A CASE STUDY OF WHITE SECONDARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT

THEIR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND THE IMPACT ON INSTRUCTION

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore how White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color impacted instruction in a successful, diverse school district. In order to develop more positive attitudes toward cultural groups different from their own, teachers should be exposed to students of color and must look carefully at their own attitudes and behavior in their classroom. Biases, prejudices, and socioeconomic inequities continue to plague our nation's schools. Teachers who are insensitive or unfamiliar with the needs of multicultural students make learning difficult for them.

For this study, the district and four participants were purposefully selected. A single high school was used for this case study. A purposive sample of four White secondary teachers was interviewed and content analysis was conducted on the data.

The district studied had achieved academic success (closing the achievement gaps) because of its focus on both the beliefs and instructional skills of its educators. The adults believed they were responsible for student learning. Research participants bonded with students and mentored them and expected all students to achieve at a high level.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my parents, Zar and Virginia Benedict, who worked hard to ensure their children would reap the benefits of higher education. I thank them for their strong work ethic, "persistence" gene, and all the Sunday morning breakfasts when our educational futures were guided and planned. I appreciate all the sacrifices they made so their children's lives would be easier than what they experienced.

To my brother, Jeril, whose constant prodding and warning that I would be "collecting my Social Security check by the time I finished my degree" spurred me on to "Just do it."

To my sister, Karen Lavin, English teacher extraordinaire, who spent many hours editing my dissertation and provided me with excellent input and transitional phrases throughout my paper.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After more than 30 years of education reform, a significant achievement gap
persists between White, predominantly middle-class students and their poor and/or non-
White peers (Berman, Chambliss, & Geiser, 1999).

Continued poor achievement trends on standardized tests from students with
culturally diverse backgrounds may signal attitudes and assumptions that need to be
challenged and addressed: attitudes of defensiveness and cultural deficiencies on the part
of teachers that can result in attitudes of helplessness and hopelessness on the part of
students.

Studies suggest that school reform fails because of educators' unwillingness to
understand the underlying causes of academic failure of students from low-income and
diverse backgrounds and because of their tendency to blame the student, families, and
communities (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Berman et al. (1999) noted that efforts to raise
achievement were hindered by educators' placing the blame on the student without
examining the links between school practices and student outcomes.

An extraordinary number of books and articles have been written about the
achievement gap, and a great number of different causes have been identified, with a
large variety of solutions recommended for this complex problem (Billig, 2005;

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Books, 2007; Bruton & Robles-Pina, 2009; HB2722 Advisory Committee, 2008; Ladner & Burke, 2010; National School Public Relations Association [NSPRA], 2008; Oszewski-Kubilus, 2006; Skrla et al., 2009; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

The population of the United States is becoming increasingly multicultural. Research has shown that multicultural students are treated differently (Cazden, 1986; Jackson & Corsca, 1974) than their White counterparts. As the number of students of color increases, there is an even greater need to understand teachers' cognitive processes and products with respect to a culturally diverse classroom. Teachers' beliefs play a powerful role in students' behavior. Rios (1996) credits several researchers (i.e., Argyris & Schon, 1975; Borko, Cone, Russo, & Shavelson, 1975; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Huber & Mandl, 1982; and Wittrock, 1987), when he argues: "The connection between teacher thinking and action, mediated by how one interprets what one sees, is of critical importance" (p. 3). Teachers' beliefs and thinking are shaped by teaching and the socialization involved in that process. Rios (1996) also notes that Wright and Tuska (1968) suggest that the teacher-student relationship mirrors the parent-child relationship. Students spend years watching teachers in action. The teachers are further socialized by the colleges they attend, the courses they take, their student teaching experience, and their response to the demands of teaching and the socialization process involved. We know that teacher thinking affects teacher action, which in turn affects teacher thinking. Research noted that a teacher's knowledge is socially constructed and the teacher will shape the subject matter to account for ethnic or economic factors that influence students.

Additionally, applying the organizational theory of sensemaking, or how people construct understandings of their world (Weick, 1995), enables us to understand teacher learning in schools. Teachers' personal experiences and professional education affect their routines and knowledge (Porter & Brophy, 1988). The teachers' personal experiences are culturally conditioned and may clash with the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds, the diverse schools they teach in and what constitutes a culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

How teachers make and understand the events they witness in their classrooms depends on their beliefs and individual lens and how their perceptions about their students impacts instructional practices in the classroom. This study provides the opportunity to study the process of teacher sensemaking and the means to understand how teachers learn.

Concerns

Research (Fuller, 1969; Marshall et al., 1990) suggests that teachers have varying levels of concerns about working in classrooms with diverse student populations. Those concerns are held about students whose cultural backgrounds differ from the teachers' background and are related to teacher/student racial, ethnic and/or socioeconomic differences. Marshall (1990) analyzed the connection between teachers' personal experiences and the concerns related to teaching in a multicultural classroom. She discovered that the concerns are related to the differences between personal and cultural experiences of teachers and their students from diverse backgrounds. The concerns centered around familial and group knowledge, strategies and techniques, interpersonal

competence, and school bureaucracy. With the increasing diversity in our schools, educators are pressured to serve all students fairly while dealing with the negative impacts of shrinking financial and material resources (Kozol, 1991; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). Ineffective resources and student diversity have provided a ready explanation for the low level of performance of students of color.

Student learning opportunities are determined by what the teacher does in the classroom in terms of instruction. Teachers' concerns include their teaching assignment, stereotypical perceptions of student inadequacy, low standards of performance, students' previous lack of success, and the school milieu. Maxwell (1993) also found that those teachers' "staying behaviors" (as cited in Artiles, 1996, p. 37) are a function of their sense of efficacy and the nature of staff relations in the school. The 'we're all in this together' collegiality of teachers increased their perceptions that students are capable of learning.

Most of the research and concerns note that teachers and students have diverse backgrounds and experiences that shape instruction and learning. The classroom is a medium for communication where teachers and students construct meaning and is why teachers must understand their students' construct so that they are more effective teachers. Greenwood et al. (1981) identified effective classrooms versus ineffective classrooms whereby the teachers' gave students the opportunity to respond to the instruction being delivered.

Ever-increasing student diversity presents challenges for both teachers and students. Some students enter school with prerequisite skills and abilities, while other

students do not. Culturally aware teachers may experience anxiety about their work in schools where students' culture and customs for students of color are different from what the teacher is accustomed to. Because of the differences between the culture of the school and the home culture, the student is likely to be treated differently by teachers. Significant research supports the notion that teachers behave differently based on given student characteristics (Irvine, 1990).

Culture is central to learning. It shapes the thinking processes of student and teacher alike and plays a role in communicating and receiving information, both essential in teaching. Children identify themselves and their place in the world within the context of their culture. A pedagogy that is culturally relevant and encourages students to embrace their own culture and norms is important for their cognitive development and engagement (Sheets, 1999).

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Sometimes known as pedagogy that is culturally congruent, multicultural, or culturally diverse, culturally relevant pedagogy is a pedagogy that responds to all cultures and values students' culture. Characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are:

. Positive perspective on parents and families

. Communication of high expectations

. Learning within the context of culture

. Student-centered instruction

. Culturally mediated instruction

. Reshaping the curriculum

. Teacher as facilitator

Sensemaking in an educational setting involves "being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, 'What's the story?'" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obtsfeld, 2005, p. 410). It means looking for a unifying order, even if we are not sure if one exists. Leaders in an educational setting need to engage in sensemaking to understand why their students are not successful. Additionally, in this era of school accountability, teachers examine ways to improve student achievement by refining curricular practices and using different approaches as a means to raise standardized test scores.

The effect on teaching and student learning is contingent upon the teacher's understanding of the curriculum and the impact teachers' curricular decisions have on student learning and the meaning/construct of those decisions. In order for teachers to be able to change practices and make their teaching more effective, they must use sensemaking to be able to construct understanding of how their students understand their world (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking served as a framework whereby the teachers' behaviors in this study suggested that they made sense of the cues and messages in the classroom and organization that influenced their perceptions about their students of color' and how it impacted classroom instruction.

It is important to provide instruction that addresses the needs of all students and is culturally responsible (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). In order to improve the achievement

of students of color in our schools, teachers must be aware of their frames of reference and not let personal feelings interfere with their profession. All students should be held to a high standard of academic success, and teachers' classrooms should promote equality and academic success. "When all is said and done, what matters most for students' learning are the commitments and capacities of their teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 293).

Problem Statement

Much has been written about the achievement gap, with many different causes identified and many solutions recommended (Barton & Coley, 2010, Billig, 2005; Books, 2007; Bruton & Robles-Pina, 20089; HB2722 Advisory Committee, 2008; Oszewski-Kubilius, 2006; Skrla et al., 2009; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). The literature presents strong evidence that reveals how distant teachers are from recognizing the extent of their deficit thinking and practices and how their deficient perceptions of their students impact instruction. Many gaps in existing research need to be closed. In order to understand how these deficiencies and practices play out in diverse secondary schools, we must examine and fill in the gaps in the current research.

Purpose of the Study

Despite some evidence that more recent comprehensive systemic reform efforts may be raising passing rates on statewide achievement tests across all demographic groups (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson & Koschoreck, 2001), many schools and districts are still not achieving success with all students (Berman et al., 1999; Haney, 2000; Little & Dorph, 1998; Valencia, 1997). The purpose of this study is for the researcher to

examine how White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color affect instruction, and to find ways to sensitize teachers' who may unknowingly have negative perceptions of the abilities of their students of color, and to find ways to overcome these perceptions. Through qualitative analysis of the narrative of selected teachers, this case study examined the sensemaking processes as secondary teachers responded to questions in a narrative format and revealed their teaching experiences. As teachers came to understand their experiences through the sensemaking process, they were better able to adapt their teaching practices to reach all their students. Campbell (1970) noted that sharing experiences and teacher insights have always been a means to establish and enhance trust among teachers and the community.

Karl Weick's (1995; 2001) theory is that the world is only partly predictable and people make choices based on their current situations. Sensemaking includes "cognitive maps of (the) environment" (1995, p.5); and decides which parts of a situation a person pays attention to and how we apply a contextual frame of reference. We then reconstruct and give meaning to past actions in order to justify current decisions, thereby developing "patterns of significant meaning" (Weick, 1995, p. 14).

The sensemaking theory, as examined in this study, provides a process for teachers to interpret and reflect on their professional and personal experiences, thereby enabling them to adapt their teaching methods to better meet the needs of all their students. This research design will add to the current body of literature and provide a more in-depth understanding of teacher deficit thinking practices, examining secondary

teachers' perceptions of their willingness to change their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students of color.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. Do White teachers perceive that they treat their students of color in a manner different from the way they treat their White students?

2. From the viewpoint of these selected White secondary teachers, what type of instruction and assessment decisions do these teachers make for their students of color based on their perceptions about these students?

3. What life experiences have these selected White secondary teachers brought into the classroom and how have these experiences affected how these teachers perceive their students of color.

By addressing these questions, we get a better understanding of a given situation and also improve teaching and learning at all levels.

Assumptions of the Study

The district and the White educators were selected for this study because of their success with students of color. The following assumptions were made:

1. All participants in the study would answer the questions honestly.

2. The perspectives, beliefs, and practices of White educators who were successful with students of color and participated in this study would benefit other White educators.

This study was done with the assumption that all participants would be open and truthfully identify their ethnicity, educational background, and professional status and answer all questions in the interviews. Information such as perceptions, awareness and attitudes of respondents (White educators) toward the issue of race helps explain the differences in the participants' responses.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher recognizes the following limitations contained in this study:

1. The study is limited to only a purposeful sample of White educators in Texas.

2. The study is limited by the small number (4) of educators interviewed.

3. The study is limited by the participants' willingness to share honestly about their experiences as White educators working in a diverse school.

Significance of the Study

White teachers must understand their feelings and behavior toward their students of color so they become more culturally sensitive and to adapt their teaching strategies to fit the different cultural differences so that all students are successful.

This study will provide an understanding that, with the increasing diversity in classrooms, of the paramount importance of teachers' attitudes towards their students of color are of paramount importance. This understanding can then provide teachers with the knowledge necessary to accommodate the growing diversity in our society. An adjustment of ideological perspectives in school relations is required. The literature reviewed in this study will present the challenge to teachers to cross the cultural barriers

and find a common ground with children's culture and heritage in order to improve academic achievement. This research examined the perceptions of individual teachers and their willingness to change their instructional practices in the classroom. A teacher's ability to reflect is significant in terms of student learning, allowing teachers to examine their strengths and weaknesses and to make adjustments accordingly. Additionally, this study is significant in that teachers using the sensemaking activities as a way to understand their perceptions about their students of color will give them a process to reflect on the clues they receive in their classrooms and help them determine what action they need to take.

Additionally, this dissertation focuses on examining sociocultural influences on teachers' perceptions and the impact on classroom practices in addition to how teachers' personal cultural experiences shaped their perspectives. This study will bring to the forefront the ways in which teachers' perceptions can affect the learning/teaching process in the classroom for culturally diverse students.

Teachers must be receptive to a multicultural classroom and must also believe that all students in that classroom are equal (Anderson, 1987). How the teachers get there (being open and receptive to a multicultural population in their classroom) will contribute to the body of knowledge in this field.

Definition of Terms

Case study: a method of qualitative research that is bounded and limited to a single unit of study that is "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

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Culturally responsive teaching: a pedagogy that recognized the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Diverse district: a district with a minimum of 50% of the student population consisting of students of color and with the majority of teachers being White (ethnic distribution is only available for teachers in Texas; ethnic distribution for administrators employed in public schools is not available).

Educator: Teachers and administrators (principals and central office administrators).

Member checks: a researcher shares interpretations of the data with the participant to ensure that the researcher has understood the participant's perspective (Creswell, 1998).

People of color: Used to describe all groups other than Whites (Bell, 2003).

Principal: the principal of a school is the instructional leader of the school (Texas Education Code Sec. 11.2021).

Purposive sampling: participants are not chosen based on representation or the ability to generalize to a population but on the relevance of their experiences to the research questions (Patton, 1990).

School district: organization responsible for implementing the state's system of public education and ensuring student performance (Texas Education Code Sec. 11.002).

Successful district: a district that has closed the achievement gap. This means that the achievement gap between the students of color and the White students in the district is smaller than the achievement gap found at the state level.

Semi-structured interviews: an interview technique that has a list of questions to ask or topics to discuss, but the interviewer may reword and reorder questions to best respond to the natural progression of the conversation (Merriam, 1998).

Teacher: classroom teacher means an educator who is employed by a school district and who, not less than an average of four hours each day, teaches in an academic instructional setting or a career and technology instructional setting.   The term does not include a teacher's aide or a full-time administrator (Texas Education Code Sec. 5.0012).

