mr. Archer to be the social studies coach. Mr. Rogers remained a foreign language instructor. The purpose of meeting with the primary participants was to explain the intent of the student engagement research and solidify their participation. Each participant was seen as a co-constructor of the research, so an additional goal of the meeting was to begin the collaboration process. Discourse between the researcher and the participants provided insight into participants' dispositions, which are discussed in this section.

### **Formal meeting with Ms. Nicole.**

Ms. Nicole's initial demeanor was curt. Her responses were short, and in comparison to previous meetings she seemed tired, distant, and cold. When technology was mentioned she repeatedly deferred to Mr. Archer, who was named the digital coach in addition to being the social studies coach, by saying, "Archer is who you should be talking to. I am not on the iTeam. I do not know." Aware of the tension, the researcher began to share her own experiences as a classroom teacher that inspired a desire to research student engagement. Eventually, Ms. Nicole's demeanor softened, she became more open, and excitedly began to develop a plan for how the Student Action Coding Sheet could be used in the science department.

Making a personal connection with the researcher over shared classroom experiences, and being welcomed into the research as a co-collaborator seemed to increase Ms. Nicole's ownership of the project. The discourse between the two began to reflect a partnership. Ms. Nicole decided that first her teaching should be observed using the

Student Action Coding Sheet. Then she would use the instrument to observe other science teachers and strategically invite interested teachers to participate in the research. She also suggested that the Student Action Coding Sheet be matched with Marzano's Art and Science of Teaching Framework. Ms. Nicole shared that the school has tools for other elements of pedagogy, and that "the other lady paired hers with Marzano." This conversation gives insight into the constant barrage of resource, consultants, and district personnel in low performing schools. Ms. Nicole's use of the words "the other lady" and "hers" can be interpreted as an absence of authentic collaboration between outsiders and teachers.

### **Formal meeting with Mr. Archer**

Mr. Archer frequently cancelled meetings with the researcher due to personal and work related obligations. His actions are proof that academic coaches are frequently used to fill administrative gaps that occur at the school. An ad hoc meeting occurred one morning when the researcher informed Mr. Archer of her presence on campus. After hearing about the intent of the student engagement research, Mr. Archer agreed to participate. He planned to use the Student Action Coding Sheet as a coaching instrument by conducting observations and reviewing the results with observed teachers. His dispositions demonstrated a desire to participate in projects aimed to improve the educational outcomes of students.

As the meeting came to a close, Mr. Archer expressed a heartfelt philosophy of teaching. He said that some teachers at the school say, "These kids can't do it," and



complain about students missing days. They express what Ladson-Billings (2001) calls a “powerlessness” to do the job (p.72). He admits that as a classroom teacher he once shared that viewpoint but now believes that is an ideology teachers cannot accept. Instead, he says teachers should accept students’ achievement levels when they enter the school, continuously work with students, and enjoy incremental victories along the way so that students graduate with potential. The alternative, Archer states, is graduating students without skill who may become a community problem. In this conversation, Mr. Archer displayed a significant quality of an effective urban teacher, sociopolitical consciousness. Sociopolitical consciousness is described as a teacher having an investment in the public good, and believing that student success impacts his or her own life (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Mr. Archer’s statement is proof that low expectations for student performance are a part of the Discourse at Reed High School. His paradigm shift is also evidence that teacher practice and dispositions are malleable. As a White, male, school leader, Mr. Archer’s positive perspective about student outcomes will hopefully permeate his department. Overall, Mr. Archer demonstrates the desired disposition that all students are capable of learning.

### **Formal meeting with Mr. Rogers.**

On the day of the meeting, Mr. Roger’s Spanish classroom was brightly lit and the walls were adorned with student work. This decoration was in sharp contrast to the dim

lighting and generic educational posters that sparsely covered the walls the previous year. Mr. Rogers agreed to participate in the student engagement research. Given the freedom to engage in the research in the format that worked best for him, Mr. Rogers selected two days, approximately four weeks from the formal meeting date, for the researcher to conduct classroom observations. With knowledge of the components of the Student Action Coding Sheet, Mr. Rogers intended to plan an engaging lesson. Unfortunately, the observations were never conducted. Mr. Rogers cancelled because of a required training, upcoming deadlines, and the overall need to eliminate items from his responsibility list.

During a conversation about student engagement, Mr. Rogers shared a successful lesson that he and administration viewed as engaging. For the lesson, students were given sentences on strips of paper and instructed to reorder the sentence strips into a conversation. Mr. Rogers was proud of the student-to-student discourse that developed in the form of debate as students collaborated.

Mr. Rogers frequently mentioned that sometimes students act as if they do not care about achievement, and they express pessimistic views of their academic performance. He contrasts their behavior with students in the suburbs who, “sat in straight rows, were well behaved, and did their work.” Mr. Roger seems to view behavior that is different than suburban students as evidence of apathy. However, he believes that students do care and want to achieve academic success, which he infers from their nervousness before examinations, their discouragement when teachers quit during the school year, and funny comments they make occasionally

The conversation with Mr. Rogers showed his gradual shift from facilitating a teacher-centered to student-centered classroom. During an observation conducted during the previous year's technology project, two students excitedly rose out of their seats while debating the conjugation of a particular verb. The researcher nodded to Mr. Rogers in approval of the student engagement, however, Mr. Rogers shook his head in disagreement and stated that the students were too aggressive. A few months later, Mr. Rogers was observed again during the preliminary data collection period of this student engagement research. The students in his foreign language classroom were virtually silent. Feedback given to Mr. Rogers after the observation encouraged increased classroom discourse between the student and between Mr. Rogers and the students. During the current meeting, Mr. Rogers' conversation evidenced a belief that debating is a form of student engagement. He proudly discussed a lesson he taught during a recent evaluation, in which he was commended for the level at which the students interacted with each other as they, once again, debated content. Mr. Rogers has developed the ability to decipher meaning beyond his students' words and actions, which is evidence of having the disposition to teach diverse learners.

#### **Formal meeting with Mr. Alexander.**

During preliminary data collection, Mr. Alexander's disposition and instructional choices were observed to cultivate student achievement. Therefore, after the researcher received permission to conduct the student engagement study, an email was sent to Mr.

Alexander soliciting his participation so that his practice could be more thoroughly explored. When Mr. Alexander did not respond to the email, the researcher decided to request his permission in person.

Thirty minutes after the end of the school day, the researcher walked into a dynamic tutoring session in Mr. Alexander's class. Based on student questions, six students were excitedly working geometry problems with Mr. Alexander, who anticipated where students would get stuck and taught through the misconceptions. Cognitive engagement was demonstrated when students debated about the correct approach to solve a problem, asked questions to deepen their knowledge, and, on the spot, reworded songs with familiar tunes to reflect the content. As students experienced success their increasing engagement was expressed through comments like, "Lets go! I got this! What are we going to do next?" At 3:37 p.m., an hour after the end of the school day, a student showed engagement and confidence by saying, "Let's do another one like this. I'm so ready for this test I could take it right now."

In this scenario, discourse was used to create community. The teacher and students collaborated, laughed and joked through the teaching and learning process. The constant discourse seemed to help students learn as they asked questions and discussed ideas with each other and the teacher. Mr. Alexander guided the study session with comments such as, "You're not getting it? Let's look at it again. Gabby look at it like this baby." As students left the tutoring session, they thanked Mr. Alexander for his help and said, "I learned a lot today." The expressions of gratitude were evidence that students want to learn and that sometimes they don't feel able to do the work, which can lead to disaffection.

Mr. Alexander's dispositions were also made clear through his actions and classroom discourse. Mr. Alexander expressed an ability to teach all learners and a belief that all students can learn. He continually helped students, never giving up on anyone, and students know they can come to him for help.

After the tutoring session the researcher described the student engagement study to Mr. Alexander and gained his commitment to participate. Although he reviewed the Student Action Coding Sheet, Mr. Alexander was not interested in crafting specific engaging lessons for the researcher to observe. Instead, he opened the doors of his classroom and allowed the researcher to conduct observations at any time. In this context, Mr. Alexander was the standard for student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse.

### **Informal Observations**

Informal classroom observations were conducted with Ms. Nicole, the science coach, and Mr. Archer, the social studies and digital coach early in the research process. Informal classroom observations were unstructured and unplanned opportunities when the researcher gained insight into engagement, discourse, and teacher dispositions at Reed. These opportunities occurred while walking the campus with participants. The objective of the observations was to train the coaches on how to use the Student Action Coding Sheet so that, as co-collaborators in the study, each coach would be equipped to conduct observations independently and use the results at their discretion. Although observations

with Ms. Nicole were conducted a part from observations with Mr. Archer, there are prominent similarities between the coaches' behavior during the process.

At the beginning of the study, each coach was given a paper copy of the Student Action Coding Sheet, as well as, access to the instrument via Google Docs. Before the first observation, the researcher reviewed the Student Action Coding sheet in detail with each coach. Upon entering each classroom for an observation, the researcher made eye contact with the teacher to gain approval, then sat in an inconspicuous spot in the room where student dialogue could be heard. The coaches, on the other hand, entered the classroom with an authoritative presence. They walked around the classroom, up and down rows, and peeked over students' shoulders all while making obvious marks on the Student Action Coding Sheet. Neither Ms. Nicole nor Mr. Archer used the instrument to fidelity. Both coaches rushed through the tool like a checklist, did not listen to student conversation, and were ready to leave after ten minutes. Ms. Nicole even commented, "This is hard."

It should also be reported that both Ms. Nicole and Mr. Archer tried to control the researchers' narrative by carefully selecting the classrooms for observation. Both coaches only allowed the researcher to peak into the window of classrooms they considered to have management problems.

An analysis of Ms. Nicole and Mr. Archer's behavior has to consider how ambiguity within the role of an academic coach impacts effectiveness. Both coaches always appeared to be tired, and rushed. When describing their job, the coaches agreed that their time is often consumed with running errands for teachers or fulfilling administrative duties. The

uncertainty seems to prevent coaches from deeply observing and reflecting on practice so that they can implement innovative change.