White: people of European descent.

Overview of Methodology

This dissertation is based on a case study of a small diverse high school in southwest Houston where 49% of the students are students of color. The high school studied served a diverse student population of approximately 234 students in grades 9-12. The student population was economically disadvantaged (37%) with a 14% mobility rate. At the time of the researcher's study, the school was making progress in closing the achievement gap between White and minority students. In light of this fact, the school was a good site to examine teachers' perceptions and their willingness to change their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students of color. This site offered easy access to the student population to be studied (convenience sampling).

The overall methodology included an unstructured open-ended informal interview format. The researcher focused data collection on the four volunteer participants, two men and two women who taught English, Science and shop. The research included classroom observations, individual interviews and group discussions.

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Data Analysis

Several techniques were instituted to ensure credible results (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba 1985). Open-ended interview questions were used in addition to classroom observations of two participants. Data was triangulated from the participant interviews (Lincoln & Guba 1985) while the emergent themes were validated through peer debriefing and member checking.

The research was designed to assess White secondary teachers' perceptions of their willingness to change their instructional practices to meet the needs of students of color.

Summary

When achievement scores of students of different ethnicities are compared, any disparity is normally referred to as the achievement gap or performance gap. White students have consistently performed better on standardized assessments than students of color since the scores of these student groups have been recorded and compared (Gonzalez, 2007). The causes and solutions to the achievement gap are various and complex; however, teachers' perceptions about their students of color and the way those perceptions affect instruction can make a significant difference in closing the gap. This study aims to gain insight into the attitudes and perceptions of White educators who work in schools that have had success in closing the achievement gap.

Conclusion

This single case study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I contains the

Introduction, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions,

Assumptions, Limitations, Significance of the Study, Definitions, and Summary.

Chapter II presents a Review of the Literature focused on how teacher attitudes

toward their students of color are part of a deeper cultural process.

Chapter III provides the method inquiry and protocol used. The researcher

included an explanation of interpretive research, along with the data analysis and

limitations of the study.

Chapter IV describes the results and analysis of the research and Chapter V

finalized the study with conclusions and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances

and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race

is born again: and in him, too, once more, and of each of us, our

terrific responsibility towards human life; towards the utmost idea

of goodness, of the horror of error, and of God. (Agee & Evans, 1939, p. 255)

Introduction

This chapter is a review of the professional literature on teachers' belief systems

and how those perceptions affect learning and instruction in a multicultural classroom.

In some instances, teacher attitudes toward students of color are part of a deeper cultural

process and for some teachers, 'difference' means "deficiency" (Steele & Cohn-Vargas,

2013, p. 67). Cultural diversity is often viewed as a 'difference' or 'deviance' from the

norm associated with ethnicity, race, gender, language, and social class. Most

discussions have ignored that society sees minorities as 'different' and that the way we

treat difference, especially in the classroom, raises complex issues. The dilemma of

difference exists because it has traditionally rested on the assumption that difference is

linked to abnormality or stigma. The dilemma of difference is also based on the

assumption "to be equal one must be the same, (and) to be different is to be unequal or

even "deviant" (Minnow, 1990, p. 50). Minnow (1990) further suggests that embedded

in the discussions about difference are assumptions that have been made about minority students. These assumptions must be looked at in the larger socio-historical context in which minorities have been viewed in our society.

This literature review is comprised of nine sections. The first section is the introduction, with research regarding teacher attitudes. The second section looks at shifting demographics and diversity. The third and fourth sections address ways to prepare teachers to teach in a diverse classroom and to understand and combat prejudice in the classroom. Section five addresses the influence of teachers' attitudes in the classroom. Section six introduces "sensemaking," which involves coming up with a plausible understanding of a changing world, as well as the four themes and sub-themes revealed by the findings. Section seven suggests pedagogical interventions, including cultural relevant pedagogy. Section eight provides positive educational interventions, and section nine is the conclusion that wraps up the research and provides interventions for teachers that will ultimately improve student achievement.

Shifting Demographics and Diversity

The racial, ethnic and cultural composition of the White majority of the United States is shifting toward a multicultural society. Today, the majority of school children in the public school districts of Texas, Florida, Arizona, and New Mexico are students of color (Southern Education Foundation, 2010). The changing demographics present a challenge to classroom teachers.

One of the factors that contributes to the diversity in our schools includes increased immigration from non-White, non-Western countries in Asia, the Caribbean,

Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. In addition, according to statistics cited in *The Condition of Education*, (U.S. Department of Education, 1992), in 1990 there were fewer Whites in their childbearing years than Hispanics and African Americans, who were also having larger numbers of children per family. Another factor that contributes to the changing demographics in schools is the ever-increasing number of poor children in the classroom. The U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census (2012) reported that 22% of all children under the age of 18 are living below the poverty level. In Texas, Hispanic students are the majority, representing 48% of the total populations, while 37% of the students are White and 13% are African American. The majority of students in Texas are either African American or Hispanic.

In contrast to these statistics, the teaching force has been comprised of White, middle class women of European-American descent. These White, female teachers attend colleges near where they grow up and then teach in the same region (Breault, 1995). In Texas, 66.4% of the teachers are White, and 77% are female. Hispanic teachers represent 22% of the total teaching population in Texas, while 9.5% of the teachers are African American (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

This low proportion of minority teachers could be problematic, considering that the population of U.S. schools is increasingly heterogeneous and has been cited as an issue to be addressed regarding diversity in education, along with the performance of racially, culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Bennett (1986) sums it up when he states that to the extent that teachers have been taught to learn and given how culture shapes learning styles, teachers will favor students who share

similar ethnic backgrounds (as cited in Guild, 1994). Suburban schools are becoming increasingly diverse, yet the teaching workforce continues to be dominated by European-American teachers. Therefore, as more demographically diverse teachers enter these homogeneous professional communities, teacher retention and working conditions will be affected (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding the importance of White racial identity development as a means of understanding racial attitudes and attitude change for those who teach (Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993; Tatum, 1992; 1994). A positive White racial identity involves a person accepting his or her whiteness, the cultural implications of being White, and not accepting racism. In forming this identity, one must progress through the stages of identity development, which in turn depends on life experiences and interaction with people of color, bringing about growth, while simply relying on studies of race does not foster growth (Helms, 1990). Research has also been conducted that identified the stages of racial identity as a reference point for interpreting ways to help teachers work with diverse student populations. The findings reflected that teachers' personal experiences with students of color became a self-fulfilling prophecy, reinforced by the teachers' initial preconceptions (Bollin & Finkel, 1995). Similar findings were recorded in a study of pre-service teachers, finding that these teachers were coming to conclusions from their field experiences that reinforced their prejudices and misconceptions about their students of color (Cross, 1993). In addition to being well versed in their subject matter, White teachers must be

better educated and better prepared to confront race and racism in themselves, their classrooms, school, and society.

Scott (2007) conducted a study with her first-year education students in order to sensitize them to stereotypes and prejudices against ethnic minorities. This study revealed that although these White education majors may not have discriminated overtly, they tended to view minorities as a group rather than as individuals and had issues with stereotypes relating to wealth and political power. This research will examine that literature. According to Allport (1979), a consequence of group categorizing is "belief in essence" (p. 195) which is a "stereotypical idea about a group of people" (p. 195). He further noted that "the human mind must think with the aid of categories…Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid the process. Orderly living depends upon it" (p. 20).

Steele (1997) confirmed this idea in a study he performed whereby he showed that the threat of a stereotype can create anxiety and hamper performance on a variety of tasks. People who are stereotyped are prejudged and face the negative impact that their behavior will confirm a negative stereotype.

This group characterization relieves people of the necessity of dealing with others as individuals. Was this the case in the school studied for this research? The question that must be addressed is how to make these White teachers better able to teach diverse student populations that are fundamentally different from themselves. In other words, how can we make people who are part of the majority optimal teachers for minority students?

Scott (2007) concluded that in order to develop more positive attitudes toward cultural groups different from their own, pre-service teachers should be exposed to students of color and must also look carefully at their own attitudes and behavior before they have a classroom of their own. Several studies have documented the high correlation among educators' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward student of color and the application of cultural awareness and minority students' successful academic performance (Banks, 1988; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). By being honest and empathetic with themselves, combined with personal awareness and understanding of their own White identity, teachers can achieve greater racial sensitivity in the classroom. Sleeter and Grant (1986) report that teachers who are insensitive or unfamiliar with the needs of these students make learning difficult for them (as cited in Deering & Stanuta, 1995).

In addition, White educators should not be overwhelmed by whiteness solely as oppression; such a view only undermines a positive racial identity and promotes hopelessness rather than recognition of social justice and commitment to social change. Generally, teachers tend to teach based on their own experiences and backgrounds (Cabello & Burnstein, 1995). Further, too few teachers have been educated to recognize and deal with the cultural, class and gender characteristics of these learners, or of their own, and many teachers have low expectations, shaped by inaccurate assumptions about the innate ability of racial minorities and poor children. Biases, prejudices and socioeconomic inequities continue to plague our nation's schools, perpetuated by the educational structures, systems, routines, and pedagogies that have existed for centuries (Jencks, 1998). However, many White teachers, such as those studied, are particularly

attracted to working with minority students and come to teaching with a desire to impart

knowledge and foster social change. These are the teachers we want in the classrooms.

Preparing Teachers for a Diverse Classroom

Teachers' negatives attitudes and beliefs will not change unless they are

challenged, yet teachers need time to accommodate and assimilate new information

before they can modify their belief systems and adopt new beliefs (Parajes, 1993). Many

educators feel unprepared and are not willing to teach students of color. In surveys of

teachers' beliefs and attitudes, however, these same teachers endorse equal treatment for

all students and feel they should have high expectations for all of their students (Avery

& Walker, 1993). The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (Henry, 1985), which is

designed to measure a person's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior toward children of color,

found in a survey of teachers that 90% believed that they would be teaching children

from different cultures, while 43% stated they would prefer to work with students of

their same cultural background (Larke, 1990). Additionally, 69% stated they would feel

uncomfortable with people whose values were different from their own. However, these

teachers did agree that they should accommodate for their students of color.

Teachers who go into the classroom with preconceptions or negative

expectations regarding their students of color could affect the quality of education their

students receive (Wolffe, 1996). Many teachers (not all) do not realize that minority

students do have the potential to succeed but may not have been given the same

opportunities as their White counterparts. Research has shown that teachers who are not

aware of their minority students' particular needs impede these students from learning (Larke, 1990).

> Teachers' dispositions toward the students they are teaching exert a powerful influence on their teaching practices. Teachers who feel different from their students and who negatively evaluate that difference are unlikely to develop or use culturally sensitive curriculum or instructional practices. In contrast, teachers who feel comfortable in urban multicultural environments appear to be much more supportive of and sensitive to the needs of inner-city students. (Stoddert, 1993, p. 4)

Understanding and Combating Prejudice in the Classroom

Allport (1979) argued that in order to understand prejudice and its effect in the classroom, one must look at the attitude component and the "overgeneralized" (p. 68) belief. Allport further asserted that "man has a propensity to prejudice, which can lead to overgeneralization and simplifying his world of experience" (p. 27). Attitudes are more resistant to change, but individual beliefs can be altered in the face of factual evidence (Allport, 1979), as evidenced by this research. Furthermore, discrimination is manifested in its execution. Two people can have similar prejudices, but they may not both practice discrimination. Campbell argued that while most people believe that "seeing is believing," the perceptual bias hypothesis proves that in fact, "believing is seeing" (as cited in Porter & Geis, 1981, p. 43). We are more likely to see what we already believe. Discrimination probably does not occur as a conscious awareness but more as an implicit assumption. Teachers need to understand all perspectives and

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understand that real truth is composed of a multitude of personal experiences; they need to remain self-reflective. Allport (1979) writes: "Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals" (p. 281). While they may accept White complicity in oppression and dominance, teachers can also claim a positive connection to White cultural identity and ethnic roots. This self-confidence welcomes the personal growth that is fostered by meaningful relationships and interactions with non-Whites; it also encourages continued challenges to one's own perceptions as well as equity in the classroom. This self-reflective open teacher is committed to social action as a means of dismantling domination and striving for equality. Equity pedagogy, as outlined by Banks and Banks (1995), "involves teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within and help create an perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society" (p. 152).

In order to combat prejudice, teachers need to understand when and how ethnic racial attitudes developed (Ponterotto &Pedersen, 1993; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). In addition, D'Souza (1995) wrote, "Painful though we may find it to read what people in earlier centuries had to say about others, it remains profoundly consoling to know that racism had a beginning, because then it becomes possible to envision its end" (p. xxi). The end of racism can start in the classroom, as "civilization is largely a product of cultural interaction and shared knowledge" (D'Souza, 1995, p. 55). Abboud (1987) and Katz (1987) noted that racial-ethnic self-recognition generally occurs at three or four

years of age and from that age until the age of seven or eight, children demonstrate increasing awareness of their similarity to their group (as cited in Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993). Children can perceive differences among people, including skin color. In addition, younger children are more inclined to attribute misfortune to the environment, while older children may place the blame on individual character (Ponterotto, 1991). Nesdale (2001), noted that children don't simply start disliking the ethnic attitudes of those around them but pick up those negative discriminatory behaviors from the people around them with whom they identify and whose opinion they value. Adolescents who are adroit at imitating adult patterns may talk democratically but behave with prejudice.

Additionally, stereotypes provide a map of how to interpret and behave toward people. Instead of questioning the stereotypes, we may avoid or denigrate persons who don't fit the stereotype (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). The term "stereotype threat" coined by Fiske (2002) and Steele (1997), describes how students internalize prejudicial attitudes related to school performance in a particular subject and how that performance declines in that subject when students internalize that prejudice. For example, when female students perceived prejudicial attitudes in science, their grades in science declined. Stereotype threat as Steele described it reinforces prejudicial attitudes. Developing prejudice requires several processes which may include frustrations being directed a particular group and/or children identifying and accepting their parents' beliefs and actions as a basis for their own attitudes and behaviors. Education (or lack of), ignorance and semantics also add to the development of prejudice (Allport, 1979). In order to reduce prejudice, it is necessary to examine longstanding beliefs (Fiske, 2002).

Categorizing people in groups comes from an environment that is fundamentally unequal and perpetuated through a child's perception of these inequities (Spencer, 1985). Many Whites have not had extensive contact with minority groups, and this lack of experience contributes to their insensitivity and can create a barrier in the classroom. The long-held views of the dominant group in a society are seen as natural or universal. Sociological perception research suggests that little change has been observed in the last thirty years in Anglo adults' views of minority people. "They continue to be perceived as less intelligent, lazy, and of lower moral character" (Garcia, 1994. p. 52). While advocates of social justice as defined by Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) and the participants involved in this case study make issues of race, color, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalized conditions central to their advocacy, they practice and commit to enacting justice and equity.