Two of the classrooms visited during informal observations were examples of inappropriate teacher dispositions and low student engagement. In one classroom, the teacher who had been absent for most of the day spoke with the science coach in the office while a substitute attempted to manage the classroom. Most of the students were talking, other were sleeping, some were on cell phones, and an even fewer amount attempted to do the assigned worksheet. Even though the teacher was in her office that is attached to the classroom, students continued to do whatever they wanted and the teacher didn't tell them differently. Although the researcher was not privileged to an account of the situation from the teacher's perspective, it appeared that the teacher was not concerned with the lack of instructional time or student learning.

The very next hour, a teacher was observed facilitating a mock state assessment to ensure the computers worked for the upcoming test. In a condescending tone the teacher reminded students to follow directions carefully. While the students tested each computer, she also reminded them of an upcoming classroom project, "that I know you want to present because you worked so hard on." While the teacher's word choice was appropriate, her sarcastic intonation prompted a visibly annoyed student to retort, "What are you trying to say, miss. Just say what you want to say." This situation symbolized the dispositions of a teacher who spoke inappropriately in the learning environment, and who has low expectations for student performance.

Informal observations gave the researcher an insiders' perspective of Reed High School that otherwise would have been unavailable, since the primary participants have, at some point, been identified as respectable teachers.

### **Informal Meetings**

When formal observations began, the researcher visited the campus of Reed High School multiple times per week. Often, casual conversations occurred with participants and nonparticipants that informed the researcher's understanding of teacher dispositions, and the ways in which teacher dispositions were influenced by the school's culture. The informal meetings provided insight into the various narratives that encompass the complex levels of discourse within a Reed High School.

### **Dispositions of the academic coaches.**

After accompanying Mr. Archer on a classroom observation, where the researcher witnessed students independently work on devices for fifteen minutes without collaboration, the researcher inquired as to how teachers planned to maintain student collaboration and discourse while using technology. Mr. Archer's response was that teachers could have students work in small groups, with predetermined roles, and instructions to discuss certain aspects of the content at specified times.

This conversation helped the researcher realize that despite usage of the Student Coding Action Sheet, which focused on assessing cognitive engagement, Mr. Archer's



conception of engagement was limited to behavioral and emotional characteristics. Simply putting students together in a group with instructions to talk does not guarantee learning. In addition to planned discourse, the discourse that happens naturally (unstructured) during the teaching and learning process is evidence of engagement.

The idea that the depth and quality of student discourse is a measurement of cognitive engagement was lost on Mr. Archer. Conversations with him often focused on best practices. He was proud of the social studies department that used technology to increase their rate of student monitoring to 100%, and believed the department was moving from student compliance towards increased student engagement. Overall, the teacher Discourse contained a lot of educational buzzwords and seemed to be inside of the proverbial box. Teachers complied with leadership's directives without determining if what they are doing actually worked, and/or how it could be best applied. Except for Mr. Alexander.

### **Dispositions of the teachers.**

In a conversation with the researcher, Mr. Alexander expressed the need for more planning time because of the large amount of paperwork requested by administration that is necessary for some teachers, but not for him. He admits to teaching, "on the fly," which is discouraged but works for him because it allows him to respond to individual student needs as they arise. From the perspective of Mr. Alexander, teachers are asked to be rigid, so he tries to put what he does into the rigid system they want. This exchange clearly

represented Mr. Alexander's dispositions that make him a good teacher. Only someone who is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the content can employ the teaching methods he described. Additionally, Mr. Alexander demonstrated resiliency and perseverance by differentiating instructional strategies so all students could learn.

One afternoon, two other geometry teachers joined Mr. Alexander during his planning and lunchtime. During this hour and twenty-minute time span, the teachers worked to troubleshoot testing software they had been given by school leaders without usage instructions. The testing software was needed for an upcoming assessment, and was guaranteed to provide students with an authentic testing experience that mirrored state assessments. While working, the teachers expressed annoyance at the schools recent abruptly implemented photocopying policy, which limited teachers to 100 copies per 9-week grading period. The teachers, who have 150 students, will never be able to print a copy for every student. As a result, Mr. Alexander purchased his own printer and the other geometry teachers contribute toner and paper in exchange for the ability to print freely. Even with Mr. Alexander's personal printer, students are sometimes required to copy as many as 26 homework problems. The teachers pointed out that this practice decreases instructional time, relies on students' inaccurate representations of geometric figures, and is detrimental for diagnosed and undiagnosed students with disabilities.

The examples of informal meetings discussed in this section show the two worlds teachers have to navigate. Sometimes, what is best for the student gets lost in administrative obligations, and well-intentioned teachers struggle to align the implementation of educational fads with what they can see students need to be successful.

## Formal Observations

Seventeen formal observations were conducted within seven classrooms using the Students Action Coding Sheet. The number of times each student action was observed across all seventeen observations has been combined and displayed in Figure 9.

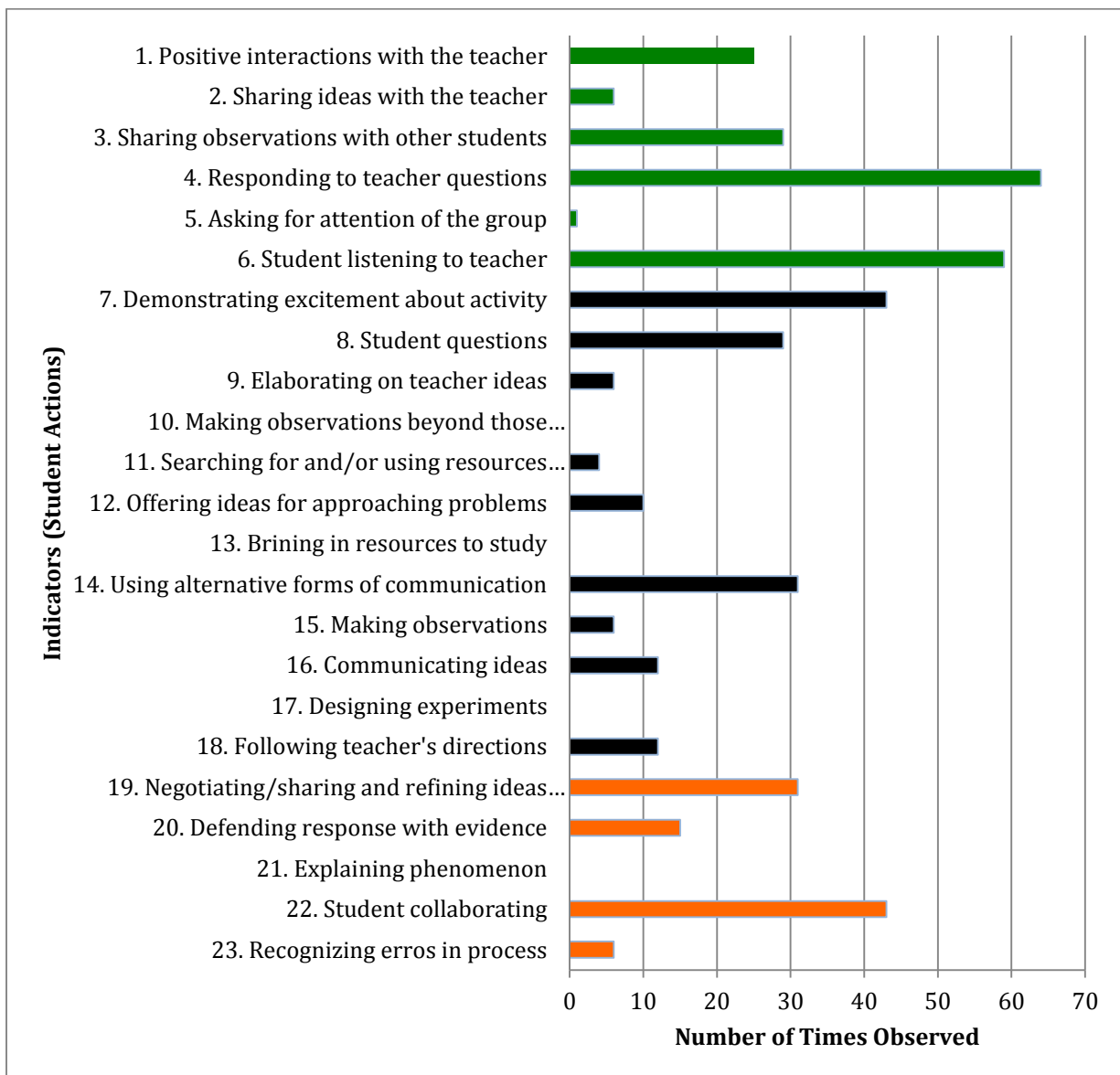


Figure 9: Student Action Coding Sheet Observation Results by Student Action Indicators

The student action indicators are categorized according to Blooms Taxonomy. Numbers 1-6 represents the lower cognitive domain that consists of remembering and the initial stages of understanding. Numbers 7 – 18 represents the medium cognitive domain that consists of the higher stages of understanding and applying. Numbers 19 -23 represents the highest domain that consists of analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

The five most frequently observed indicators were (1) responding to teacher questions, (2) student listening to teacher, (3) demonstrating excitement about activity and student collaborating, (4) using alternative forms of communication and negotiating/sharing and refining ideas through discussion, and (5) sharing observations with other students and student questions. Within the top 5, some indicators were observed at the same frequency. Both demonstrating excitement about activity and student collaborating were observed 43 times, using alternative forms of communication and negotiating/sharing and refining ideas through discussion were both observed 31 times, and sharing observations with other students and student questions were observed 29 times.

The five student action indicators observed the least were making observations, bringing in resources to study, designing experiments, explaining phenomenon, and asking for attention of the group (raising hand). The first four indicators were not observed during the study. As shown in Figure 10, most student actions were indicative of the lower cognitive domain, followed by medium and then highest.