Americans share a common historical and cultural heritage in which racism has played and still plays a dominant role. Because of this shared experience, we also inevitably share many ideas, attitudes, and beliefs that attach significance to an individual's race and induce negative feelings and opinions about non-Whites. To the extent that this cultural belief system has influenced all of us, we are all racists. At the same time, most of us are unaware of our racism. We do not recognize the ways in which our cultural experience has influenced our beliefs about race or the occasions in which those beliefs affect our actions. In other words, a large part of the behavior that produces racial discrimination is influenced by unconscious racial motivation (Ross, 1990). However, we know how to educate poor and minority children of all kinds-

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racial, ethnic and language-to high levels. Some teachers and principals do it every day, year in year out, with outstanding results. In fact, the school that was studied for this research has experienced that success with minority students.

Influence of Teachers' Attitudes

Most social behavior is learned from imitation and reinforcement (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Spencer (1982, 1983) determined that children learn early about cultural preference and that they mimic the values of the world in which they live. The cultural biases noted in young children is an example of the effect prejudice has in forming a child's outlook during his or her formative years. It is critical, therefore, that teachers be cognizant of their attitudes toward their students in the classroom. While parents are a child's primary role models, the way a teacher interacts with his or her students has a powerful impact on the student's success. Bourdieu (2012) believed: "Each family transmits to its children, indirectly rather than directly, a certain cultural capital and a certain ethos" (p. 32). The teacher then consciously or unconsciously takes into account the social origin of his pupils and bases his relationship with his student on that perception, not on the student's performance (Bourdieu, 2012). Sergiovanni (1992) said it best when he stated:

> The heart of the school as a moral community is its covenant of shared values. This covenant provides a basis for determining its morality…the virtuous school subscribes to and uses these moralities as the basis for deciding what its values are and how they will be pursued. (p. 108)

Teacher and student populations are growing more diverse, making teachers' attitudes toward their students of color all the more important. For example, teachers and administrators need to learn how groups of students interpret verbal and nonverbal information and must not assume that all cultures interpret information in the same way (Hays, 1994). The growing diversity in our society requires an adjustment of ideological perspectives in institutional (school) relations. Students' perceptions of their teacher may not be what the teacher intended. Delpit (1995) argues that poor children and children of color are short-changed by teachers and administrators who, while well-intentioned, interpret the skills, abilities and behavior of "other people's children" (p. 24) through a lens that is sometimes clouded by assumptions and cultural stereotypes. It is the reluctance of those with power "to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision" (p. xiv). A student may view the classroom environment as uncomfortable, whereas the teacher is trying to provide a comfortable academic environment. Teachers need to cross the cultural barriers and find a common ground with children's culture and heritage in order to improve student academic achievement. The literature indicates that teachers must be receptive to a multicultural classroom and must also believe that all students in that classroom are equal (Anderson, 1987). The successful teachers who were studied for this research believed that the responsibility for student success rested on their shoulders.

Teachers' attitudes impact the learning environment, as those attitudes affect teacher expectations, and thereby teachers' behaviors toward their students of color. Teachers' perceptions then influence student self-image and academic performance:

Personality theorists believe that attitudes perform a number of functions

for the individual. First, attitudes tend to simplify (indeed, oversimplify)

many of the problems people encounter in their environment. An

individual with a given attitude tends to react toward the attitude object

in terms of it being either good or bad. It is much easier to react to all

members of a minority group as being bad than it is to consider and

analyze all the individuals in the group and recognize that each one is

different. (Alexander & Strain, 1978, p. 391)

A teacher's attitude toward his or her students of color is important in order to motivate

students. Students' motivations are closely related to student academic achievement and

the classroom-learning environment. "Teachers frequently operate on over generalized

feelings and attitudes about students who come from cultural backgrounds different from

our own" (Chiang, 1994, p. 342). Teachers' beliefs regarding culture and learning styles

are paramount in order for them to understand and embrace student-learning styles. A

teacher's non-acceptance of these different cultures can become barriers to the students

they have committed to teach. Increased cultural awareness is good, but not sufficient.

Educators must also examine deeper issues of equity and access. Nieto (2005)

recommends that schools examine their policies and practices and ask themselves hard

questions such as "1) Who is taking calculus? 2) Which classes meet in the basement?

and 3) Who is teaching the children?" (p. 8). White educators need to look critically at

the changes and growth required in themselves to effectively work with issues of

diversity that would allow them to empathically teach, engage, and understand students of color.

Obviously, educators need to be aware of the issues surrounding diversity and must become attuned to the existing attitudes of the individuals in the school. As Cuban (1990) writes: "A school's culture and structure are linked simply because the culture is a set of taken-for-granted beliefs; beliefs about the nature of the school mission, about students' abilities and motivation, about teachers, about administrator attitudes and so on" (p. 342).

Teacher attitudes and beliefs play an integral role in the success or failure of a school. The instructional leader of the school must be willing to accept responsibility for the actions of his or her teachers (Cuban, 1988). Along those lines, Blau (1956) wrote, "To administer a social organization such as a school according to the purely technical criteria of rationality is irrational, simply because it ignores the nonrational aspects of social conduct" (p. 44). Current pedagogical practices are not working. Leaders must be aware of their teachers' negative feelings toward their students of color and how those teachers' perceptions impact a student's academic achievement:

> Widespread academic failure of students from certain ethnic populations seems
> to prove that certain pedagogical approaches often used with at risk minority
> students to be dysfunctional and outdated. A belief that all children can learn—
> regardless of their cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds—must lead

to effective teaching characterized by high expectations, sensitivity to cultural patterns, and successful communication to and motivation of students. (Pine & Hillard, 1990, p. 559)

Deficit thinking is a conceptual framework that has also been used to explain school failure among low-income minority groups. Valencia (1997) wrote in *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking* that

The deficit thinking theory has held the longest currency among scholars, educators and policymakers. Although there are several explanatory variants of this model, the deficit thinking paradigm, as a whole, posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster- such as familial deficits and dysfunctions. Given the endogenous nature of deficit thinking, systemic factors for example school segregation; inequality in school financing; curriculum differentiation) are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school. (p. xi)

But what about teacher perceptions? How do we make sense of this changing world?

Sensemaking

Sensemaking, a term introduced by Karl Weick (1995), refers to how we structure the unknown so as to be able to act in it by coming up with a plausible understanding of a changing world, then testing this understanding through data collection, action, and conversations (i.e., the participant interviews). People try to make sense of particular events by communicating through stories. The narratives these

participants revealed during the unstructured interviews unearthed their perceptions about their students of color and how it affected the delivery of instruction in the classroom. As Weick (1995) noted, situations are filtered through individual's perceptions and they respond in a subjective manner. Additionally, Nieto (1996) noted the importance of providing a classroom environment based on shared cultural experiences in order to create an opportunity for teachers and students to became active participants in learning. Essentially, sensemaking is the process by which people give meaning to an experience. It is the understanding of complex things-events in particular. It is a motivated, continuous effort to understand connections among people, places and events in order to anticipate their trajectory and act effectively. Sensemaking enables us to have a better grasp of what is going on in our environment, thus facilitating visioning, relating, and inventing. This chapter outlines steps to effective sensemaking, as noted by this research, to enable teachers, such as those in this study, to explore the wider system, create a map of that system and act in the system to learn from it.

Relating is about building trusting relationships among people and across networks. Or, as it relates to this study, relating is the trusting relationships between teacher and student and teachers and their peers. Visioning involves painting a compelling picture of the future and what is possible, as in this case, that all students can be academically successful. Inventing means creating the structures and processes needed to move toward the vision.

What is Sensemaking?

Karl Weick (1994), the "father of sensemaking" (p. 4) stated that the term means simply, "the making of sense" (p. 4). It is the process of "structuring the unknown" (Waterman, 1990, p. 41) by "placing stimuli into some kind of framework [that enables us to] comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict" (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51). Sensemaking allows us to turn complex situations such as "White Secondary Teachers' Perceptions about their Students of Color" into a situation that is comprehended in words and acts as a springboard into action (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Sensemaking requires an articulation of the unknown because explaining the unknown is a way to see how much someone understands it. Teachers need to construct understanding of their world (Weick, 1995) in order to understand how students learn. Applying sensemaking to this study of teacher perceptions about their students of color broadens our idea of how instruction is impacted.

How Does Sensemaking Work?

As we try to deconstruct meaning, we are able to bring multiple interpretations to our situation and then act. As we continue to act, we can change the map to fit our experience and reflect our growing understanding. Sensemaking is a way of categorizing themes and refers to how we structure the unknown so as to be able to act in it. Sensemaking is not about finding the right answer but about creating an emerging picture that becomes more comprehensive through data collection, action, experience, and conversation. Sensemaking enables us to have a better grasp of what is going on in our environment.

Proposing a sensemaking framework allows the researcher to examine teachers' sensemaking in which the participants explored issues of social justice in their high school. Many researchers have argued that effective teachers of students of color must understand their work within the larger context of a racially stratified and structured society (Cochran-Smith, 1997, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Gay and Kirkland (2003) argued that "teachers knowing who they are, understanding the contexts in which they teach and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness" (p. 181). This teacher understanding of who they are is based on a body of research that has documented the deleterious consequences when educators fail to self-reflect and examine their shortcomings and instead assume that the students and families are deficient in some way (Gay, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Olmeda, 1997; Sleeter, 2001). There exists specific research that pays attention to teachers' sensemaking about race and racism and helps teacher educators recognize the importance of engaging teachers in questioning deficit framings (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Haviland, 2008; Leonardo, 2004; Mazzei, 2008; Milner, 2006; Picower, 2009; Riviere, 2008; Sleeter, 1993). These studies highlighted the importance of addressing race and racism in teacher education.

Sensemaking provides a framework for teachers to understand student behavior in a classroom filled with diverse students learners, such as the students the teachers' served in this study. All of these teachers had their own perceptions of what worked in their classrooms and interpreted events on their individual experiences and upbringing.

Their self-reflection allowed them to view their strengths and weaknesses and to adapt their instruction accordingly.

The sensemaking framework is used to analyze and interpret the ideological sensemaking and transformation of teachers in a diverse public high school in which the participants examined their perceptions about their students of color. A contrasting framework as noted by Lowenstein (2009) sees teachers as "competent leaners who bring rich resources to their learning: about issues of race, racial justice, and equity" (p. 187). diSessa (1993) found that people make sense of the world largely through elements of common sense. Schools are commonly thought of as places where the elements of commonsense are reproduced. For example, commonsense about violence in communities of color or the lack of educational support provided by parents of color are rarely based on people's patterns of experience in the world but often gain validity similar to one's own experience because of the reinforcement of assumptions in the general society through media and daily interactions.

Sensemaking is a way of categorizing themes and refers to how we structure the unknown so as to be able to act in it. The four themes and eight sub-themes that were revealed by the findings include a) student disruption of expected flow of classroom routines and how participants (individual teachers and teacher teams) presented knowledge in alternative and multiples ways (flow of activity); b) teachers' awareness of how their perceptions about their students of color influenced how they made sense of their students issues with grasping lessons (retrospective); c) teachers' ability to find common ground (student success) while addressing bracketed concerns and questions

(labeling); and d) teachers' demonstrated awareness of the necessity to harness their positive and negative emotions and work with each other to ensure student success.

The first theme identified in the sensemaking literature is the disruption of flow of normal activities (Weick, 1995). When students are unable to grasp instruction, there is a disruption to flow of instruction in the classroom. Additionally, two sub-themes were revealed: a) "flow in teacher teams," whereby all the participants came together to share activities and knowledge of instructional practices to better understand why students were struggling academically, and b) "student flow," whereby the teachers strategized lessons and delivery of instruction methods for student comprehension so that the **flow** of instruction in the classroom would not be disrupted.

The second theme identified in the study is "retrospective" (Weick, 2005, p. 413) sensemaking, which is the teachers making sense about an event that has already happened. There is a discrepancy between what the teacher intended to happen and what actually transpired: students understanding a lesson one day and not understanding the same lesson the next day. The two sub-themes revealed under the retrospective sensemaking theme were "teacher commitment" and "diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners." The teachers were committed, as they cared deeply about their students, they were self-reflective and were vigilant about meeting their educational needs. They provided diverse teaching strategies for their diverse learners by tweaking their instructional practices to take into account a student's culture, manner of learning, and any deficiencies that would impact learning.

The third theme, "labeling" (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 412) is when the participants in this study labeled and categorized experiences to make sense of puzzling information or questions. The participants used the labeling process as they continually analyzed what the issues were for their struggling minority students. The two sub-themes identified under the labeling theme are "dealing with student stereotypes" and "teachers' perceptions about their students." The findings revealed that the students and teachers were very comfortable with issues or race and diversity in the classroom and were cognizant about using teaching strategies that worked for their diverse student population. Additionally, the teachers' perceptions about their students made them very aware of the achievement gaps in their classrooms and spurred them on to support learning and teaching in order to fulfill their student needs.

The final theme, "social sensemaking" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414) involves the social process of human thinking and functioning and how people (such as the participants in this study) depend on each other, the relationships they had with each other and with their students. The social sensemaking theme revealed the sub-theme of "relational trust" (Byrk & Schneider, 2004, p. 20) and "effective teachers" (Wenglinsky, 2000, p. 32). Relational trust was revealed in that the teachers were engaged in subjects and ideas, as well as the lives of their students and peers. The participants displayed the components of "relational trust" (Byrk & Schneider, 2004, p. 41) respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity in their interactions with their students in the classroom every day. Furthermore, these teacher participants were effective teachers as

they challenged and encouraged their students and were committed to the purpose of making all their students successful.

Gay (2000) wrote:

Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it…This is a very different concept of caring then the often cited notion of 'gentle nurturing and altruistic concern,' which can lead to benign neglect under the guise of letting students of color make their own way to move at their own pace. (p. 252)

Sensemaking involves coming up with a plausible understanding of a dynamic, shifting world through data collection, action, and conversation and then refining that understanding. Sensemaking enables us to have a better grasp of what is going on in our environment. The purpose of this study is for the researcher to examine how White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color affect instruction and to better understand the teacher sensemaking process and how these teachers' perceptions about their students of color broaden our idea of how instruction is impacted.

Pedagogical Interventions

Diverse classrooms present new challenges to instructors' teaching and curricular practices, leading to the development of programs and a curriculum that provides a means for students of color to attain academic success in the classroom. Culture is central to learning and plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that

acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures.