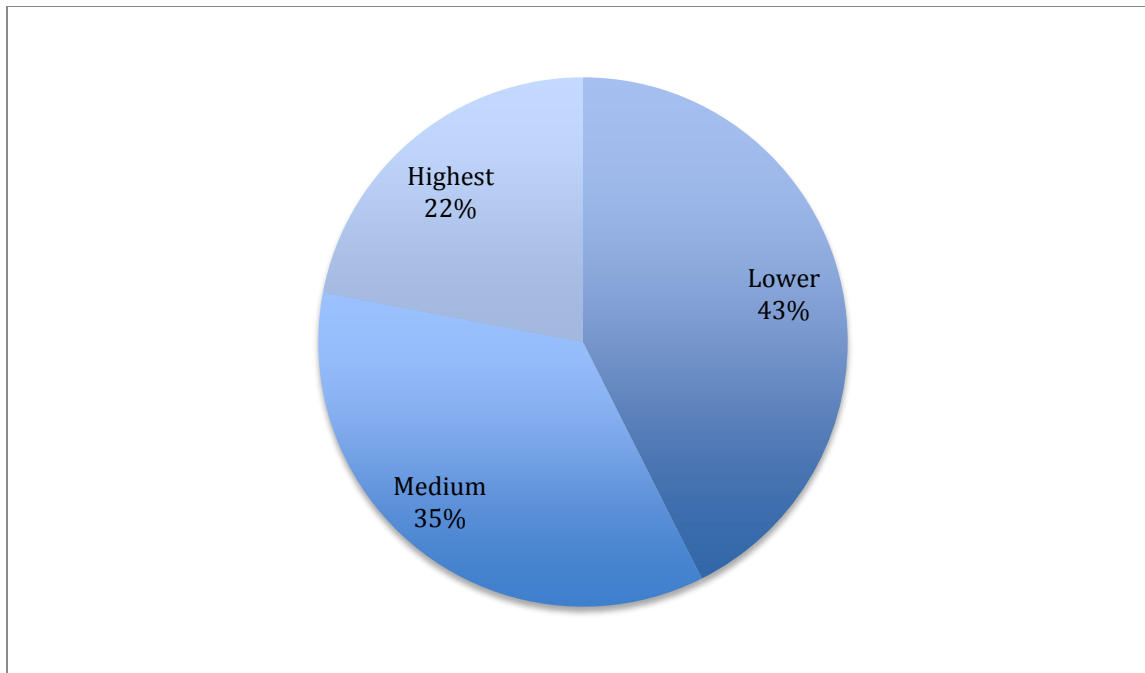


Figure 10: Student Action Coding Sheet Observation Results by Cognitive Domain

The remainder of this section discusses the observations that are represented in the figures above. The findings are a report of the combination of observations conducted for each teacher. Woven throughout the findings is an analysis of how the findings represent student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse.

**Ms. Nicole.**

As the science coach, Ms. Nicole is not a full time instructor. However, she decided to dedicate five class periods each day to teaching small groups of low-performing students from other biology classes. A single classroom observation was conducted during one of the small group sessions.

Ms. Nicole emotionally engaged students at the start of the lesson by showing photographs of celebrities and other intriguing concepts that related to the content. The learning activity required students to compete in teams to match vocabulary terms to pictures and definitions. From start to finish, the atmosphere was full of interest that occasionally peaked to excitement. Students talked and joked while working. Although slightly frustrated at times, the students persisted towards mastering the concept even when they were told to recheck incorrect answers.

In regards to teacher dispositions, Ms. Nicole reflected a number of indicators on the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form. Most noticeably, Ms. Nicole demonstrated an ability to work with ethnically diverse and exceptional learners, exhibited enthusiasm for her content area, and consistently spoke in a manner appropriate for the learning environment. She used a conversational tone to instruct and encourage a team atmosphere.

For the first day of the unit, it was appropriate that most of the frequency marks on the Student Action Coding Sheet were in the lower and medium cognitive domains. As the class period progressed, the lesson became more cognitively engaging. The frequency of student action increased from six during the first five minutes to seventeen during the last five minutes.

Pressure to maintain a pace consistent with the instructional calendar is a common feeling for teachers. When reflecting on the lesson, Ms. Nicole commented that she didn't get as far in the lesson as she intended. However, both her and the researcher noted that she did not rush or leave the students confused.

As suggested by Ms. Nicole, the researcher planned to continue observing the small group sessions, and once she felt comfortable with the instrument, Ms. Nicole would use the Student Action Coding Sheet to observe and coach other science teachers. However, this observation was the first and last time the researcher collaborated with Ms. Nicole, who stopped replying to emails.

### **Ms. Cooper.**

In Ms. Cooper's chemistry class students worked in groups of three to complete the first day of a Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) activity. POGIL is an inquiry based, student-centered, science curriculum that guides students in the construction of their own knowledge. Students showed interest as they aimed to answer the questions on the worksheet.

As evidenced by the selection of the POGIL curriculum, Ms. Cooper held all students to high expectations and exhibited the belief that all children can learn. Ms. Cooper also cultivated an environment of teamwork by frequently reminding students to not, "go pass stop points without a signature, you may know it but if y'all don't know it together I can't sign." The expectation of collaboration was clearly communicated through Ms. Cooper's dispositions, classroom arrangement, and instructional choices.

Marks on the Student Action Coding Sheet were concentrated in the Lower cognitive domain. Based on the learning activity it would seem that more marks would be located in

the medium and highest domains. However, this assessment was conducted on the first day of the lesson and the researcher was not familiar with the POGIL strategy.

**Ms. Lemon.**

Ms. Lemon's chemistry class copiously copied notes from a standard black and white PowerPoint projected on the whiteboard. Ms. Lemon's disposition was terse. Her temper was the only thing that outpaced her instructional delivery. Students complained about the speed at which she rushed through the slides and repeatedly asked her to slow down. She advised students to abbreviate. On the very next slide, when students requested to be told what to write, she replied, "everything." In another attempt to slow down Ms. Lemon's instruction, as student said, "we are listening to your explanation then writing," to which, Ms. Lemon replied, "well, you picked the wrong one to do first."

Interspersed within the dialogue described above, students asked questions about the content or related it to prior knowledge, both of which are indicators of cognitive engagement. On the Student Action Coding Sheet Ms. Lemon received four marks in the lower cognitive domain for students listening to her extended explanations.

Ms. Lemon demonstrated an obvious deficit in speaking in a manner appropriate to the learning environment, maintaining verbally appropriate relationships with students, and treating all students fairly according to their needs. The encouraging aspect of this observation was the student to teacher discourse. Student responses to Ms. Lemon's instruction exhibited strong self-advocacy skills.



**Mr. Archer.**

Mr. Archer, the social studies and digital coach, invited the researcher to observe a lesson that served as his yearly evaluation, as well as, a demonstration on how to use technology as an instructional tool. Upon entering the classroom, student statements such as, “damn, look at that technology! It looks like y’all are about to have fun in there,” showed emotional engagement towards the usage of technology in the classroom.

Through the lesson, small groups of students responded to teacher questions about previously learned content by posting to online discussion forums that were projected onto the board in the front of the classroom. Mr. Archer used student responses to facilitate discussion and clarify misconceptions. The teacher and students discussed the questions until a correct answer was reached. Cognitively engaged students expressed an interest in the content and pride in developing the correct answers.

Mr. Archer’s high-energy lesson consistently demonstrated the appropriate dispositions for teaching in an urban school. He was enthusiastic about the lesson, continued to scaffold content, and used questioning techniques within whole class and small group instruction to get all students to learn. One particular exchange between teacher and student demonstrated the power of immediate feedback. Mr. Archer said, “Wadley, let’s read your response.” The student replied, “Wait, I elaborated on it, you have to refresh the page.” Mr. Archer exclaimed, “Great! That’s the purpose of this!”

The discourse within this classroom was multifaceted. Students collaborated with each other to answer each question and complete the assignment. Additionally, the

answers students contributed to the discussion reflected their reality. When asked for an example of seasonal employment, a student responded, “A single father trying to support his child.” In Mr. Archer’s example of frictional unemployment, an employee quit his or her job because of an argument with the boss. Students responded with, “nah, I’m not going to quit the job, “you don’t quit though,” and “I need my money.” A teacher in this environment must be aware and accepting of students’ lived experiences.

An additional, and significant, level of Discourse existed because the lesson served as Mr. Archer’s evaluation and a recorded demonstration. Some of the comments Mr. Archer made were loaded with educational buzzwords that would make him appear more competent and increase the likelihood of a high score on his evaluation.

As expected, Mr. Archer achieved one of the highest ratings, a 34, on the Student Actions Coding Sheet. The marks were evenly distributed between the lower, medium, and highest cognitive domains. While Mr. Archer taught a high-energy engaging lesson, it is unlikely to be repeated at that level on a daily basis.

When the classroom was nearly vacant, Mr. Archer said that when he saw a certain male student walk in the classroom, he cringed at the thought of the student disrupting the lesson. However, he was pleased that the student did well. The teacher whose classroom the lesson took place in, a young White male, added, “yea my girls are awesome but my boys suck.” These comments are further evidence of the negative Discourse that exists about students at Reed High School. Perhaps the student exhibited improved behavior because he was actually engaged in the lesson. This conversation confirms the thoughts of

one of Reed's administrators who questioned how students could be expected to do well, when they are not surrounded by teachers who care about them.