Teachers making instructional decisions based on a student's cultural background cannot assume that one uniform teaching method will be effective for every student (Guild, 1994). Once a teacher closes the classroom door, that teacher makes the decision about how to present the curriculum and with whatever modifications necessary for student understanding. Wilson-Portuondo (2006) noted, "The increasing diversity in our schools, the ongoing demographic changes across the nation and the movement towards globalization dictate that we develop a more in-depth understanding of culture if we want to bring about true understanding among diverse populations" (as cited in Brown University, 2006, p. 1). Taking into account teacher attitudes and beliefs toward their students of color is essential when considering curriculum reform. Cuban (1990) argued that principles based on knowledge of learning is a good place to start for school improvement. "Without such a force, reform efforts run the risk of merely reforming again and again and again focusing on the surface structures of schooling but leaving central problems untouched" (p. 1).

Grant and Sleeter (2009) have identified five educational approaches to working with students of diverse backgrounds, including race, culture, language, social class, gender and disability. These goals include curricular and instructional practices:

- Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different advocates
  adapting instruction to student differences for the purpose of
  helping these students succeed in the mainstream. The emphasis

is on difference rather than deficiency and emphasizes that cultural

differences should be accepted by the teachers and the school. This

view was in opposition to the view held by white educators in the 1960s

who viewed students of color as culturally deprived.

- The Human Relations approach argued that schools should

     develop effective communication, love, respect, cooperation,

     and tolerance in order to bring people together.

- The Single-Group Studies approach focused on raising the

     consciousness of ethnic and women's groups. The idea was

     to teach students that all groups are equal.

- The Multicultural Education method embraced and celebrated

     all segments of a diverse society-race, gender, culture,

     disability, language. This approach sought to protect

     and enhance diverse groups.

- Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist

     challenged white norms and focused on justice and

     equity. (pp. 34-35)

Did the teachers in this study embrace these approaches? As the essence of what

is taught in the classrooms, curriculum is an important starting point when examining the

ways in which teachers can move education in a multicultural direction. Curriculum

reflects the pedagogical practices and educational philosophies of educators. In turn,

teachers' attitudes regarding their students of color play into these educational

philosophies that impact academic achievement. Teachers have control over how they teach the curriculum; therefore, the relationship between teachers and their diverse classrooms is important. Gibson-Taylor (1998) stated, "In our multicultural society, culturally responsive teaching reflects democracy at its highest level (it) means doing whatever it takes to ensure that every child is achieving and ever moving toward realizing her or his potential" (p. 201).

Historically throughout the U.S., curriculum has been based on the exclusion of minorities. Establishing inclusion for all means challenging powerful barriers that have been in place for centuries:

> The academic and social change envisioned through transformation
> will not come easily. We are only beginning to undo the effects of
> distortion and inequities set in motion 500 years ago when
> Columbus brought massacre and the most brutal form of slavery
> known to these shores, all in the interest of spreading 'Western
> Civilization' with all its long-lasting assumptions of racial,
> cultural and male superiority. The praxis must be pursued
> with a constant, eager patience that has its reward, in our
> lifetime, the concrete beginnings of change for the better for all. (Butler &
> Walter, 1991, p. 325)

In order to have an inclusive curriculum, alternative perspectives from diverse groups who have been excluded historically, politically from society must be included. Kitano (1997) wrote, "Whatever the focus and context of these conceptions of

multicultural change, consensus exists that change is a dynamic process describable in terms of levels rather than as a static outcome" (p. 21). The inclusive curriculum challenges traditional beliefs and assumptions and allows for a climate where students think in different ways, which gives equal weight to multiple perspectives and diverse ways of knowing (Kitano, 1997).

If we wish to move toward a multicultural curriculum, Kitano (1997) emphasized that strategies such as "content, instructional strategies, assessment, and the dynamics of classroom interactions all be adapted by teachers depending on their personal philosophies, readiness, expertise and the demands of discipline readiness, expertise and the demands of disciplinary contents" (p. 23). Many teachers do not want to change their pedagogical practices and strategies necessary to address the needs of diverse students (Adams, 1992). However, we know that "ongoing multicultural activities within the classroom setting engender a natural awareness of cultural history, values and contributions" (Serverian-Williams, 2006, p. 2).

Positive Educational Interventions

An abundance of literature addresses teachers' expectations in diverse classrooms and their feelings about their students of color. Teachers often struggle to create a multicultural pedagogy while maintaining authority, at the same time attempting to challenge the traditional rules and norms of the monoculture classroom and negotiating social identities in the classroom (Mayberry, 1996). Being conscious of the ways in which one's identity shapes teaching practices and achieving high levels of self-actualization helps teachers "to create pedagogical practices that engage students,

providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (hooks, 1994, p. 22).

Teachers bring into the classroom their preconceived notions of multicultural students, and at the same time, teachers' personal identities provide the fundamental structure of a classroom, inevitably resulting in collisions in the diverse classroom (Weiler, 1988).

> Classrooms are not and can never be neutral sites for the production or reproduction of knowledge. Those of us who step into classrooms as professors and as students do not shed our identities at the door with our coats.
> We enter those rooms as humans situated as subjects and as objects of discourses that give us the identities we claim for ourselves and that are assigned by others. (Rakow, 1991, p. 10)

Further, Rakow (1991) states that no matter what strategies are used in teaching a diverse classroom, "We cannot hope to achieve equality in the classroom since it does not exist outside the classroom" (p. 12). However, even though "the discourse of the classroom is not completely controlled by teachers…teachers can open the possibility that other discourses besides the dominant sexist and racist discourse can be heard" (p. 12). What pedagogical practices did the participants in this study use that resulted in high performance? Nieto (2010) in her book *The Light in Their Eyes,* posits that "learning is actively constructed, connected to experience, influenced by cultural differences, developed with a social context, and created within a community" (p. 3).

Reviewing the literature on teachers' feelings about their students of color helps to understand the issues that arise in a diverse classroom versus the traditional monoculture classroom. These accounts help us see how teachers perceive their students and how their perceptions impact instruction. Teachers who value multicultural education for ALL their students have adapted their teaching strategies away from the traditional pedagogy. These adaptations and diversified teaching strategies are the heart of pedagogical transformation to enable teachers to reach minority students. A caring adult can make a big different in the educational outcome of any child at risk of experiencing educational failure (Wilson-Portuondo, 2006).

Teachers who teach from an ethnic studies perspective strive to follow classroom practices that enable students to perceive the world from a global perspective and to look at issues from various points of view, understanding perspectives besides their own. This worldview allows them to better navigate American culture as a whole, not just their own specific culture (Banks, 1991). Additional strategies that need to be considered as a way to create positive inter-group relations that will ultimately improve student achievement include student-centered classrooms, the co-construction of knowledge, and critical thinking on the part of students. Kesson and Henderson (2004) noted that responsible educators reflect on what they are trying to accomplish with their students and why and "would feel pride that they are working as committed democratic educators" (p. 4). What did this study find? Diverse characteristics such as learning styles and abilities, or cultural, social, economic and racial backgrounds must be addressed (Dale, 1998). Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant

to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. They act as guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally-and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences.

Teachers are integral to multicultural change and should be aware or their own feelings regarding the students in their diverse classroom. Resistance to change is to be expected:

> Many people have quite reasonable questions and disagreements about the meaning and value of multiculturalism. Many others worry that their own self-interest and comfort, their current privileges and powers, will be diminished by multicultural advances. And still others resist for reasons that are not conscious or obvious to themselves, or that they barely understand. (Chesler, 1996, p. 2)

As teachers examine their attitudes about their students of color, they may find multicultural change threatening, as it means their recognition of their own limitations, recognizing that "even they, the supposed experts, must retool, go back to study, review their life's work, and face difficult challenges in content and pedagogy in their classrooms" (Schoem, Frankel, Zuniga, & Lewis, 1995, p. 5). In addition, some teachers may feel that they are being required to relinquish their power in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1992) notes that a key criterion for culturally relevant teaching is nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. Teachers should use the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge

and skills. Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates

the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, &

Rivera, 2002).

The literature offers different models for teachers to promote awareness of ethnic

identity in their classrooms to promote positive inter-group relations. Most include the

need for change in teaching methods, course content, and teacher knowledge of

themselves as instructors, and teacher knowledge of their students. Models include:

> Teachers knowing their students and understanding how students from diverse
>
> backgrounds experience the classroom; teachers knowing themselves and
>
> recognizing their history of interacting with social, cultural backgrounds and
>
> learned beliefs; creating a curriculum that includes diverse cultural and social
>
> perspectives; developing a broad range of teaching methods that address the
>
> diverse learning styles of students from different backgrounds. (Kitano, 1997, p.
>
> 10)

Ferdman and Dean (2014) insist that

> Diversity can provide advantages only when it's combined with fundamental
>
> changes in individual's behaviors and attitudes, group norms and approaches and
>
> organizational policies and practices that result in people feeling appreciated,
>
> valued, safe, respected, listened to, and engaged both as individuals and as
>
> members of groups of multiple social identity groups. (p. xxiv)

Sensemaking theory emphasizes the interpretive, social, and ongoing nature of

constructing understanding, versus the idea that learning is something that occurs at

formally designated times in predetermined ways (i.e. classrooms). Teachers can engage

in sensemaking when they come across a message about student learning or experience

an event they don't quite understand (e.g. when a student has difficulty with a lesson).

The sense teachers derive, the understanding they have of messages and events, is

dependent upon their practices, beliefs, and experiences. The sensemaking theory, as

revealed in this study, provides a process for teachers to reflect on and interpret their

professional experiences, and in turn opens the door for them to adapt their teaching

methods to reach the diverse learners in their classroom. As teachers come to

understand their experiences through the sensemaking process, they are better able to

adapt their teacher practices to better reach their students of color. Campbell (1972)

noted that sharing experiences and teacher insights has always been a means to establish

trust among the teachers and the community, such as the participants did in this study.

Conclusion

The education of minority and/or lower socioeconomic children is an issue that

needs to be addressed. These students' underachievement, with added statistics of

increasing violence among at-risk youth and the ever-widening gap between the haves

and have-nots is a concern that questions our ability to compete on a global scale. It is

also important to note when grappling with meeting the needs of students of color that

we are currently living in a very conservative political climate, impacting programs that

value diversity. Valverde (1998) underscores this point: "In recent years we have

witnessed attacks on 'the core of equal opportunity' by the Christian Coalition's stance

against affirmative action and by legislation such as California's Proposition 209" (as

cited in Castaneda, p. 14). Historically, popular movements have struggled for equitable education. This movement against multiculturalism, with its education orientation toward the traditional White, middle-class student is a blatant disregard of the society in which we live (Chesler, 1996).

Experts agree that educators need to be leaders and role models in the reduction of prejudice. With training, educators can significantly impact the status of race relations (Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993). Teachers need to provide a classroom environment conducive to positive growth and open communication necessary to promote racial harmony, understanding, and student achievement. Wittmer and Myrick (1989) wrote: "Educators hold the key to the process of reducing or eliminating the social and emotional barriers that prevents many ethnic minority group members from becoming productive citizens…" (p. 48). They further argue that

> Facilitative teachers avoid bending the child to match the curriculum. Rather, they cultivate the talents and unique cultural characteristics of children…They know that the culture can be a predisposition to learning…The facilitative teacher accepts the child as is and helps that child move on from that point. (Wittmer & Myrick, 1980, p. 49).

Effective teachers who strive for academic achievement in all of their students and facilitate personal growth and achievement of their students of color are attentive, genuine, understanding, respectful, knowledgeable, and communicative (Wittmer & Myrick, 1989), such as the teachers studied in this research. Teachers' communication with their students of color is integral to those students' academic success.

Communicating with a person from another race or culture requires cognitive empathy, demonstrating knowledge of that culture while appreciating that person as a cultural being in order to develop effective rapport and expression of ideas and feelings. The teacher must be cognizant of the students' feelings, ask open-ended questions, and provide feedback. Furthermore, teachers need to acknowledge students for their contributions to class discussions and should use linking statements that help students find common ground among them, as this will develop cohesion in the classroom (Myrick, 1993; Wittmer & Myrick, 1989). Richard Delgado (1997) summed it up when he wrote:

> Empathy would work in a just world, and one in which everyone's experience and social histories were roughly the same, unmarked by radical inequality. In such a world, we would have things to trade. There would be reasons for needing to get to know others, for understanding what they feel and need. But we don't live in such a world. (p. 614)

The relationships among students and teachers of different cultures can improve when teachers engage in cooperative teaching and learning. Additionally, meeting in small groups gives students the opportunity to identify ethnic differences in a supportive environment and allows students from varied ethnic groups to better understand the norms, values, and social routines of their peers from different cultural groups (Slavin, 1995). "We must acknowledge the place of race, ethnicity, and linguistic background in our society and the role of the individual and structural factors. We must strive to discontinue the deficit discourse about minority students that stresses blame and

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hopelessness" (West, 1994, p. 12). As our society continues to become more diverse, what takes place in the classroom is paramount in helping to reduce prejudice and to create an educational system where all students are successful. Teachers are the key change agents and role models for helping promote positive intergroup relations (Sandhu & Aspy, 1997).

The literature suggests that creating an inclusive classroom is not easy and requires teachers knowing themselves and being aware of their attitudes toward diversity, incorporating social, cultural, and political realities into the content in the classroom, using conflict in the classroom as learning opportunities, creating a sense of community within the classroom, and using diverse teaching styles as a way of assessing and meeting the needs of students from different backgrounds. Making instructional decisions on a daily basis, teachers need to understand local values and beliefs, along with constraints and resources embedded in local populations. Teachers' attitudes, conscious or subconscious, toward their students of color impact the way in which they function in the classroom. Teacher attitudes can influence student reactions to other students. The teacher is responsible for educating students to live in a diverse society (Worthen, Borg, & White, 1993). Teachers need to examine their ideologies if we are ever going to become a truly pluralistic society. Schools must take the lead in gathering diverse groups together and convey the message that we all have something important to learn from one another (Thornton, 1995).

Dixon (1997) wrote:

Teachers have the responsibility to recognize cultural differences and

establish, within the framework of these differences, an environment that

encourages all of their students. There is a concern of whether or not

teachers have been adequately prepared to establish a learning environment that

is fair and encouraging to students from a variety of cultural and racial

backgrounds. Teachers who are ill prepared to meet these challenges may

inadvertently establish differential expectations and discipline patterns that are

actually discouraging and detrimental to some groups of students. (pp. 69-70)

The research shows that teachers' perceptions about their students of color have a

huge impact on the instructional decisions they make. Practices and interventions to

promote positive inter-group relations and ultimately improve student achievement are

essential. Banks and Banks (2002) noted that

Teachers need to be aware, because the myth of the melting pot is hegemonic and

untenable with the plurality of cultural groups in the United States. Estimates

state that by 2050, 48% of the nation's youth population will be comprised of

students of color. (p. 242)

As the research has proven, educators must strive to enhance the quality of life

for their minority and non-minority students. We must look at ourselves, those whom

we deem different, and the societal context in which we live and work. It begins with

the teacher in the classroom. How did the teachers in this study fare? How did these

White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color impact instruction?