**Mr. Flash.**

The assistant principal invited all instructors to observe an "excellent live digital curriculum lesson" in Mr. Flash's U.S. history classroom. He encouraged observers to look for student engagement, a student-centered lesson, teacher questioning techniques, a minimum of 3 levels of teacher "monitoring for student learning" not compliance, student discussions authentic to the Learning Goal, students' proper use of specific academic vocabulary, and bell to bell learning. To the researcher, it seemed like an entire class period would be necessary to observe these components, however, the assistant principal told teachers only two or three minutes were needed. This small statement, in addition to rushed observations with Ms. Nicole and Mr. Archer, and the principal's belief that teachers may perceive the engagement research as, "just another thing," is evidence of a larger problem. During this study, Reed's school leadership was not observed meticulously reflecting on practice. The atmosphere was hasty, and appeared to prefer quantity to quality. Whether this condition reflected the school's administration, the school district, or the state educational policy is unknown to the researcher. Nevertheless, the researcher was informed about this lesson by Ms. Nicole, and decided to observe.

Similar to Mr. Archer's lesson, small groups of three students collaboratively answered questions and posted the response to an online discussion form that was

projected on the whiteboard in the front of the classroom. Most of the students were attentive, and expressed their enthusiasm with comments like, “we were born ready!” Students were observed debating answers and strategically eliminating answer choices based on content knowledge and test-taking skills.

During most observations at Reed High School students were primarily behaviorally and emotionally engaged. This was one of the few lessons that escalated to cognitive engagement, which was evident by the students’ use of metacognitive strategies to think critically and the depth of discourse that occurred as students debated and eliminated answers. An example is Courtney, a student who initially did not seem to be very engaged, responded well to a question and became very engaged as time went on. The complexity of the lesson increased, and the ending activity required students to justify which answer was the “best” answer. Based on marks from the Student Action Coding Sheet, most student actions demonstrated high cognitive engagement, and the lesson was increasingly engaging as it progressed.

Mr. Flash’s lesson provided an example of discourse being used as an instructional strategy. Students were encouraged to talk, collaborate, and defend their responses with the group. Female voices were the loudest, but males did participate. Mr. Flash’s professional dispositions were exemplified by the way he demonstrated excitement for the content when asking questions, differentiated learning by assigning students different roles within small groups, showed respect and appropriate relationship development with students, and used questioning to create a student-centered learning environment. His dispositions made students feel comfortable and he used discourse to build student

confidence. Mr. Flash never reacted negatively to student responses. Instead, he replied, “good thinking,” “that’s a good answer, but not the best answer,” or “do not feel bad that you got it wrong, let’s talk about why.”

**Ms. Lucy.**

Although not a new teacher, this was Ms. Lucy’s first year at Reed High School. Her course load included four classes of regular World History, two classes of AP World History, and one AP/IB World History class. Because of Ms. Lucy’s strong classroom management skills, she was asked to teach all seven periods of the school day to decrease the number of students in her overcrowded classes. Even after the restructuring, Ms. Lucy had thirty students in her regular World History and AP World History classes, and nine students in AP/IB World History. Observations in Ms. Lucy’s class started a few weeks prior to Spring Break. Most days she was noticeably tired and minimal instruction was observed. Time spent in Ms. Lucy’s room was an equal combination of classroom observations and discussions between her and the researcher - two African American, female, teaching practitioners.

Ms. Lucy’s instructional style relied heavily on technology. According to Ms. Lucy, she was dismissed from a previous teaching assignment for using too much technology and not enough teacher instruction. Students in her regular World History classes were typically observed interacting with content on a website by either playing educational games or watching videos and responding to accompanying questions. Other times,

students just sat, engaged in casual conversations. Interest and excitement were displayed one day when students celebrated high assessment scores, but overall, students were behaviorally compliant and emotionally neutral.

During observations in Ms. Lucy's AP World History classes, students normally worked on GetAFive, which is College Board's test prep website for the AP exams. Ms. Lucy assigned students specific units to complete by watching videos and answering the accompanying questions. Similar to the regular classes, students were behaviorally compliant and emotionally neutral. On the Student Action Coding Sheet, Ms. Lucy's classes averaged a frequency score of 20, which is significantly lower than scores for cognitively demanding lessons that earned 30 marks or more.

Once, a different assignment was observed. Students were instructed to write content focused questions for each level of Webb's Depth of Knowledge, a framework that categorized learning tasks based on cognitive difficulty. During this lesson, increased signs of disaffection were observed. Most student conversation was off topic, two male students styled their hair, one student slept, and in three of the eight small groups one student wrote while the others sat quietly. Ms. Lucy circulated the classroom to encourage students and manage the different levels of engagement. Cognitively engaged students provided feedback on each other's questions.

Ms. Lucy's disposition was the same across all classes, she was strict yet personable. When asked how she gets students to participate in question writing knowing that their thoughts will be displayed and discussed she said, "I make students feel comfortable and am all over students who are about to laugh or poke fun." Ms. Lucy provided technology to

students without a device, even if it meant lending her personal tablet or cell phone. She advised students on how to complete the assignments, encouraged them, and built relationship by holding non-academic conversations. Warm greetings, laughing, and joking proved strong bonds. Her actions clearly demonstrated appropriate relationships, and an ability to work with ethnically diverse populations. However, Ms. Lucy's reliance on technology and lack of rigorous assignments raised questions about her belief that all children can learn and her ability to hold students to high expectations.

**Mr. Alexander.**

The researcher was introduced to Mr. Alexander during the technology study that was conducted the previous year. Although he taught regular level Geometry classes, Mr. Alexander's students performed at the same caliber as, and sometimes slightly better than, more advanced students. During this study, Mr. Alexander taught Pre Calculus and IB Calculus for the first two periods of the school day, followed by four classes of Geometry Honors.

Seven observations were conducted in Mr. Alexander's classroom, and each class period was observed at least once. Throughout all of the observations, which occurred sporadically over a twenty-six day time span, only three different instructional activities were witnessed. Students either played Kahoot, a game based learning application; completed a worksheet in small groups; or took an assessment. Up to this point, the observations discussed in this report suggest that student engagement is primarily

cultivated by the teacher's instructional choices. That was not the case for Mr. Alexander. While his instructional choices were appropriate, a discussion of student engagement in Mr. Alexander's class centers on his professional dispositions.

A student described Mr. Alexander as, "the daddy of the school." Which is a true statement for one student in his third period class, his daughter. Regardless of the biological connection, Mr. Alexander cultivated kinship with all of his students through displays of respect, enthusiasm, perseverance, and resiliency; all dispositions that, according to the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form, an urban teacher should possess. Mr. Alexander's professional dispositions were rooted in care. When a frustrated student submitted an assessment and grumbled, "I'm not doing math anymore, I don't care." Mr. Alexander instinctively replied, "I care enough for both of us."

Mr. Alexander has a reputation for holding students to high expectations. An example was provided by a student who informed the class before a test that, "If you don't get 100% he will make you do it again!" His ability to enforce high expectations and cultivate student academic resiliency appeared to have originated in the depth of the relationships he established. Mr. Alexander's relationship with his students was unique and appropriate for teaching and learning in an urban high school. Mr. Alexander began a review with, "square root is intimidating like the bully on the playground, saying 'Gimme your lunch money!'" Laughing hysterically, students confirmed with, "it is!!" Cognitive engagement is evident when students exert effort to master challenging concepts. Mr. Alexander's students appeared to trust that he would explain the concept until they got it,



which he was observed doing on multiple occasions. He didn't give up and the students didn't give up either.

Whether playing Kahoot or completing a worksheet, students worked in collaborate groups of four to five students everyday. Activity in Mr. Alexander's class followed a predictable pattern. Students silently watched Mr. Alexander solve a problem, or the problem was solved with student input. Then, students worked to solve additional problems in their group. The following exchange between teacher and student demonstrated the effectiveness and intent of the process. "I think we should work in groups more, I'm more efficient this way." To which Mr. Alexander replied, "It's not just them helping you, you are helping them too by explaining it another way. That's what we want to happen." Discourse in Mr. Alexander's class was closely connected to the collaborative groups.

Multiple levels of discourse existed in Mr. Alexander's classroom. Overall, the teacher and students used discourse to facilitate instruction, build a classroom community, and reinforce the classroom norms. During teacher-led instruction, Mr. Alexander and his students functioned as co-constructors of knowledge. Conversations frequently began with Mr. Alexander saying, "Ok, lets solve it." A student would respond, "Mr. Alexander I got 36." To which he replied, "Ok, how did you get 36?" Mr. Alexander would begin the math equation and students interjected comments to help him solve it, to ask a question, or to demonstrate a change in understanding. This process allowed him to identify misconceptions and adjust instruction based on student responses.

Occasionally, students led whole group instruction projected on the large whiteboard, or small group instruction on one of five medium sized whiteboards Mr. Alexander drilled to the wall himself. Student leaders mimicked Mr. Alexander's style of instruction by solving equations with student input, while Mr. Alexander smiled proudly and clarified concepts when needed. A Black male student named Chris provided an example of student led instruction during Pre Calculus. Chris began his explanation with, "Y'all got this...you know that the dash really means -1...bring this down...now we will combine like terms...let me break this down so I can show you." All the while, other students also contributed ideas to solving the equation. After Chris' explanation, a talkative group of girls in the corner called him to their table and said, "Chris, when you said, "FOIL," exactly what did that mean? Jonathan explains, then says, "The way the book teaches is harder." Instructionally, the constant conversation observed in Mr. Alexander's class exhibited a collaborative effort and co-construction of knowledge between teacher and students. Mr. Alexander demonstrated Ladson-Billings' (2009) claim that teaching is a two-way relationship and that "when students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence" (p.134).

Additionally, a community environment was created through discourse. Mr. Alexander's tone was always familial. He used academic vocabulary during instruction but did not inundate students with educational buzzwords. For example, instead of instructing students to do a "think-pair-share," a common instructional strategy used to inspire collaboration, he would encourage them to solve an equation independently, deliberate within small groups, and then begin a discussion with, "ok, let's talk about it. Student

performance was celebrated with phrases such as, “that’s good baby!” Mr. Alexander disclosed that encouraging students was important because all students in the course were not Honors material; some were there because of student or parent choice. In a Black community that is well known for poverty and crime, Mr. Alexander not only chose instructional activities that required collaboration, but verbally taught students how to work as a team. Cultivating an academic community satisfies students’ need to belong, which if unguided can lead them to street gangs (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Discourse between students also built community. Students were attentive during direct instruction, but talkative during independent and group work. Conversations were both on and off topic, and even elevated to song as a student sang a verse of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the Negro National Anthem. Students also celebrated learning. An example was when a female student, whose performance improved after she attended a tutoring session, said, “I only got two wrong, this is the best I ever did! I feel smart today!” In addition to being an example of celebration, this statement is one of many illustrations that proved Black students in urban schools want to be successful. Accountability structures were strengthened through discourse as students corrected each other’s behavior and provided academic feedback. One student said to another, “I’m confused bruh. Let’s look at how we did this.” In another example, a student listened to her peer’s explanation of an equation and said, “I think your problem is that you are over thinking it.”

Discourse was also used to reinforce classroom rules and maintain an academic focus. Mr. Alexander was never observed yelling at his students. The most intense directive occurred when, in a stern but calm voice he said, “we are getting a little overboard

here today, let's drop it down a notch." Otherwise, he stood next to talking students, said "quite please," or directed instructional conversation their way with, "y'all got it back there?" To a student playing music on his cell phone, Mr. Alexander said, "who is jammin' on the phone so hard? Turn it off." As taps on the desk turned into rhyming over a beat, Mr. Alexander free styled a math related rhyme that instructed students to start their assignment. After a few seconds of laughter students began to work. When a student yelled, "Doritos!" in the middle of instruction, Mr. Alexander nonchalantly said, "I know your hungry, it's almost time. But for real, do you get it?" One afternoon, Mr. Alexander warned the researcher that it was Friday and the students would, "be a little more crunk because that's just how our kids are." The value of these examples is that distracting behavior occurred in Mr. Alexander's classroom, just like any other classroom. However, unlike teachers who quickly belittle or isolate misbehaving students by sending them out of the classroom, Mr. Alexander chose to operate from a place of cultural and developmental understanding. He pays little attention to negative behavior and constantly verbally reinforces positive behavior, and thereby, maintains an academic focus.

On the Student Action Coding Sheet, an average of 28 student actions reflecting engagement were observed during seven observations. 50% of the student action frequency marks were located in the Lower cognitive domain. The most cognitively engaging moment, based on the Student Action Coding Sheet, was when a student, Chris, solved a math equation in front of the class with student input, then privately explained a confusing concept to a group of his peers. Overall, student engagement, teacher

dispositions, and discourse were more balanced in Mr. Alexander's classroom than in the classrooms of other study participants.

### **Student Reflections**

At the request of the researcher, Ms. Lucy asked each of her students to complete a reflection discussing their most and least favorite class, as well as instructional activities they participate in while in class. The most commonly mentioned instructional activities, listed from most to least frequent, were: classroom discussions, note-taking, working in pairs or small groups, hand-on learning activities, lectures, peer teaching activities, and project based learning activities. Other than hands-on learning activities, which the researcher expected to be experienced by students less frequently than lectures, student perceptions align with classroom observations at Reed High School. Similar to the researcher's assumptions, urban education literature identifies teacher-centered learning activities (e.g. note-taking and lecture) to be more common than student-centered instructional activities such as hands-on and project based learning. Student reflections may contain bias because of their desire to make Reed High School, or Mr. Lucy appear in a positive light. Nevertheless, they provided valuable insight into the expectations students hold for their teachers.

Students primarily identified their favorite class based on instructional activities. Technology, group work, and hands-on-activities were among the most preferred. Another significant factor was having an interest in the content, also described as working in an

area of passion. Students then expressed the need to understand the work and feel successful, be engaged in a discussion where they can say their opinion, and lastly, students voiced a desire to be challenged. Three student comments best exemplified students' preference for learning.

- Student 1: "My favorite class is anatomy because I do a lot of hands-on activities. Regardless of the amount of hard work I do, me and my group (if I have one) finish the projects on time and feel proud of doing it."
- Student 2: "We do hands on activities and I am able to apply and learn at the same time."
- Student 3: "Journalism because we write stuff that's happening in our world now."

Students' descriptions of their favorite class also generated a list of qualities they desire in a teacher. Students overwhelmingly described teachers who thoroughly explained content and offered extra help as their favorite. Also mentioned were teachers with a sense of humor, and those who are encouraging. The actions of students' favorite teachers were described as:

- Student 4: "The teacher always goes the extra step to make sure we succeed and get the information we need to know."
- Student 5: "My geometry teacher explains and explains what he has already explained until we understand. His ability to teach is out of this world and so far I have passed geometry with nothing lower than a B."
- Student 6: "Encourages us to keep on trying even though we tried before and failed."

Students were also asked to think of their least favorite class and identify something that could make it better. The responses mirrored the qualities of students' favorite classes. Most frequently students communicated the desire for teachers to provide better instruction to help them understand the content, followed by being more kind and providing more timely feedback. The following comments are an example of students' opinions:

- Student 7: "I really don't like my English class because I feel like I have to teach myself."
- Student 8: "My teacher does not provide the help needed for us to successfully pass her class. She refuses to teach she wants us to learn on our own but doesn't give us useful resources."
- Student 9: "What would make it better is if the teacher wasn't rude and intimidating."

The way students articulated their expectations of teachers and instruction reflected a level of understanding that is not represented by the standardized test assessment scores of students at Reed High School. Broader funds of student knowledge should be considered because students have ideas that are not recognized.

## **Discussion**

A major aim of this case study was to explore the impact of student engagement on student learning at an urban school with a majority Black student population. Through

conversations with participants and non-participants, as well as, through classroom observations, salient ideas emerged that contribute to the narrative concerning teaching and learning in an urban school.

### **School Culture**

This study was greatly impacted by the culture of Reed High School. A major obstacle for participants in this study was time, or as they professed, the lack there of. The two classroom teachers, Ms. Lucy and Mr. Alexander both wished for additional planning time. Mr. Rogers cancelled his observations because of time constraints related to a responsibility list overcrowded with meetings and testing. The academic coaches, Ms. Nicole and Mr. Archer, did not follow through on their original commitment to participate in the study. Mr. Archer's time was dominated by trainings and administrative duties, while Ms. Nicole became unresponsive.

Principal Randolph foreshadowed participation issues when he advised the researcher that teachers might perceive involvement in the engagement research as, "just another thing." Interestingly, these very same teachers devoted full participation to the previous year's technology research. Based on teachers' use of words that reflected popular trends in education, it appeared that the administration and instructors were dedicated to a never-ending cycle aimed at meeting state and district mandates. However, when given the opportunity to examine student learning from a different vantage point, student engagement, participation in the research was more tolerated than embraced.



## **Discourse**

### **Teacher to Teacher.**

The perception of students at Reed High School is an additional concern that surfaced during this research. Discourse revealed that some teachers hold low expectations for student performance, which impacts their capacity to be effective instructors. After reading student reflections, the researcher began to wonder if teachers know what students want and need from them in order to be successful. Do teachers even know that students want to be successful? Are teachers aware of the excellence that resides in students (Delpit, 2012)? Have they witnessed the commitment to learning that was clearly exhibited in Mr. Alexander's classroom? Mr. Rogers, for example, appeared to be on the path to understanding his students. While meeting with the researcher he showed a strong desire to know that students cared about learning, a characteristic that he was not previously observed to hold. His ability to critically read students and interpret the true meaning behind their words and actions has helped him see that they do care, and that fresh understanding seemed to drive his practice.

### **Student to Student.**

The role of discourse in this study cannot be underestimated, and discourse among this specific population is an area of future research. Teacher discourse revealed their perceptions of students, established competence among peers, illuminated aspects of the school's culture, and formed the basis for instruction. Equally significant was student

discourse, which was shown through the way students used discourse to cultivate knowledge. The students at Reed High School were constantly engaged in conversation that resulted in learning and community building.

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse were interwoven. The highest levels of cognitive engagement were observed in Mr. Flash's, Ms. Nicole's, and Mr. Alexander's classroom. These teachers shared three common elements of practice. First, using discourse as an instructional strategy allowed them to listen to the cognitive process at work in their students. Second, each teacher demonstrated strong content knowledge. And third, they all exhibited multiple indicators of dispositions on the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form.

In practice, the teachers often employed questioning strategies to elicit discourse. The teachers adapted instruction in response to student needs as they listened to students verbalize the cognitive process. Possessing a strong knowledge of the content enabled the teachers to intensify instruction to hold students to high expectations and accommodate struggling students, which demonstrated the ability to work with exceptional learners. During this study, the most frequently demonstrated dispositions were the ability to work with ethnically diverse populations and the existence of emotionally, verbally, and physically appropriate relationships with students. The teachers who cognitively challenged students also demonstrated enthusiasm for their content area, a belief that all

children can learn, as well as, the capability to treat all students according to their needs, and hold all students to high expectations.

During multiple observations in this case study, students worked in small groups to answer questions or to solve math equations. Most often, challenging tasks were attempted with the support of peer groups and the teacher. This enabled students to work within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is described as what a student can do while working with someone more skilled than him or herself (Vygotsky, 1978). The practical implication of Vygotsky's argument is that what students can do with others is more indicative of their mental abilities, and more complex than what they can do alone. It is predicated on the belief that what students can do with assistance today, they will be able to do independently tomorrow. This was true of students at Reed High School. Repeatedly, students demonstrated increased engagement after getting an answer right. As their self-efficacy increased due to mastery experiences, students were more willing to attempt increasing complex tasks (Bandura, 1977). For students, one intellectual victory lead to another, and as discussed in the student reflections, students preferred engaging in activities where they found success. The more cognitively engaging classrooms provided evidence of this learning process.

### **The Student Action Coding Sheet**

Students' ability to achieve academic success depends on teacher instruction. The Student Action Coding Sheet is a pedagogical tool because it provides teachers with the

opportunity to scaffold engaging instructional activities into each lesson. It provides three cognitive levels that describe what engaged students say and do that build upon each other. Without carefully attending to each phase of learning as it develops, the most complex tasks that are expected at high levels of cognition will be performed on a surface level, lacking the depth they are intended to cultivate.