Let's find out.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this study was to research and document the attitudes and perceptions that White secondary teachers have about their students of color and how those perceptions affect instruction in the classroom. The students in this study were in grades 9-12 and were coded in PEIMS as "non-White." This study looked at the research of many authors, such as Stokes (1997), who concluded that even after years of effort too many minority students persistently earn disappointing scores on achievement tests, educators must take a new approach. Teachers who have no awareness of cultures other than their own or who believe that these students simply are incapable of doing better contribute to students' belief that they cannot achieve high scores, and that both of these attitudes must change before students can succeed. In order to illustrate these teacher deficit modes of thinking, a case study was used and teachers were chosen who had varying years of experience.

Mica Pollack (2008) has also researched and noted a need for intervention of teachers in the classroom. She believes that teachers need to be made aware of how their attitudes about their students of color impact the classroom and the individual student. Teachers need to be taught how to bridge the divide between teacher and student, allowing for success for ALL students.

Design

This study examined the perspectives of White secondary teachers who teach students of color, and how those perceptions affect their instruction. The investigator chose a case study for this research. A case study is a specific, unique bounded system that allows the research to study individuals, events, activities or processes (Creswell, 2003, 2006). A case study indicates patterned behaviors (Stake, 2005) that are researched in depth and the data are delineated by time period, activity or coherence. The tradition is both a process and product of inquiry. This study meets all the criteria of a case study as the teachers are the individuals being studied and the patterns of those teachers' responses when interacting with their students are being examined.

This case study examines a phenomenon such as whether "White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color impact instruction," as it (phenomenon) exists in its natural context (the teachers in the high school where by teach.). In order to identify boundaries between the two phenomena (Yin, 2003), case studies are the optimal tradition to utilize when educators are seeking to answer 'how' and 'why' questions such as the questions being examined in this research.

Plummer (2001) described case studies such as this one as establishing "collective memories and imagined communities; and they tell of the concerns of their time and place" (p. 395) in this research. This research is appropriate for an intrinsic case study as the researcher is internally guided, or has intrinsic interest in this particular research (Stake, 2005).

This research will include components often included in a case study, such as the nature of the case, the case's historical background, the physical setting of the case, and those informants through which the case can be known.

Researchers have latitude with a case study, and the option this researcher used for presenting this case study is how much to make the report a story, how much to formalize generalizations or to leave that to the readers (Stake, 2005). This case study will be biographical in that the research documents the history of the individuals by using information sources about the participants (Plummer, 2001). This case study design provides criteria that were appropriate to this type of research. Through the use of multiple in-depth interviews, the case study allowed the investigator to get close to the subject of interest (Bromley, 1986).

Qualitative Study

Merriam (1988) described a qualitative case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21), while Yin (1994) states that a case study is an "…empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context" (p. 13). Furthermore, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted, qualitative researchers utilize setting because context is important. Setting and observations are pivotal to understanding the "…where, how, and under what circumstances" events unfolded (p. 50). This study looked at how the participants made meaning of White secondary teachers' attitudes about their students of color and the impact on instruction. This meaning was mediated through the investigator, the research instrument; the strategy was inductive, and the outcome was

descriptive. The emphasis of this case study was to examine the process that took place and the meaning of the four participants involved.

Data Sources

Purposive Sampling

"Purposive sampling…increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher's ability to identify emerging themes" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen. 1993, p. 82). The research used purposeful sampling to choose the participants in this study. Merriam (2000) defines convenience sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, as a selection based on "…time, money, location, availability, and respondents…" (p. 79). The participants in this study were chosen on the basis of both location and availability and because they were high school teachers, as secondary education was also the researcher's background and interest. Furthermore, Wiersma and Jurs (2005) remarked that when case studies are conducted logically, they can be "…rich sources of information" (p. 324). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study, given the need for information and understanding. As relevant to the study, purposive sampling was used to select an information-rich case whose study will illuminate the questions being researched.. Data were collected through interviews and was inductively analyzed to identify recurring themes and a rich, descriptive account of the findings was presented and discussed.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that a qualitative study is designed to understand differences between stated and implemented theories so that all the subjects can come to an understanding of the importance of the issues. The structure of the

problem statement is written as a purpose statement: The purpose of this study was to document the deficit beliefs, assumptions, and attributes that White secondary teachers make about their students of color and how those perceptions impact instructional decisions. A case study was appropriate for this study in order to ascertain certain structures of experience (the White secondary teachers' perceptions of their students of color), the meaning-perspectives of the actors (teachers), and specific interrelationships between the teachers and their environment.

In order to understand the teachers and their interactions with the students, I think it is important to understand the community in which these students live. (See Table 1 below). The high school the researcher examined is in a small Texas town with a total area of 1.5 square miles and 1,172 residents. Located in southwest Texas, the town was founded in 1845 by William and LydiaAnn Guyer, pioneer settlers of Bovine Bend and named after the vice president of the local railroad. The median income is $41,635, and 25% of the population works in education as teachers, clerks, custodians, and so on, in the local schools. The next major industry is construction. The town has five convenience stores and eleven restaurants, while residents shop for clothing and groceries in nearby towns. The number of Black residents is below the state average, while the Hispanic population is significantly higher than the state average. Although 45% of the residents have graduated from high school, the number of residents who hold a bachelor's degree, 7%, is below the state average. The town boasts a religious population, with 52% of the town belonging to a local church, including 40% who belong to the Catholic Church. In addition, the obesity rate is right in line with the rest

of Texas, with 26.4% of the population documented as obese with a 9.8% diabetes rate.

At this high school campus, 49% of the students were students of color, 37%

economically disadvantaged, 35% at-risk. The school had a mobility rate of 14%. The

campus is similar in terms of demographics to a lot of the high schools in Texas and was

chosen for its large minority population. The high school is located on the main road

and has 234 students in grades nine through twelve.

Table 1

Students' Community

Town	School Population
• Located SW Texas • 1,172 Residents • $41,635 Median Income • 25% of population works in education • 45% of population high school graduate • 7% of population have Bachelor degree • 52% of population belongs to a church • Typical apartment rents for $730/month	• 234 students 9th-12th grade • 49% students of color at high school • 37% students economically disadvantaged • 14% high school mobility rate • High School over 30 years old • High School hub of community • High School performed above state average on all TAKS tests

The town is small but close enough to Houston so that students are exposed to

the clothes, jargon, technology, clubs, and drinking that are part of the average

teenager's life. The town has never experienced a rape or a murder; however, last year

there were five assaults and eight burglaries. Most of the homes sit on an acre of land, and the average home costs $200,000.00. A typical apartment rents for $730.00.

The school is well over thirty years old and needs some renovation, but it is the hub of the community, with school football games and extracurricular sporting events. There were always students in the halls, cafeteria and fields when the researcher went to visit. The researcher chose this high school due to its diversified population and the willingness of the principal to make his teachers available. Basically, convenience sampling, a category of purposeful sampling was used. The convenience sampling method as defined by Schwandt (2001), is based on the relative ease with which a researcher can access a population (as cited in Hayes & Singh, 2012).   Hood (2006), noted it is advantageous to use convenience sampling as was demonstrated in this study, as the principal put out an announcement asking for volunteers who would be willing to meet with the researcher and assured them the study would be anonymous. This is another example of how convenience sampling was used, as the sample (participants in this study) was readily available to the researcher (as cited in Hayes & Singh, 2012).

2010-11 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report

The following information, taken from the 2010-2011 AEIS report, shows the progress this high school has made in closing the achievement gaps and provides data relevant to the study. As shown in Table 2 below, the students at this high school performed above the state in every subject:

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Table 2

Comparison of High School Studied Test Scores with State

Test	State	High School
Reading/ELA	90%	93%
Math	84%	87%
Science	83%	88%
Social Studies	95%	96%
All Tests	76%	82%

While researching this high school, the researcher looked at AEIS statistics as well as the district vision and mission statements to gain insight into the school's priorities.

Vision

"Preparing students for tomorrow's opportunities" (Vision Statement of school district studied, n.d.).

Mission Statement

> Committed to providing a quality, well-rounded education to all students. District shall insure the success of student learning, in all subject areas by providing the knowledge and skills that students need to prepare them for productive employment after high school and/or post-secondary education. The district will seek opportunities to broaden and enhance the curriculum so students

will become more self-directed and self-motivated to meet the challenges of an ever-changing society. (Mission Statement of School District Studied)

Participants

The final teacher participants included four White secondary teachers who had varying years of experience. The principal of the school informed the faculty that a study would be conducted and asked for volunteers willing to participate. There were not any particular selection criteria per se; the principal simply announced that a graduate student wanted to conduct a study at the school regarding student performance and asked if anyone would be willing to participate and if so, they should report to the library at a particular time. By the time all the background information had been collected, the original six participants had been reduced to four participants who came on a regular basis. The purpose of the studied was explained, and any and all were welcome to participate. The criterion was, simply, whoever was willing to participate was chosen. An unstructured, open-ended informal format was used, as it allowed the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues. This unstructured interview process is the most common among qualitative researchers and is used as a means to gain access to the interviewee's experience. The interviewer aims to ask the right questions so as to elicit responses in the form of authentic feelings and meanings of the interviewee (Schwandt, 2001).

The teacher participants will be identified only as teacher 1, 2, 3, and 4 (see Table 3 below) in order to protect their anonymity. During the first interview, the researcher met with the principal first, who was very cordial and provided coverage for

the teachers in case the time ran over. The group first met in a room adjacent to the library so the researcher could explain why they were there, how the interviews would proceed, and to assure them that all information was confidential and that they would not be identified in any of the write up or future publications resulting from the study. Originally, six teachers had signed up to participate, but two dropped out at the last minute. Each dropout had different reasons for their non-participation.   For those to remained and participated in the study, everyone was a little nervous in the beginning as they were not sure what to expect. However, I tried to calm their nerves and assure them their participation was appreciated and that we would do our best to enjoy ourselves throughout the interviews. The participants were a small, close-knit staff and it was made evident very quickly that they felt comfortable with one another. They quickly warmed to the study topic and seemed to respond to all of the interview protocol and related discussion candidly.

Table 3

Participant Information

Teacher/ Gender/ Years of Experience	Subjects Taught	Background	Thoughts About Community	Indication Teacher Cared About Students
T1 Male 12	IPC, Physics, English	•Born in town •Studied Medicine •Middle Class •Early 30's	•Felt town was unchanged •Liked small community/ knowing families •Felt parents cared about students	•Student advocate •Believed all students could succeed •Encouraged students to follow dreams
T2 Female 11	English	•Born one town over •Late 20's •Middle Class	•Attended local school •Liked community •Felt parents could be more involved	•Feels all students should be accepted and not blamed •Won't allow students to fail
T3 Male 20+	Shop Teacher/Coach	•Born and raised in Alabama •Early 50's •Longshore-man	•Not tied to community •Felt parents should be more involved •Liked town but "everything has changed"	•Felt students could succeed with skills learned in class •Thought students were good kids •Taught many years/liked teaching
T4 Female 12	English	•Early 30's •Family of teachers •Middle Class	•Feels like part of the community •Has good family rapport •Feels more parents could be involved	•Believes in self-reflection to better serve kids •Engages students and won't let them sit back •Wants to help students be successful

Participant teacher 1, T1, is a dynamic teacher with twelve years experience who teaches IPC, physics, and English. He seemed to be the most opinionated of the bunch and was very articulate and gave long, relevant answers to any topic that came up. The researcher was very impressed by his poise and thought he was probably a teacher whom students really responded to. He seemed the most interested in the study and asked the most questions. Teacher 1 is homegrown, having attended the local schools in town up to the tenth grade, when he left to attend an academy in Denton with plans to become a physician. Teacher 1 grew up in a typical White, middle-class working family and has a lot of insight into the community since he has lived there most of his life. Teacher 1 is definitely an academic who loves learning and teaching and is working on his mid-management certificate with hopes of becoming a principal within a couple years. His wife is a diagnostician in the district. She was his high school girlfriend and is Hispanic. Teacher 1 learned Spanish from his wife and being married to a Hispanic, he feels, gives him a good insight to some of the issues his students face in the classroom. This teacher told the researcher that the community today is pretty much the same as it was when he was growing up, other than it was "more Czech" when he was a student, and there was not a large Hispanic population. Although Teacher 1 had originally intended to become a physician, he realized within the first couple years of college that even though he had the passion to help others, he didn't want to put in that many hours. He wanted to spend time with his family and felt that teaching would allow him to still give back to the community and give him time to spend with his family.

Participant teacher number two, T2, is an English teacher who came in mid-year.

Teacher 2 is recently married and also attended schools in the community. She had been subbing at the school and took over for a teacher who left mid-year. Teacher 2 is in her late twenties and has been teaching almost twelve years, part of that time in the next town.

Participant number three, T3, is a shop teacher and seemed the most uncomfortable of the four participants. Teacher 3 was more reserved and referred to himself as the "old man." He is a former coach and has taught in the district for years. T3 grew up in Alabama and moved to Texas with his family when he was in grade school. He's a former longshoreman, as was his father who came to Texas for work. Teacher 3 grew up in a nearby town and taught in a nearby school district for some years before coming to this district.

Teacher number 4, T4, was also an English teacher who seemed to be a close friend of teacher participant number 1. T4 is in her early thirties and has been teaching for approximately 12 years in this and other districts. Her father taught sixth grade, and she comes from a family of teachers.

Data Collection

Data collected for this study included open-ended and follow-up interviews, as well as classroom observations. The classroom observations were conducted on a volunteer basis. The researcher asked participants for permission to stop by their rooms to observe them in their classroom setting in order to observe the relationship between them and their students. There was no predetermined objective. Participant T1 and T4 gave permission. Participant T1 was observed twice in his science class (two different

classes, same subject) and T4 was observed once in her English class. In both the interviews and the observations, the participants shared their experiences, resulting in an interpretive study that shared meanings held by these subjects. The interviews also took place at the participants' school. These interviews resulted in a well-triangulated case study (Stakes, 1998 as cited in Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Individual interviews are the most frequent method of data collection in quantitative research and are the preferred technique for unexplored social phenomena (Hays & Singh, 2012). As Seidman (2006) pointed out,

> Every research method has its limits and its strengths. In-depth interviewing's strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people's experience form their point of view. We can see how their individual experiences interact with powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work, and we can discover the interconnections among people who live and work in a shared context. (p. 130)

Individual interviews were the primary method by which data were collected in this study. The goal of this interview process is to garner specific information. Patton (1990) believes that the researcher digs to discover what is "in and on someone else's mind and make meaning of their experiences" (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 71). If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it has one a long way to validity (Seidman, 2006).

Semi-Structured Format

The semi-structured format lends itself to depth and validity of participant responses. Hays and Singh (2012) wrote that semi-structured interviews enables "more participant voice" and provided a "richer picture of phenomenon under investigation" (p. 239). The intent of the study was to document beliefs, assumptions and attributes White secondary teachers make about their students of color and how those perceptions impact instruction. These perceptions were garnered through the use of semi-structured, individual interviews. The research questions examined were a) Do White teachers perceive that they treat their students of color in a manner different from the way they treat their White students? b) From the viewpoint of these selected White secondary teachers, what type of instruction and assessment decisions do these teachers make for their students of color based on their perceptions about these students, and c) What life experiences have these selected White secondary teachers brought into the classroom and how have these experiences affected how these teachers perceive their students of color?

After the initial interviews, the participants and researcher met together in four sessions for two hours each session. The researcher also met individually with teacher number 1 separately on two additional occasions as he was the most articulate, in addition to observing teachers in their classroom settings. The participants took notes, the researcher audiotaped the sessions and took field notes as appropriate. These notes included important comments made by the teachers, researcher's reactions, other teachers' reactions and the researcher's observations.

Only three observations were conducted due to time constraints and because only two out of the four participants volunteered to be observed. There was no pre-conference held for the observations; the researcher and two volunteers agreed that the researcher would simply "pop in" and the volunteers understood that the walkthrough was not evaluative. The participants would have the opportunity to discuss what the researcher observed after the observation. Participant T1 was observed in a science class once for 42 minutes and in the same subject in a different classroom for 37 minutes. T4 was observed for 38 minutes in her English class.

Initially, six White secondary teachers were chosen by the purposive method, but only four teachers ended up attending all the sessions. The purposive method is used when a researcher is studying complex social action within a particular locale such as the high school studied, and purposeful sampling is used to select information-rich cases that will bring the answers to the question being studied (Patton, 1990). The investigator made sure, while performing field research, that what was observed was customary so that a working picture of the routine features of the participants in the study could be developed. The participants guided the events and conversations that took place during the study (Schwandt, 2001).

In this study, data were collected from multiple sources: interviews, focus groups, document analysis, peer debriefing and observations. The researcher met with the participants individually to collect biographical information, to give them a chance to get to know the researcher, to set their minds at ease in terms of confidentiality, and to assure them that they would never be identified by name either in this research or to

others outside of the group. They all knew each other fairly well and a level of trust already seemed established among them.

Articles and research were provided related to the under-performance of children of color in high school and the participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences in the classroom related to that issue. Before we went any further, we agreed, for the purpose of this research, that we would define diversity predominantly in terms of social representation of social group memberships. The researcher gave them a handout (Appendix A) that listed situations that reflected "White Privilege": "I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time" "Yes"; Number 5, I can go shopping alone most the time pretty well assured that I won't be followed or harassed, "Yes"; Number 10, "I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race. Teacher 1, "I would say so, but I think it would depend of who is around. I think there are some races more willing to hear my voice than others." We went through the list of most of the 15 different scenarios and all the participants agreed, that for the most part, the scenarios were accurate and indeed, they did benefit from their White privilege.

Data Analysis

For this study, the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used so that the data could be compared as they were collected. Each session began by the participants summarizing what had been talked about during the previous session. Participants were free to add to what had already been stated or clarify something that had been said. Lincoln and Guba (1981) define this as a quality control process (member

checking) that allows a researcher to improve credibility, validity, and accuracy of a recorded research interview. Fine (1998) refers to this process as "writing against othering," (p. 141) a way of guarding the researcher against inadvertently projecting his or her own experience onto the participants while missing the salient points of their own race, culture, or class experiences from their perspectives.

The protocol for the analysis of the data involved member checks in which the researcher shared with the participants their comments from previous sessions that summarized their thoughts. This 'check' allowed verification of perspectives being accurately portrayed and to address any issues while looking for themes and patterns to further inform the direction of the research (Glesne, 1999). As the teachers told their stories, the researcher came to know them better, and as data continued to be gathered, the researcher's subjectivity allowed her to tell the participant's story in verifiable, meaningful ways (Glesne, 1999).

For the classroom observations, the researcher took notes about what she had observed in both participants' classrooms and then they discussed the results in a post conference at the end of the day following the observations. Both teachers were given the opportunity to discuss what the researcher had observed in terms of their relationship with their students and how it did or did not impact instruction in the classroom.

A multidimensional culturally responsive classroom includes a curriculum that is conducive to multiple cultures and learning styles. During the classroom visits, the researcher observed that both teachers incorporated numerous teaching strategies to deliver curriculum so that all their students processed the information delivered to them.

Additionally, both teachers included several strategies to help their students relate to their cultural backgrounds. T1 has a more easy-going personality and is a natural in terms of his relationship with his students. T4 has a more authoritative personality but works at making sure all her students understand the material and makes adjustments for students who need extra help.

T1 encouraged his students to follow their dreams and let them know they could do anything they set their mind to. T4 used different strategies such as cooperative learning, a Promethean board, and clickers and also related well to her students, although she was not as involved in their personal lives and occasionally fell back on traditional teaching methods, i.e. lecturing. Table 4 below details the observations of the participants.

As a result of the observations, the teachers discussed in the professional learning communities (PLC) what the researcher had noted during the walkthroughs. The observations were fodder for self-reflection and discussion on how to make all students feel connected to their teachers and school. The PLC discussion centered on the researcher's observation that both teachers had high expectations for their students and held them accountable for their learning. Homework was given and expected to be completed. All students were expected to respect each other and the teacher. Both teachers were aware of their different students' backgrounds and addressed the students' individual learning styles accordingly.

Table 4

Participant Observations

Participant Volunteer	Number Minutes Observed	Subject Taught	TE/STD Interaction	Outcome – PostConf/PLC
T1	42	Science	• Told students to "follow dreams" • High student expectations • Homework given and completed	• Varied strategies for student success • Self-reflective • Used culturally relevant pedagogy
T1	37	Science	• Held students accountable for learning • Close bond with students • Aware of individual student needs	• Works with each student individually • Collaborates with colleagues
T4	38	English	• Varied teaching strategies used (Promethean board, cooperative learning, clickers) • Held students accountable for learning • Falls back on traditional teaching methods	• Uses best teaching practices • Used culturally relevant pedagogy • Reflective/Adaptive teaching practices to meet the needs of students

In this study, the researcher observed and described details of events and actions using the participants' own words. According to Freire (1970), historical epochs evolve around themes, and the way people react to these themes determines their destiny. If we can identify these themes and become conscious of our patterns and how we think, we can actively work at what needs to be changed. Through this research, the researcher intended to bring attention to the deficit thinking of White secondary teachers. The deficit thinking framework holds that poor schooling performance is rooted in students' alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, while institutional structures and inequitable school arrangements that exclude students from learning is held exculpatory (Valencia, 1997). The research was geared to exposing that the deficit model is largely based on imputation and little documentation.

Trustworthiness and Reliability

The researcher's notes or memos were essentially a recap of ideas and concepts discussed among the groups and how those concepts struck the researcher and understanding of certain aspects of the study. These notes helped connect the data and assertions and theoretical discussions. Additionally, throughout the collections of data, "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6), was provided in order to 'thickly' interpret social action by recording circumstances, meanings, intentions, and motivations of the participants regarding particular episodes. Also, the researcher had to be constantly aware of her position and how she was being viewed. The researcher had a colleague act as what Patton (2002) described as her "peer debriefer" (as cited in Hayes & Singh, 2012, p. 211). Peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), serves many purposes. It

allowed the researcher to test hypotheses, provide clarity by a peer the researcher trusted, and allowed the researcher to proceed with good judgment.

This study established trustworthiness in the qualitative paradigm by triangulation, member checking, writing descriptively, and acknowledging researcher biases in a manner that allowed the researcher to be honest and forthcoming about feelings and observations. Merriam (2009) relates trustworthiness to ethics, suggesting that the qualitative researcher has multiple methods by which to establish his or her credit in the study. She suggests that triangulation, member checking, adequate engagement in data collection, and researcher reflexivity provide a strong basis for ethical trustworthiness. In this study, triangulation occurred by using multiple data points from audiotaped personal interviews, focus groups, interviews, observations, document analysis, and notes. Furthermore, the triangulation of the data is effective for confirming emergent themes. Triangulation is a procedure used to establish that criterion of validity has been met and is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences drawn. Triangulation is possible and necessary because research is a process of discovery in which the genuine meaning residing within an action or event can be best uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points (Schwandt, 2001).

Triangulation is a method whereby researchers use several sources to provide insights and descriptions about the same events or relationships (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Furthermore, triangulation "enhances meaning through multiple sources and provides for thick description of relevant information" (Erlandson,

Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 115). This study employed different strategies of triangulation.

In addition, articulation of the background of the researcher is important in interpretive research. The researcher was a careful observer that Merriam (2009) discusses, and the role was taken seriously. The researcher's role was to observe and provide a rich description. Thick description within case study research helps the study to speak to similar situations outside of the case study (Geertz, 1973). The conversations addressed included personal observations, the classroom, pedagogy, and students of the participants. The words of the teachers spoke life into this study and its subsequent analysis. As Hays and Singh (2012) noted,

> We must challenge ourselves not only to uphold the utmost integrity as researchers, but also to recognize (and not minimize) that we are researchers hold significant power in the lives of our participants as they share their experiences with us. (p. 23)

The researcher acted more as an observer than participant so that the study could focus more on what was happening in the setting and be more aware of the actions of the teachers. If the researcher was asked a direct question by the participants, she responded. There is no bias-free point of view in any approach to research since we all filter our view through our theoretical lens. The researcher's lens is that of a White, middle-class female principal of a Title I high school.

Limitations

All qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. Wolcott (1990) noted that he primary goal or the goal of any basic qualitative study, for that matter, is to uncover and interpret those meanings. He further observed that limitations are important to research because studies take place in a particular setting at a particular time. In another setting with another teacher or another group of students, other results are possible. This research was qualitative and therefore subjective. Certain structures of experience (the White secondary teachers' perceptions of their students of color) were looked at as well as the perspectives of the actors (teachers), and specific interrelationships between the teachers and their environment.

The researcher acted as the instrument of research, listening to what these four White secondary teachers believed to be issues in their classrooms relating to their students of color. While using the high school where the researcher served as principal would have simplified the process, those teachers would have answered the questions in the way they thought their employer wanted them to be answered, or the researcher's preconceived notions about the teachers would bias the research. Although the research was conducted in a manner that follows research protocols suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the research was still seen through the eyes of a White administrator and researcher looking at diversity.

Summary

Data for this study were gathered through observations, teacher diaries, focus group interviews, personal interviews, and observations, then triangulated. Furthermore, observational notes to the researcher functioned as part of the ongoing analysis by the researcher regarding the effect of teachers' perceptions of their students of color and the resulting impact on instruction.

Teachers must be receptive to a multicultural classroom and must also believe that all students in that classroom are equal (Anderson, 1987). How the teachers get there will contribute to the body of knowledge in this field. In order to understand the impact of teacher belief systems and how those perceptions affect instruction and learning in multicultural classrooms, schools must take the lead in gathering diverse groups together and convey the message that we all have something important to learn from one another (Thornton, 1995).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

In Chapter IV, the researcher summarizes the results of the study and discusses these results in relation to the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter II, which provides a context for the study. Throughout the data analysis, the researcher found common themes in participants' comments throughout and across the research questions posed. These themes studied collectively within the framework of the study's participation comprised the study findings.

Etched deeply into the school culture was how teachers 'should' teach and how learners 'should' learn according to what rules of relationship between them. However, learning communities construct meaning in multiple ways about what they should do and how they should be carried out (Duffy, 1995). How do we make 'sense' of the cultural inscriptions about education in order ensure student success?

Methodology

One central question guided this qualitative case study: How do White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color impact instruction? This section details the data that emerged during the study of teachers in a diverse high school. A total of four participants, 2 males and 2 females, were interviewed in confidential settings at their school. The individual interviews were based on open-ended questions that sought responses from the participants. The interviews varied in structure based on

individual responses to the original research question. Later interviews revealed emerging themes, and participants asked and answered questions related to those themes while sampling and interview protocols were adjusted based on emerging concepts as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Participant responses were open-ended and narrative in nature, and participants relayed anecdotes from their experiences to illustrate their points. The qualitative data were reported in narrative form with direct quotations revealing specific insights in the participants' own words. The participants' identities are confidential, and the teachers are referred to as "teacher participant 1-4" throughout the study. The data analyses were used throughout the study in order to categorize the data. This single-case analysis was used in conjunction with a thematic approach, as noted by Boyatzis (1998). The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method with regard to the teacher participants' perceptions about their students of color and how it impacted instruction in the classroom.

A peer researcher was used to compare findings and to ensure there were no differences in terms of interpretation of participants' findings. The findings revealed that all the participants were aware of the issues their minority students struggled with in the sub-theme of flow in teacher teams, and a sub-theme of the sensemaking labeling theme was revealed by the findings. The participants in this study teamed up regularly and helped each other make sense of the puzzling cues they received in their classrooms that affected their instruction and, ultimately, their students. The teachers agreed that most of the changes they made in their rooms were related to the delivery of instruction

and therefore, they would break their students into small groups when they were decoding vocabulary. The group decided to continue to have the students read on-level materials and to pull them out for individual tutorials for one-on-one instruction for those students who couldn't keep up. The participants agreed to set up a tutorial rotation after school and met on a weekly basis to check student progress. They met as a *team* and then described/labeled the issue as a vocabulary-decoding problem for those students who were struggling. As a *team*, they came up with a solution so as not to interrupt the flow of instruction in their classrooms. Their solution was to create a tutorial pull out which was successful as described by teacher number two: "Pulling out the struggling readers and helping them individually in tutorials has improved their overall confidence. It's more work for us but pays off for the students." Additionally, teacher participant number one commented:

This collective effort of pulling kids into tutorials is working as the struggling kids don't slow us down in class with materials that are above their level. By identifying each individual kid weaknesses-we can bring them up to grade level.

Pulling students into tutorials to help them reach grade level was an example of successful sensemaking, as the teachers formed a team and came up with a change that made sense to them. The teachers worked together to ensure the flow of instruction in the classrooms, allowing them to move forward in class and helping build the slower students' confidence by working with them individually with materials they understood. Analyzing (constructing meaning) and coming up with the solution of pulling slower readers into tutorials reduced ambiguity and resulted in an opportunity for teachers to

transform their teaching practices, while supporting one another.   In essence, they assimilated the cues (struggling readers) and made accommodations accordingly.