During this case study, seventeen classroom observations were conducted using the Student Action Coding Sheet. The findings show that 43% of student actions were classified at the lower levels of cognitive engagement. 22% of student actions reflected the highest levels of cognitive engagement, with the most frequently observed actions being, student collaborating and negotiating/sharing and refining ideas through discussion. The remaining 35% of student actions were classified as moderately cognitive engaging, with the most frequently observed actions being, using alternative forms of communication and demonstrating excitement about the activity.

The two most frequently marked indicators in the medium cognitive domain category received a large number because of technology usage in the classroom. Without technology, student actions that reflected medium engagement would be minimal. Significant learning opportunities at the medium cognitive domain level were either not, or were infrequently, reflected through student actions such as, making observations passed those planned by the teacher, bringing in resources to study, and elaborating on teacher ideas.

This gap in engagement may be the key to understanding Reed High School's low student achievement scores. Based on conversations with school administration and

teachers, the schools' focus is on technology integration and student collaboration. Meanwhile, actions that reflect medium levels of cognitive engagement on the Student Action Coding Sheet, that cultivate students' ability to demonstrate understanding and apply knowledge, are limited. At Reed, teachers assigned collaborative activities that may have lacked depth due to missing cognitive engagement steps. Therefore, collaboration with cognition is just conversation.

### **Teacher Dispositions**

Another contribution of this research is the specific teacher actions that are evidence of the dispositions on the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form. Teacher dispositions that are most common in highly engaging classrooms were identified. The study aligns with literature that connects teacher dispositions to student engagement. If teacher dispositions impact student engagement, and student engagement impacts learning, and learning impacts achievement, an additional area of future research must examine the factors that impact teacher dispositions.

This research examined teaching and learning in an urban school with a majority Black student population. For administrators, this study can inform their hiring practices and objectives of classroom observations. For teachers, this study identifies dispositions and instructional strategies that cultivate engagement among Black students. For the students, this research is their voice. It says that students are interested in learning, capable of learning, and knowledgeable about what supports their learning.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this research are a function of the researcher's positionality as an outsider. Insider participants who recommended classrooms for observations could have directed the researcher towards teachers who are the most engaging or the most skilled at classroom management. Additionally, with the knowledge of the researcher's presence, teachers and students could have exhibited increased engagement characteristics.

As action research, the findings of this case study are specific to the site and therefore, not generalizable. The information gathered contributed to the researcher's understanding of student engagement at the site, and will inform future research at the site regarding student engagement.

### **Recommendations and Implications**

The recommendations and implications of this research study are written in consideration of Milner's (2010) *opportunity gap* framework, which questions whether or not schools provide students opportunities to learn and to be successful. Embedded within the opportunities to learn ideology is a belief that, intellectually, all students are equally capable of success despite the obstacles they face outside of school. Therefore, the role of the school is to create learning environments where the instruction provides a relevant response to student differences, thereby affording an opportunity to learn. The potential impact of the recommendations and implications on student learning, teacher practice,

school administrators, teacher education, and educational research are discussed in this section.

### **The Recognition of Student Learning**

The impact of student engagement on student learning, as evidenced by student actions and discourse, was examined in this study. Observations conducted using the Student Action Coding Sheet indicated that student engagement was the highest in classrooms where teachers balanced instruction, content knowledge, and appropriate dispositions. Specifically, high levels of cognitive engagement were observed when the teacher used classroom discourse as an instructional strategy, showed strong content knowledge, and demonstrated the appropriate dispositions for teaching in an urban school, according to the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form.

Student engagement and student learning were different between classes. While some teachers were observed to scaffold learning opportunities according to Blooms Taxonomy, others did not carefully attend to cognitive stages in the learning process. Observed classrooms also varied in the amount of student-centered or teacher-centered instruction, even though student reflections showed a clear preference for student-centered instructional strategies. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers strategically plan for student engagement at multiple levels of cognition and stages in the learning process.

Teachers at Reed High School must have a broader awareness of what student learning looks and sounds like. Teachers at Reed High School demonstrated an awareness of behavioral and emotional engagement, but did not appear to recognize cognitive engagement. Fredricks et al. (2004) held that cognitive engagement could be recognized through the quality and depth of classroom discourse; therefore teachers must provide opportunities for students to talk about what they are learning. Through classroom discourse, students make meaning of the content and their mental processes become known. With an awareness of student cognition, teachers can use appropriate instructional strategies to meet student needs.

### **Teacher Practice**

Based on observations conducted during this exploratory research, teacher practice was heavily influenced by teacher dispositions. Teacher dispositions are the teacher's habits of mind that influence the learning environment. Research highlights certain teacher dispositions that impact engagement such as having high expectations (Fredricks, 2011), being supportive (Turner et al., 2011), providing authentic and challenging pedagogical experiences (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014), exhibiting a positive and warm attitude (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), and being enthusiastic about the content and students (Early et al. 2014).

The findings of this case study suggest that teacher dispositions were equally as significant to student learning as instructional choices and the teacher's knowledge of the



content. However, teacher dispositions are a neglected in teacher preparation programs (Thornton, 2006) and professional development. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers participate in professional learning opportunities that require them to address race and equity, and examine how their own life experiences impact their teaching and relationships with students.

Meaningful fieldwork opportunities can influence teacher dispositions. Each year, teachers at Reed High School are required to complete a professional growth plan, which is aimed at increasing teacher expertise through planned action steps, reflection, and collaboration. Teachers could use this opportunity to take action by mentoring a student, engaging in community programs, or contributing to service learning projects. After fieldwork teachers would be required to reflect on their experiences with knowledgeable colleagues or volunteers from the research community, before collaborating with other teachers to develop pedagogical strategies that support student needs in their specific environment.

Given the overall significance of teacher dispositions, additional studies are needed to better understand the factors that influence teacher dispositions such as personal history, school culture, and educational policy.

### **School Administrators**

School leadership must recruit, select, and develop teachers who are qualified to work Black students in an urban high school. Given the findings of this case study, qualified

teachers must possess dispositions appropriate for teaching in an urban school, a deep understanding of the content they teach, as well as the ability to select learning activities that best fit student needs. To recruit and select teachers, it is recommended that school administrators utilize interview questions that assess candidates' competence in the desired dispositions.

This case study can also inform classroom observations conducted by administrators. In addition to assessing the actions of the teachers, administrators can evaluate the level of student engagement, which leads to student learning, based on student actions and discourse. Teacher dispositions can also be examined by observing instructional choices and teacher-student interactions that are evidence of the quality of relationships.

### **Teacher Education Programs**

According to Adkins-Coleman (2010), students in teacher preparation programs need specific and practical examples of what cultivating student engagement looks like in order to be ready for teaching in urban schools. The examples and analysis of student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse in an urban school provided by this case study could inform prospective teachers. Through student reflections, this study also revealed the learning environments and teacher dispositions that students prefer. The realities of teaching and learning in an urban school that are discussed in this research may challenge a prospective teacher's beliefs about race, ethnicity, and class.

## **Educational Research**

This case study examined teaching and learning in a secondary school, which according to Milner (2010) is a neglected area of research. Reed High School is a microcosm of urban schools that serve a majority Black student population across the nation. This student focused on the positive elements of teaching and learning that are present in the school, instead of contributing to the narrative about the ineffectiveness of urban schools.

Given that only 19% of the student engagement instruments identified by Fredricks (2011) were observational tools, this study was an example of how observational data can be used to identify and document student engagement. Each classroom in which observations were conducted provided a comprehensive snapshot of the interplay between teacher and student during the learning process. More in depth investigation is needed to identify specific instructional strategies that yield student engagement at the lower, medium, and highest cognitive levels.

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## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

Nationally, the 2015 performance of Black students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Test scarcely meets the Basic level of performance, and is a significant stretch from the Proficient, and Advanced levels. The scores of Reed High School provide a school-based snapshot of student performance. On the 2014 – 2015 Florida State Assessment, 20% of the students tested scored Satisfactory and Above on the English Language Arts Assessment, and 19% of the students tested scored Satisfactory and Above on the Mathematics Assessment. The national and local academic achievement of Black students on standardized tests begs the question; do American schools have the capacity to educate Black children?

The purpose of this action research was to explore the teacher behaviors and instructional strategies that developed a culture of high achievement among Black students as measured by student engagement and discourse, immediately before and after desegregation, and in classrooms today. The examination of popular theories concerning the education of Black people in the early 1900's and the narratives of individuals who attended segregated schools, provided a historical and current description of the state of Black education. In addition, the connection between student engagement and teacher dispositions was recognized. A review of relevant literature informed this study by providing a conceptual understanding and operational definition of student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse. Last, a case study was conducted to bring a local, practical focus to the research. The purpose of this case study was to examine the impact



of student engagement on student learning in an urban school with a majority Black student population, as evidenced by student actions and discourse. Data for the case study were collected through preliminary research, informal and formal meetings, and informal and formal observations. Data were collected during each site visit using the two-column anecdotal notes, and during classroom observations using the Student Action Coding Sheet. Data were analyzed based on the operational definitions of each term from the conceptual framework – student engagement, dispositions, and discourse. Additional teacher behaviors were discussed to the extent that they aligned with the desired teacher dispositions on the Fitness to Teach Checklist/Referral Form.

Across all three manuscripts findings indicate that Black students learn when they are engaged. Black students learned during intense Jim Crow oppression, and student actions and discourse were proof of learning in Mr. Alexander's, Mr. Flash's, and Ms. Nicole's class at Reed High School. The problem is that Black students may engage in learning differently than traditional styles of teaching and learning afford. The original purpose of school was to control and manage behavior. Additionally, it was established to reinforce the social and cultural norms of the European society for which it was created. For Black students to thrive they must navigate double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). Du Bois' concept of double consciousness describes an African American's struggle to reconcile African heritage with American identity, without losing footing in either culture. The implications of double consciousness for Black students is that they must struggle to unite an innate African heritage and the cultural characteristics of being an African American with the requirements for learning in a European created institution.

Educational researchers have provided many ways for educators to engage Black students. Delpit (2012) advised teachers to create a sense of belonging for students and to connect the curriculum to their culture in positive ways. Ladson-Billings (2001) says the teacher must know the content, the student, and know how to teach the content to the student. hooks (1994) advocates for classrooms where students are active participants in their learning not passive consumers. One of many suggestions given by Ladson-Billings (2009) in *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* is to, “encourage students to learn collaboratively...to teach each other and be responsible for each other” (p.60). These examples were selected because they engaged students in *both* the narratives of individuals who attended school during segregation *and* were observed to engage students in classrooms at Reed High School.

Researchers, teacher preparation programs, administrators, and teachers should be mindful of the balance between student engagement, teacher dispositions, and discourse. When all three are present students participation and engagement, via deep cognitive discourse, is present. Student engagement shapes educational outcomes (Sharkey, Quirk, & Mayworm, 2014) both positively and negatively, and it has been seen to increase student achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Paris, 2014).

### **Relevant Coursework**

Facilitating Learning, Development, and Motivation helped me to recognize instances of learning, behavior, and motivation in practice. For example, I was able to

recognize the growth in students' self-efficacy when they had mastery experiences while working in their zone of proximal development. The data analysis course increased my understanding of the structure of the school system, particularly the legislation that leads to educational fads. For example, in this case study, teacher dispositions were found to stimulate engagement. Understanding educational policy enables me to understand the influences *on* teacher dispositions that may lead to frustration and impact a teacher's ability to display the appropriate dispositions with students. The course in organizational theory improved my ability to analyze a problem from different perspectives, and apply the appropriate solution. Analysis of Complex Problems of Practice required the completion of a Situating the Problem assignment and a Thick Description assignment that together helped me situate myself within the context in preparation for my dissertation work. It helped me to examine my context critically and broadened my understanding of what counts as data. My elective courses, in qualitative research and urban education both helped to round out my experience in the Professional Practice Program.

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## **APPENDIX A: UCF IRB LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA0000351, IRB00001138**

To: **DeShawn Sims**

Date: **October 16, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/16/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Characteristics of Equity in Education for African American Students  
Investigator: DeShawn Sims  
IRB Number: SBE-15-11681  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#)

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/16/2015 10:44:54 AM EDT

IRB Manager

**APPENDIX B: ORIGINAL STUDENT ACTION CODING SHEET**

**Appendix. Student Actions Coding Sheet (SACS)**

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Lesson goals: \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson objectives: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions: Please mark each occurrence observed as many times as they occur in the five-minute period. In addition, make supplementary marks for every continuous 15 seconds of observed action.**

Categories	Subcategories	Number in each subcategory			
		1st five minutes	2nd five minutes	3rd five minutes	Total
Student actions indicative of lower cognitive domains <i>Remembering and initial stages of understanding</i>	(1) Positive interactions with the teacher				
	(2) Student sharing ideas with the teacher				
	(3) Student sharing observations with other students				
	(4) Student responding to teacher questions				
	(5) Student asking for attention of group (raising hand)				
	(6) Student listening to teacher				
Student actions indicative of medium cognitive domain level <i>Higher stages of understanding and applying</i>	(7) Student demonstrating excitement about activity				
	(8) Student questions				
	(9) Student elaborating on what the teacher says				
	(10) Students making their own observations beyond those planned by teachers				
	(11) Student searching for resources				
	(12) Students using resources (unsolicited)				
	(13) Student offering idea for approaching problems				
	(14) Student bringing in resources to study				
	(15) Student using alternative forms of communication				
	(16) Student making observations				
	(17) Student communicating data				
	(18) Student designing experiment				
	(19) Student following teacher's directions				



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Student actions indicative of the highest cognitive domain level	(20) Student negotiating/sharing and refining ideas
<i>Analyzing, evaluating and creating</i>	(21) Student defending responses with evidence
	(22) Student providing explanation for phenomenon
	(23) Student collaborating
	(24) Student recognizing errors in process

---

### Subcategory Indicator Explanation (If Further Explanation Needed) with Example Student Actions

#### *Student Actions Indicative of Lower Cognitive Domains 'Remembering and Initial Stages of Understanding'*

- (1) Positive interactions with the teacher:
  - (a) Students working with the teacher to come up with ideas or share interesting discoveries
  - (b) Teacher and student discussing a topic of interest
- (2) Student sharing ideas with the teacher:
  - (a) Student answering question when prompted by the teacher
  - (b) Student calling the teacher over to share an observation
- (3) Student sharing observations with other students:
  - (a) When students are given time to make observations students openly explain to each other what they see
  - (b) When carrying out experiments students explain what they observed 'that trial was faster than the last'
- (4) Student responding to teacher questions:
  - (a) Students giving an answer to a question posed by the teacher
- (5) Student asking for attention of group (raising hand):
  - (a) 'I have something interesting to share with the class'
  - (b) 'Can I tell how I came to understand this idea?'
- (6) Student listening to teacher: Extended teacher-initiated commentary. Make one mark for every continuous 15 seconds of observed action.
  - (a) Students listening to the teacher's explanation
  - (b) Students listening to extended detailed instruction from the teacher

#### *Student Actions Indicative of the Medium Cognitive Domain Level 'Higher Stages of Understanding and Applying'*

- (7) Student demonstrating excitement about activity—Student demonstrating heightened attention toward classroom activity or lesson component:

- (a) Eagerly sharing ideas
- (b) Student raising hand to anxiously volunteer
- (8) Student questions – Students raising their own questions:
  - (a) ‘What is the importance of the insect’s antennae?’
  - (b) ‘How many trials do you think we need to perform?’
- (9) Student elaborating on what the teachers says—A response offered by a student after the teacher offers an explanation:
  - (a) After teacher discusses phenomenon of dehydration, student shares, ‘My mother had that experience when she was dehydrated’
  - (b) Student offering another example of a phenomenon introduced by the teacher
- (10) Students making their own observations beyond those planned by teachers:
  - (a) ‘Most of these insects move to the top of the container when originally captured’
  - (b) ‘Wolves seem to maintain their traveling patterns even after an associate pack member is killed by humans’
- (11) Student searching for resources:
  - (a) Students moving around the classroom to find materials they need to complete an observation
  - (b) ‘Do you have three see through containers that we could use to complete our experiment?’
- (12) Students using resources (unsolicited):
  - (a) Students taking initiative to use a text or reference materials to confirm observation or make comparison without being prompted by the teacher
  - (b) Students using microscope to make observation without prompting by the teacher
- (13) Student offering idea for approaching problems:
  - (a) ‘Perhaps we could ask the mayor why this decision was made’
  - (b) ‘Maybe we could keep one container sealed while we leave the other open’
- (14) Student bringing in resources to study:
  - (a) Students bringing in plants that are of interest to them for an experiment
  - (b) Students gathering different types of string at home to test their strength
- (15) Student using alternative forms of communication:
  - (a) Students drawing pictures to keep track of their observations
  - (b) Students using writing to express their understanding
- (16) Student making observations:
  - (a) Students engaged in looking and measuring
  - (b) Students curiously prodding an object to learn more about it

- (17) Student communicating data:
  - (a) 'This is what we found when we tried to see which was faster'
  - (b) 'This graph demonstrates the performance of the fuel used'
- (18) Student designing experiment:
  - (a) 'I think we should try to use three different flasks to see if there is a difference'
  - (b) 'I think we only need to run the reaction for three days'
- (19) Student following teacher's directions: Student is doing what the teacher told the student to do without having to or being allowed to use own judgments in determining action:
  - (a) Students following the step-by-step protocol of a lab
  - (b) Students completing a worksheet

*Student Actions Indicative of the Highest Cognitive Domain Level 'Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating'*

- (20) Student negotiating/sharing and refining ideas: Through discussion students reach a new understanding:
  - (a) Students sharing ideas about how best to solve a problem or design an experiment
  - (b) Students discussing their ideas behind why something happens
- (21) Student defending responses with evidence:
  - (a) Students using data to defend a conclusion
  - (b) Students using physical attributes of an object to rationalize a response
- (22) Student providing explanation for phenomenon:
  - (a) 'The large spots on the butterflies' wings are useful for protection'
  - (b) 'The gravitational pull of this planet is greater than the other because...'
- (23) Student collaborating: Students working together to accomplish an objective:
  - (a) Students discussing observations
  - (b) Students comparing their conclusions
- (24) Student recognizing errors in process:
  - (a) 'This won't allow us to determine if the sunlight or soil is affecting the plant's growth'
  - (b) 'We forgot to take the temperature into account in trying to answer our initial question'

## **APPENDIX C: ADAPTED STUDENT ACTION CODING SHEET**

### Student Action Coding Sheet – Observations

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Please mark each occurrence observed as many times as they occur in a five-minute period. In addition, make supplementary marks for every continuous 15 seconds of observed actions (i.e. make 4 marks for 1 minute of a continuously observed action).