The social nature of brainstorming and "flow in teacher teams" was key in coordinating instruction.   The team teaching efforts to keep the instruction flowing and the PLCs in this high school were instrumental in changing teaching practices and improving student learning. By identifying (labeling) the issues students had with reading (mainly decoding vocabulary) and implementing one-on-one tutorials, other teachers were aware of what their colleagues were doing. They then sent students to the tutorials for help. There were no boundaries as the teachers collaborated to best meet the needs of every student. Cultivating student progress evolved as participants pooled their knowledge to solve problems related to teaching students across grade levels and teachers developed new practices.

The "flow in teacher teams" occurred again when teacher participant number two spoke about the student in her class who "had a chip on her shoulder." Participant number 4 also stated, "She feels disrespected and needs someone to bond with her." The teachers constantly reflected, evaluated, and tweaked their teaching practices to better support their students. Their entire focus was breaking through their students' barriers; this meant building relationships with them, and being on top of their academic progress and needs to make sure they understood what was going on in the classroom.   They were totally student-centered and supportive of their students. These teachers had no problem discussing the issues with their students of color and were constantly brainstorming with other teachers, believing they should do whatever necessary to make

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their students academically successful. They were cognizant of the cultural differences

these students faced and were constantly analyzing their performance to see how they

might improve for the success of all their students.

Most of the teachers lived in the community where they worked and were

therefore even more invested in their students' success. The idea of this study was to

elicit insights of teachers based on their individual perceptions of the situation. For the

teachers in this study, the classroom was the focal point for their evaluation of how they

viewed themselves as successful teachers. Positive classrooms with quality instruction

for ALL students was the single most important factor for these teachers.

The data throughout this study were detailed and complex. All the participants

discussed different types of influences on their experiences using sensemaking theory to

describe teacher data (see Table 5 below). Four common themes related to sensemaking

theory emerged from the study: a) student disruption of expected flow of classroom

practices; b) teacher awareness of how their perceptions about their students of color

influenced how they made sense of their students' issues with grasping lessons

(retrospective sensemaking); c) teachers' ability to find common ground (student

success) while addressing bracketed concerns and questions (labeling); and d)

sensemaking as a social process in the way teachers depended on each other and how the

participants' were also aware of the need to harness their positive and negative emotions,

their impact on their students, their engagement of students, colleagues and parents

(social sensemaking).

Table 5

Sensemaking Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Flow	• Flow in Teacher Teams • Students in Flow
Retrospective	• Teacher Commitment • Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners
Labeling	• Dealing with Student Stereotypes • Teacher Perceptions About Their Students
Social Sensemaking	• Relational Trust • Effective Teachers

Teachers might engage in sensemaking any time they encountered a message about student learning that they had difficulty understanding. This teacher understanding was entwined with the teacher's identity, beliefs, knowledge, and teaching practices. Applying this sensemaking lens to the teachers' review of their students of color broadened the scope of what teachers learned.

Analysis of Data

The researcher employed sensemaking theory to understand how teachers made sense of their instructional practices in order to meet the diverse needs of their students. All four teacher participants used a sensemaking lens to test their perceptions about their students of color. Sensemaking was also used in determining changes to the classroom instruction. The findings revealed the significant role Sensemaking Theory played by impacting teachers' decisions about student curricular and relationship needs. When teachers conversed with colleagues or participants in brainstorming sessions about issues they saw in their classroom, they encountered and interpreted messages about instruction. Piaget (1972) stated that "dialog is a means of decoding messages that teachers interpret either by assimilating or accommodating them" (p. 71). The participants in this study exchanged observations, and ideas, which led them to make changes to some of their classroom practices accordingly.

Additionally, students who didn't understand a lesson or struggled academically caused a disruption to the flow of instruction, and these disruptions forced teachers to stop and re-examine how they might present a lesson using other instructional practices. Furthermore, the participants tried to make sense of any previous teaching practices that used to work but didn't currently work which forced teachers to examine that discrepancy as to why their students struggled academically.

Flow

The first theme identified in the sensemaking literature is the disruption of **flow** of normal activities (Weick, 1995) (see Table 5 above). When students disrupted the

flow of classroom activities due to their inability to grasp instruction, the flow of the class was disrupted. The teacher (or team of teachers) had to go back, reteach, and make curricular changes so that all students understood. These interruptions triggered the sensemaking process as teachers attempted to construct an understanding of what happened and what to do next. Teachers sometimes received messages about instruction that they had difficulty interpreting. These received messages interrupted their normal flow of experience (Weick, 1995) in their practice or thinking about teaching practices; messages can include classroom activities that students failed to understand, classroom discussions, teacher presentations, and so on. The teacher or teams of teachers had to then assimilate these messages through interpretation, bracket them and question the sources of puzzling messages to immerse them in further dialogue.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) stated that when teachers experience flow in the classroom that occurrence can motivate teachers and provide insight into their teaching practices. He described flow as "when a person faces a task with a clear set of goals that require appropriate responses; and when he or she receives immediate feedback on their success in meeting goals" (pp. 29-33). Csikszentmihalyi further suggests that a feeling of flow may encourage teachers to motivate and interest students to persevere with educational goals.

The data indicated that teachers employed sensemaking theory for their decision making in the following areas according to theme: a) student disruption of expected flow of classroom routines and how participants (individual teachers and teacher teams) presented knowledge in alternative and multiple ways (flow of activity), b) teachers'

awareness of how their perceptions about their students of color influenced how they made sense of their students issues with grasping lessons (retrospective), c) teachers' ability to find common ground (student success) while addressing bracketed concerns and questions (labeling), and d) teachers' demonstrated awareness of the necessity to harness their positive and negative emotions and work with each other to ensure student success (social).

Two sub-themes were revealed under the sensemaking theme of 'flow.' The first, "flow in teacher teams," occurred when two or more teachers got together to analyze what was disrupting the flow of instruction in their classroom activities so that they could develop a solution amongst themselves what they could do so that students understood. In the second sub-theme, "student flow," a teacher used strategies to explain lessons so that students understood. Both sub-themes related to the idea that when students did not understand a lesson or teachers could not comprehend why students had difficulty grasping the lesson, there was a disruption to the flow of classroom activities.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) described experiences of flow as "a magnet for learning" (p. 33), arguing the importance of studying both students' and teachers' experiences. He posited that the teacher's sense of flow may be crucial to effective teaching because it motivates and inspires students to learn, versus memorizing information.

Flow in teacher teams. In this sub-theme, "flow in teacher teams," all four teacher participants came together and shared their knowledge about instructional

practices in order to understand the issues several students had grasping material and the fact that they were off grade level.

Freeman and Johnson (1998), concur that a teacher's beliefs, experiences, practices, and values play an important role in unfolding a teacher's knowledge base and that teachers should meet regularly and share instructional practices. How teachers use their knowledge base to make sense of their classroom gives them a chance to reflect about successful teaching practices and develop a "sense of plausibility" (Prabhu, 1990) in their teaching practices.

Teacher participant number two gave an example of one of the student's confusion over a lesson forced her to go back and reteach (interruption of flow) and how she met with her team to brainstorm. As part of her presentation to an English class, T2 explained to other participants that "Low kids are seldom at their correct reading level and that hurts them when they are trying to grasp concepts. The idea is to use materials at the level that will scaffold student learning." She explained that she met with her team on a weekly basis to share ideas and to disaggregate data from pre- and post-assessments. As a group they strategized how to best present a lesson in order to reach all students. Teacher participant number two perceived she was missing something in her instruction when some of her students did not understand (interruption to flow). She collaborated with her team in order to make sense of why some students did not grasp a lesson (interpretation). She stated,

> How do we address the district benchmark when we know from the pre-
> assessment that a quarter of our kids don't know the vocabulary and aren't on

grade level? It is an issue as even the lowest kids who are struggling the most

have to pass the state assessment and they can't meet the standards.

Teachers feel that flow tends to occur when students are interested, and research

suggests that personalization and contextualization can increase intrinsic learning

(Cordova & Lepper, 1996).

Teacher participant number two demonstrated another example for this sub-

theme, "flow in teacher teams," when she struggled with students needing to be able to

pass state assessments and meet state standards when one-quarter of the students were

not on grade level. This discrepancy interrupted the classroom flow as the teacher had to

figure out what curricular changes needed to be made to bring her struggling students up

to grade level. Meeting with her team members led teacher participant number 2 and her

teammates to engage in sensemaking by discussing how to break down the units into

smaller chunks to facilitate student comprehension and prepare word walls for

vocabulary building. After collaborating, teacher participant number two had a better

understanding about how to break it down for students but was still worried:

> The students all have to pass the district benchmarks with a 70 or better in order
>
> to prepare them for the State TAKS test. If we had time and could just focus on
>
> vocabulary and teaching eventually, they would all get it.

Her group members were equally concerned but stated that the bottom line was, "All the

students had to pass TAKS." Furthermore, this passage demonstrates how these teachers

made sense of the messages they received about instruction (students weren't on grade

level but all had to pass TAKS regardless). Using the sensemaking process presented

the opportunity for the teachers to process understanding of puzzling messages.

Teacher participant number four was equally concerned with her struggling

students in her English class. Students' poor reading skills interrupted the flow of

instruction in her classroom. She examined the reasons and came up with an activity

that changed how the information was presented to her students and shared it with

another teacher:

I'll tell you what I do every week. I have the students practice round robin

reading but skip over the kids who don't like to read out loud. That way, they

practice reading out loud in front of a group. At the beginning, they didn't like it

but now that they are comfortable as a group they ask each other questions

related to the novel like the setting of the story, characters, etc. It worked really

well for them.

Teacher Participant Number 2: So you do that every week and they like it?

Teacher Participant Number 4: Yes, it takes a while but it engages
all the students-forces them to participate and I can check their
comprehension.

Teacher participant Number 2: Sounds good. I have a group of kids
that are really close to each other-I'll try it.

Teacher participant number four shared an activity she used successfully in her

class. Through dialogue, these two teacher participants combined their working

knowledge so that students would understand the reading. They worked together

(teacher teams) to implement teaching strategies to create a new understanding of how to improve instruction in their individual classrooms.

When the participants in this study collaborated and had authentic communication, they demonstrated another example of "flow in teacher teams." van Lier (1996) defines authentic communication as:

> … a process of engagement in the learning situation, and as a characteristic of the person engaged in learning. As such, authenticity relates to who teachers and learners are and what they do as they interact with one another for the purposes of learning…in the classroom, authenticity relates to processes of self-actualization, intrinsic motivation, respect and moral integrity in interpersonal relations. (p. 125)

These teachers experienced flow as they made sense of the puzzling cues affecting their instruction and ultimately came to better understand their students. The teachers agreed that most of the changes they made in their rooms were related to the delivery of instruction and that they would break their students into small groups to decode vocabulary. The group decided to continue to have the students read on-level materials and pull them out for individual tutorials for one-on-one instruction for those students who couldn't keep up. The participants agreed to a set up a tutorial rotation after school and met on a weekly basis to check student progress. They met as a *team* and then determined the issue as a vocabulary-decoding problem for those students who were struggling. As a *team*, they came up with a solution so as not to interrupt the flow of instruction in the classroom. The interaction between student and teacher was integral to

the flow experiences and their solution was to create a tutorial pull out as described by teacher number two:

Pulling out the struggling readers and helping them individually in tutorials has improved their overall confidence. It's more work for us but pays off for the students.

Additionally, teacher participant number one commented:

This collective effort of pulling kids into tutorials is working as the struggling kids don't slow us down in class with materials that are above their level. By identifying each individual kid weaknesses-we can bring them up to grade level.

Placing students in tutorials to help them reach grade level is an example of successful sensemaking as the teachers teamed up and made a change that made sense to them. The teachers worked as a team to ensure the flow of instruction in the classrooms, which allowed them to move forward in class and helped build the slower students' confidence by working with them individually with materials they understood. Coming up with the solution (constructing meaning) of pulling slower readers into tutorials reduced ambiguity and resulted in an opportunity for teachers to work as a team and transform their teaching practices, brainstorm with each other, and come up with solutions. These teacher teams resulted in dialoging and brainstorming, which enabled the teacher participants to bond and support each other. In essence, they assimilated the cues (struggling readers) and made accommodations accordingly. Flow for these teachers happened when they felt that learning occurred for students as well as themselves and did, as Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggests, motivate and inspire their students.

The social nature of brainstorming and "flow in teacher teams" is key when dialoguing with colleagues and experts to develop and coordinate instruction. The two-way dialog between teachers and team teaching efforts was instrumental in keeping the instruction flowing, while the PLCs in this high school were crucial in changing teaching practices and improving student learning. By identifying the issues students had with reading (mainly decoding vocabulary) and implementing one-on-one tutorials, other teachers were aware of what their colleagues were doing and sent students to the tutorials for help. There were no boundaries as the teachers collaborated to best meet the needs of every student. Cultivating student progress evolved as participants pooled their knowledge to solve problems related to teaching students across grade levels and teachers worked with each other to develop new practices.

Students in flow. The second sub-theme revealed "students in flow" (see Table 5 above) when teachers used strategic lessons for student comprehension so the flow of instruction was not interrupted in the classroom.

Teacher participant number one was a science and English teacher who, just like all teachers, had students in his classes who struggled academically. In his case the students had problems with scientific concepts. The students' struggle required the teacher to find a way to deliver the instruction so that his students would understand. This teacher engaged the sensemaking process by assessing how he could structure his lessons differently for better student comprehension. During the interviews, he gave another example of how low reading skills affected the students in his class. He shared in great detail how he structured lessons and strategies he tried so that students could

better decode the vocabulary by taking the words out of context and then having them use the word in a sentence. He related how that strategy addressed reading comprehension and vocabulary and shared examples. When teacher participant number 1 finished, the other participants asked for further clarification on how the lesson was set up: Teacher participant number 2 asked: "Do you have the students read the passage first all the way through or do you go sentence by sentence?" Teacher participant number 1 replied: "They read the passage first and then I go back through the vocabulary I chose from each sentence and I ask for definitions based on context." This example suggests that teachers collaborated on what happens in the classroom, planning instruction and making decision about what to teach. By asking for clarification regarding the decoding of vocabulary, teacher participant number 4 combined her current knowledge of the strategies used in her classroom in order to minimize the interruption of flow of teaching for those students who didn't understand.