Cognitive Domains	Indicators (Student Actions)	Examples of Student Actions	Number in each category			Total
			1 <sup>st</sup> 5 minutes	2 <sup>nd</sup> 5 minutes	3 <sup>rd</sup> 5 minutes	
<b>LOWER</b> <i>Remembering and initial stages of understanding</i>	(1) Positive interactions with the teacher	(a) Discussing a topic of interest with the teacher to develop ideas or share interesting discoveries				
	(2) Sharing ideas with the teacher	(a) Calling the teacher over to share an observation				
	(3) Sharing observations with other students	(a) When given the opportunity, openly explaining to each other what they see				
	(4) Responding to teacher questions	(a) Answering a question posed by the teacher				
	(5) Asking for attention of the group (raising hand)	(a) "I have something interesting to share with the class."				
	(6) Student listening to teacher	(a) Listening to teacher's extended instructions/explanations				
<b>MEDIUM</b> <i>Higher stages of understanding and applying</i>	(7) Demonstrating excitement about activity	(a) Eagerly shares ideas (b) Student raising hand to anxiously share				
	(8) Student questions	(a) Student raising their own questions				
	(9) Elaborating on teacher ideas	(a) Offers example of a phenomenon introduced by the teacher				
	(10) Making observations beyond those planned by the teacher	(a) "Wolves seem to maintain their traveling patterns even after an associate pack member is killed by humans."				
	(11) Searching for and/or using resources (unsolicited)	(a) Searching classroom for materials to complete assignment (b) Using resources w/o being prompted by the teacher				
	(12) Offering ideas for approaching problems	(a) "Maybe we could ask the mayor why this decision was made."				
	(13) Bringing in resources to study	(a) Bringing in resources of interest to complement assignment				
	(14) Using alternative forms of communication	(a) Drawing pictures to keep track of their thoughts (b) Using writing to express their understanding				
	(15) Making observations	(a) Curiously analyzing to learn more about an object/concept				
	(16) Communicating ideas	(a) "This graph demonstrates..."				
	(17) Designing experiments	(a) "I think we should try to use..."				
	(18) Following teacher's directions	(a) Follows teacher directions (i.e.: steps to complete a lab) without using own judgments to determine action				

### Student Action Coding Sheet – Observations

<b>HIGHEST</b> <i>Analyzing and evaluating and</i>	(19) Negotiating/sharing and refining ideas through discussion	(a) Sharing ideas about how best to solve a problem (b) Discussing ideas behind why something happened				
	(20) Defending response w/evidence	(a) Using attributes of a concept/object to rationalize response				
	(21) Explaining phenomenon	(a) "The spots on butterflies' wings are useful for protection."				
	(22) Student collaborating	(a) Discussing observations and comparing conclusions				
	(23) Recognizing errors in process	(a) "We forgot to take the temperature into account..."				

#### QUESTIONS AND NOTES

Used and adapted with permission:  
**Edrogan, Campbell and Abd-Hamid (2011). *The student actions coding sheet (SACS): An instrument for illuminating shifts toward student-centered science classrooms.* International Journal of Science Education, 33(10), pp. 1313-1336.**

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**APPENDIX D: FITNESS TO TEACH CHECKLIST/REFERRAL FORM**



Check All That Apply:

- Self Assessment
- Formal Assessment
- Midterm
- Final

**FITNESS TO TEACH CHECKLIST/REFERRAL FORM**

Name of student \_\_\_\_\_ Course \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Program: (circle one)    Early Childhood                      Elementary                      Middle School                      Secondary

Indicators	Acceptable Behaviors	Developing Behaviors	Unacceptable Behaviors	SOE Value	Disposition
<b>1. Demonstrates professional self-regulation.</b>	Consistently is on-time and present, stays for entire class session, assignments are turned in on time and is engaged.	Most of the time is on-time and present, stays for entire class session, assignments are turned in on time and is engaged.	Frequently does not make contact when absent or not punctual, leaves early or comes in late, assignments are not turned in on time and is not engaged.	Academic Excellence	Self-regulation
<b>2. Works productively with faculty, staff and peers (in class and out).</b>	Consistently works productively with faculty, staff and peers and positively with students by contributing to learning and being focused on and accountable for tasks.	Most of the time works productively with faculty, staff and peers and positively with students.	Frequently has difficulty working productively with faculty, staff and peers and positively with students.	Skilled and knowledgeable professionals working collaboratively.	Positive attitude toward others
<b>3. Demonstrates understanding about others' teaching perspectives.</b>	Consistently understands others' perspectives about teaching in a nonjudgmental way by listening to, sharing with, and supporting the efforts of others with empathy.	Most of the time understands others' perspectives about teaching in a nonjudgmental way.	Frequently has difficulty understanding others' perspectives about teaching in a nonjudgmental way.	Democracy, diversity and social justice.	Empathy



<b>4. Accepts and acts upon constructive criticism.</b>	Consistently is able to accept and act upon reasonable criticism with a positive attitude.	Most of the time is able to accept and act upon reasonable criticism with a positive attitude.	Frequently has difficulty accepting and acting upon reasonable criticism with a positive attitude.	Inquiry leading to reflective decision-making and problem solving.	Diplomacy
<b>5. Separates personal and professional issues.</b>	Consistently separates personal and professional issues focusing on professional task and responsibilities.	Most of the time will separate personal and professional issues to focus on experience, seeks help if necessary.	Frequently has difficulty separating personal and professional issues to focus on experience, lets personal issues interfere with experience.	Skilled and knowledgeable professionals working collaboratively.	Resourcefulness
<b>6. Speaks in a manner appropriate to the learning environment.</b>	Consistently communicates in a manner appropriate to the learning environment by using the appropriate volume, tone and language for the context.	Most of the time will communicate in a manner appropriate to the learning environment context.	Frequently has difficulty communicating in a manner appropriate to the learning environment context.	Caring and safe environment.	Respect
<b>7. Demonstrates appropriate social skills in professional and social interactions with others.</b>	Consistently demonstrates interpersonal skills that are required for successful professional teaching, including cooperation/collaboration, discussion participation and conflict resolution.	Most of the time will demonstrate interpersonal skills that are required for successful professional teaching.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating interpersonal skills that are required for successful professional teaching.	Skilled and knowledgeable professionals working collaboratively.	Professionalism
<b>8. Demonstrates a commitment to teaching.</b>	Consistently the commitment to teaching is demonstrated by thoughtful reflection, analytical thinking and quality engagement in the school setting and coursework.	Most of the time commitment to teaching is demonstrated by thoughtful reflection and analytical thinking.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating thoughtful reflection and analytical thinking.	Inquiry leading to reflective decision-making and problem solving.	Professionalism

<b>9. Demonstrates appropriate command of both oral and written communication.</b>	Consistently demonstrates appropriate command of both oral and written communication in the school setting and coursework.	Most of the time will demonstrate appropriate command of both oral and written communication.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating appropriate command of both oral and written communication.	Academic Excellence	Skills
<b>10. Relationships with students, peers, supervisors, family members, staff and faculty are emotionally, verbally and physically appropriate.</b>	Relationships with students, peers, supervisors, family members, staff and faculty are emotionally, verbally and physically appropriate on a consistent basis.	Is working to build appropriate relationships with students, peers, supervisors, family members, staff and faculty.	Frequently has difficulty with relationships with students, peers, supervisors, family members, staff and faculty that are emotionally, verbally and physically inappropriate.	Skilled and knowledgeable professionals working collaboratively.	Respect
<b>11. Demonstrates an ability to work with ethnically diverse populations.</b>	Consistently demonstrates an appreciation of and ability to work with diverse populations by ensuring that teaching and learning are student centered.	Most of the time demonstrates ability to work with diverse populations.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating ability to work with diverse populations.	Democracy, diversity and social justice.	Respect
<b>12. Demonstrates an ability to work with exceptional learners.</b>	Consistently demonstrates an appreciation of and ability to work with exceptional learners by ensuring that teaching and learning are student centered.	Most of the time demonstrates ability to work with exceptional learners.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating ability to work with exceptional learners.	Democracy, diversity and social justice.	Respect
<b>13. Demonstrates initiative.</b>	Consistently demonstrates flexibility and is open to new ideas, willing and able to modify beliefs and practices. Is able to take action through one's own agency	Most of the time is flexible, accepting, and open to trying new ideas.	Frequently has difficulty accepting and trying new ideas.	Democracy, diversity and social justice.	Flexibility

<b>14. Demonstrated enthusiasm for his/her content area.</b>	Consistently demonstrates enthusiasm for educational field/content area and age level of student by engaging work and interactions with a positive attitude.	Most of the time demonstrates enthusiasm for educational field/content area and age level of student.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating enthusiasm for educational field/content area and age level of student.	Caring and Safe Environment	Enthusiasm
<b>15. Exhibits a belief that all children can learn. AND</b>	Consistently implements differentiated learning strategies so all children can learn.	Most of the time implements differentiated learning strategies so all children can learn.	Frequently has difficulty implementing differentiated learning strategies so all children can learn.	Caring and safe environment.	Resiliency
<b>17. Treats all students fairly according to their needs.</b>	Consistently implements differentiated learning strategies so all children can learn.	Most of the time implements differentiated learning strategies so all children can learn.	Frequently has difficulty implementing differentiated learning strategies so all children can learn.	Academic Excellence	Perseverance
<b>16. Holds all students to high expectations.</b>	Consistently demonstrates high expectations for students by scaffolding instruction and maintaining academic rigor.	Most of the time demonstrates high expectations for students.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating high expectations for students.	Academic Excellence	Resiliency
<b>18.a. Demonstrates commitment to lifelong learning.</b>	Consistently demonstrates ongoing process of learning by questioning and testing assumptions about teaching and education through reflection and dialogue.	Most of the time will demonstrate ongoing process of learning by questioning and testing assumptions about teaching and education.	Frequently has difficulty demonstrating the ongoing process of learning by questioning and testing assumptions about teaching and education.	Academic Excellence	Curiosity

<b>18. b. Demonstrates commitment to professional growth.</b>	Consistently revises practice using current research by reading professional literature, engaging in professional development and participating in professional organizations.	Some of the time will revise practice using current research.	Frequently does not revise practice using current research.	Academic Excellence	Initiative
<b>19. Demonstrates scholastic integrity.</b>	Produces high quality work; gives credit to sources			Academic Excellence	Integrity
<b>20. Demonstrates respect for the teacher's role and school environment.</b>	Demonstrates appropriate personal hygiene habits and dress.			Caring and Safe Environment	Self-Respect

Notes:

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty/Cooperating Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number & Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Semester: \_\_\_\_\_