Most of the participants' discussion about students was used to solve problems related to particular students who were struggling academically. Participants shared information about how individual students were doing outside of the classroom as well. They discussed student-learning problems and any type of challenges students might be facing at home that would prevent learning the concepts. The participants made sense of the interruption of flow in their classrooms when students had trouble with a lesson and they had to stop and examine the issues of why and what they could do to make sure all students understood.

Teacher participant number three was a shop teacher whose students tended to be confused about some of the lessons in his room. The students' confusion caused an interruption to teacher participant number three's teaching practice-his ongoing flow of experience (Weick, 1995), which caused him to stop and make sense of what caused the confusion and how he could change his approach to the lesson. Participant number 3 redid the lesson and "chunked" the material into smaller units and stopped frequently to check for student comprehension. He explained: "I try to structure it (lesson) so we do small things at a time, where I can go back and check it to make sure they do everything, you know correctly." This teacher's act of sensemaking was successful in that he was able to construct a plausible (Weick, 1995) explanation for whatever ambiguity affected the lesson. He then devised the solution of presenting the material in smaller chunks and relied on cues (check for understanding at regular intervals) to ensure students understood so he could go on with the lesson with no interruption of instructional flow.

Flow occurred in these teachers' classrooms when learning was taking place. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) suggests that these flow experiences are important in motivating teachers in the classroom. Furthermore, Johnson (1992, 1996) states that is essential for teachers to develop a sense of awareness through the process of sensemaking, as to why and what they do. Teachers need to experience and to reflect on their work. Teachers discussing their flow experiences encourages self-reflection and sensemaking. Recounting their positive teaching experiences encourages them to stick with it, develop sensitivity in the classroom, and helps them adapt teaching practices for student success. Teachers sharing their experiences of flow in the classroom can provide

opportunities for them to ascertain how different classroom events affect them. This discussion and self-reflection is a way for teachers to develop authentic learning and involvement.

Retrospective

The second theme identified in this study related to the sensemaking theory is "retrospective sensemaking" (see Table 5 above). The two sub-themes revealed from the retrospective sensemaking theme were a) "teacher commitment" and b) "diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners." The participants were successful with their students of color because they had positive attitudes toward them and believed in them and were vigilant about meeting the needs of their different student populations. Delpit (1995) noted that "We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs" (p. 46). These teacher participants believed all their students were capable of being successful. Furthermore, the participants reflected and changed teaching practices where necessary to provide academic support for their students in the classroom.

Retrospective sensemaking occurs through a process of reflecting on past events (Weick, 1995) and involves teachers making sense of cues from their own or a colleague's past practice. This kind of sensemaking is about an event that has already happened, and teachers experience a discrepancy between what is intended and what actually transpired. The discrepancy is noted in the process of teaching when a lesson does not have the intended impact in the classroom. There is a discrepancy between

what the teacher intended to happen and what actually did happen. The discrepancy engages the retrospective sensemaking process.

Teacher participant number 2, an English teacher, exemplified retrospective sensemaking when she vented her frustration about the vocabulary for a novel she intended to teach her freshmen English students. In prior years, she had used word walls and had the students study the words for homework for a couple days. They would write the words in a sentence and then be tested for comprehension. This method had always been successful in the past, but for some reason this year's freshmen were having difficulty. A lot of the students failed the vocabulary quiz, slowing down the reading of the novel. Participant number two demonstrated retrospective sensemaking when she explained to the other participants how she "made sense " of her students' failure to learn the vocabulary related to the novel:

> We constructed the vocabulary word wall and I had the students write sentences and paragraphs as a homework assignment as I always had in the past. I thought they were getting it until I graded the vocabulary quizzes and saw the high failure rate. What was different? I had always taught the vocabulary this way in the past. Upon speaking to the students who failed, the issue was the fact that they weren't doing homework. By not doing the assignment at home and studying the words, they failed the quizzes, which slowed down the reading of the novel.

There is a discrepancy in that a teaching method that always worked in the past failed to meet participant number two's expectation this year, causing her to construct a plausible explanation for the failure. She realized she was going to need to make the vocabulary

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coding a class assignment in order to monitor their comprehension. The retrospective

process was used by the participant in this study as it relates to the academic success of

her students in class.

Teacher commitment. This example leads to the first sub-theme revealed in the

retrospective Sensemaking theme, "Teacher commitment to student success," one of the

most important factors influencing student performance in schools. Teachers who feel

empowered to make crucial decisions regarding their jobs are more likely to feel

committed to holding themselves to a high standard of professional performance

(Glickman et al., 1998; Hargreaves, 2001; 2003).

These teacher participants were committed to their students' success. They were

reflective and constantly looking for cues in case their teaching methods needed to be

tweaked so that they could move forward with all of their students. The retrospective

process was evident when all the participants had high expectations for achievement, and

the students responded to their teachers' perception that they were all capable of being

successful. Teacher participant number one, who taught English and science, shared

stories with the group of how his students respond to his perception that they are all

winners and his expectation for them that they would all be successful:

> Students come by all the time to let me know how they are doing in their other
>
> classes or ask for input if they failed a test or are having issues with another
>
> teacher. I let them know that I am there for them and offer to get them tutoring
>
> and to speak to the teacher or whatever it takes to get them to pass. This wasn't
>
> always the case in the past. When I first started out, I did the normal teach and

grade routine. When I started taking an interest in their outside life, I noticed a

marked improvement of their interest in my class and it became easier to work

with them.

This teacher was reflective and committed and used retrospective sensemaking to figure

out that taking an interest in his students outside of class, affected the success of his

students in his classroom, and made adjustments to his teaching practices accordingly.

He summed it up when he stated his students responded to him and always told him "we

like you, Mr. _____. You always keep it real for us."

Another example of retrospective sensemaking and teacher *commitment* is when

English teacher, participant number four, reflected about meeting her students' needs

and mentioned a student she had at the beginning of the school year who was always

testing her expectation that all students would do homework and hand in class work.

This student would do neither. The usual procedures she would use for noncompliant

students, including detention, contacting parents, office referral, had no effect. Finally,

she started to get to know the student to see what he would respond to. She noted when

she gave him extra attention in class and wasn't punitive in grading for late assignments,

he started to turn around. She allotted him extra time for assignments so that he could

keep up with the class, and he started to hand in his work. This teacher was committed

to figuring out what worked with this student and adjusted her teaching practices in

order to reach him and allow him to experience success. The student graduated two

years later and always came back during school breaks to see her. This teacher was

committed to figuring out what worked for this student and adjusted her teaching

practices in order to reach him and allow him to experience success. Flow was spontaneous in this case and could not predict what the outcome would be by changing the approach to reach this student.

These teachers wanted what was best for their students, were perceptive and knew what strategies worked for them in the classroom. They made sense of problems and adjusted their practices to help students achieve success. The teachers were committed to their students' success, using retrospective sensemaking, making sense of interruptions to their normal teaching practices, and by drawing on their knowledge and sharing with their colleagues.

Participant number 1 also exemplified commitment to student success:

All of us work together and if we see a policy or procedure or teaching strategy that needs to be changed, we discuss it and then just go ahead and do it. It's all about the kids and what works for them.

The teachers viewed themselves as the leaders of their classrooms, and their commitment was a component of that purpose-their responsibility for their students' success. Teacher participant number 2 mentioned that a good example of the school's total commitment was during TAKS when "even the bus drivers and kitchen help are trained in TAKS procedures, are aware of the importance of the test and know that that week students are probably stressed so be on the watch for that."

The teachers were constantly on the lookout for programs, materials, or resources that would benefit the students in their classroom. They were committed to any practice or resources that would have a positive impact. They collaborated and discussed

different strategies and tweaked those ideas as needed. They were very much in tune with how their students responded to them and relied on the students to let them know what worked and what didn't. Teacher participant number 3 noted, "You have to listen to what the students are telling you [in terms of why they do or don't understand a lesson]."

Teachers made sense of the perceptions about their students of color from the various influences of their teaching practices and understood what factors influenced their classroom flow such as students not grasping a lesson, home environment barriers, not reading on grade level, and so on. They were totally committed to their students' success and were willing to change their teaching practices, to tutor, and to form relationships, to make sure their students were academically successful. They were totally **committed** by every definition of the term.

Diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners. The second sub-theme to emerge from "retrospective sensemaking" is use of "diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners." As noted throughout this study, many factors affected the success of culturally diverse students. The participants in this study engaged in retrospective sensemaking, reflecting why past practices such as lecture versus groups, reading and answering questions versus group discussions weren't working for some of the students in their classes. Those past practices did not have the intended outcome in the classroom, and this discrepancy triggered the sensemaking process. The teachers reflected and changed their teaching practices in order to provide support in the classroom to ensure all of their students were successful.

Some of those strategies that helped were noted by the teacher participants in the study: They mentioned that they were grateful for small classes and felt they were able to reach all populations by having fewer students in class. The participants also spoke about allowing students to take a leadership role when they were in groups to co-construct activities. Additionally, English teacher participant number 2 stated that she "tried to connect English literature class material to students' ethical perspectives and encouraged students to use their religious perspectives to think about the subject of violence." English teacher participant number 2 reported that she involved students in the class by "demonstrating the ways that theoretical concepts relate to their everyday opinions and beliefs." These participants clearly showed they actively thought about issues of gender, race, and class and considered those factors in tailoring their teaching practices for a diverse group of students. They provided "diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners."

In addition to striving to meet students' individual needs, both academic and personal, these participants believed that their practices should evolve to reflect new understandings about content and student learning and they changed up materials, lesson plans and tests as needed. They collaborated with each other regarding teaching practices and what resources worked best for them in the classroom and changed their practices accordingly.

For example, English and science teacher participant number one mentioned that he "constantly reads his guidebook and outside curricular sources in addition to participating in staff development and shares that information with his colleagues."

These teachers looked for ideas to improve their teaching practices that interrupted their thinking, leading them to ask questions about what might work for their students in their classroom. Teacher participants two and four also demonstrate sensemaking and providing diverse teaching strategies for their diverse learners when they talked about a planning session they attended the previous summer on how to present "inferencing" to their English students. Teacher participant number 2 was not sure how to set up the lesson or plan out the unit timeframe and break it down for her struggling students. Her problem with setting up the lessons interrupted her planning process. She learned to make sense of how to teach the lessons by collaborating with her colleague, participant number four, in order to reach her students.

By sharing "diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners," the teacher participants shared their knowledge, beliefs and practices about teaching and provided a lens through which they constructed understanding about diverse teaching strategies for their diverse learners. The participants interpreted messages they encountered about colleagues' past teaching practices, suggesting that by using the sensemaking theory, they made sense of these colleagues' practices and allowed them to support student learning in their classrooms.

Labeling

The third theme identified in the sense making literature is labeling, whereby members (participants in this study) find, label, and categorize experiences to stabilize the streaming of experiences. As it relates to this study, labeling is a process that is ongoing and central in the determination of human behavior (Mills 2003), for example

the White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color. The participants were trying to determine what the issues were for their struggling minority students by labeling and categorizing the issues to be addressed. How would they reach common ground (student success)? What teacher practices could be identified and tweaked in order to reach all students?

The two sub-themes revealed for Labeling were "dealing with student diversity," and "teacher perceptions about their students."   The use of the subtheme of "dealing with student diversity" is linked to sensemaking and action. The first question of sensemaking is "What's going on here?" The second question is "What do I do next?" In this sub-theme, the participants recognized that many factors affect the success of culturally diverse students. They recognized specific strategies are needed for working with children of diverse cultures. So, what did they do next (sensemaking)? They took action (sensemaking) and incorporated a variety of instructional strategies and learning activities with opportunities for students of diverse backgrounds to learn in a way that is responsive to their communication, cognition and aptitudes. This is the starting point for student success.

The second sub-theme of the sensemaking theme of labeling is "teacher perceptions about their students," which was also revealed by the findings. The teacher participants collaborated and reflected on a daily basis as they tried to make sense of their perceptions about their students and what was the best way to help them learn. How did their teachers' perceptions affect their instruction and ultimately their students in their classrooms every day?

Dealing with student stereotypes. The first sub-theme revealed in the labeling findings was "dealing with student stereotypes." In trying to identify/label their minority students' academic struggles and in order to make sense of these participants' perceptions about their students of color impacted their classroom instruction, the participants were very open and comfortable in their discussions about race and diversity in the classroom. Teacher participant number 2 commented,

> Kids are kids-you just need to reach out your hand to them and pull it (knowledge) out of them. Of course you need to be cognizant of the cultural issues so as not to offend them. Just use whatever method (teaching strategy) works for them.

This teacher participant used the sensemaking theme of labeling to categorize the different needs of different students and was aware of student stereotypes and mindful that she needed to be sensitive to each child's culture and individualize her teaching methods accordingly. Furthermore, this teacher's revelation of her feelings (perceptions) about students of color in her class opened a discussion regarding different teaching strategies the others in the group employed in order to reach their students. The participants revealed they were "interested in improving their teaching skills, they wanted to connect with their colleagues, and they were concerned about issues regarding underrepresented groups." Those underrepresented groups were sometimes labeled by student stereotypes. The teacher participants continued to discuss and make sense of the issues they experienced in their classrooms with their students of color. They all agreed

to continue to discuss any issues they were experiencing in their classes (categorizing experiences/labeling) to identify why their minority students struggled (labeling).

All participants were of the mind that "You just need to treat all the students the same as basically there is no difference between them (students)." English and science teacher participant number one stated,

> I don't think that we (teachers) perceive a difference (between students). I think the mistake is made because we are not asking fundamental questions about educating a human; that's it and it's bound on both sides by that. The differences that do exist-different kids, different attitudes, different languages, different behaviors, different dislikes. Those are the differences between the kids.

Teacher participant number two added, "We are all human beings and therefore the same. It's on an individual level."

The participants went on to talk about how they all treat their students the same-they didn't categorize or stereotype their students. Therefore the issue (minority students' academic struggles) was not related to perceiving/labeling their students any differently than the other students in class. They couldn't label or categorize (make sense) of race being an issue. In fact, while the participants discussed the TAKS scores that categorize students by sub populations, the group agreed with teacher participant number four when he stated that "the TAKS is in itself discriminatory as it tracks scores by racial groups."

Teacher perceptions about their students. The sub-theme of "teacher perceptions about their students," a sub-theme of the sensemaking theme of "labeling"

was noted in the participant interviews when they recognized the problem of the achievement gap and discussed how they could support teaching and learning. This recognition led to brainstorming and discussion. The teachers were constantly analyzing what the issues were in terms of their minority students struggling academically (labeling categories/making sense).

They researched effective teaching practices and discussed and implemented what they felt would work for their students. The participants worked with the families of the students in their classes to foster a positive self-image in their minority students and to help build a bridge across the cultures and traditions in their classrooms. They wanted the students in their classes to be proud of where they came from and to be successful in the community they shared with the other students in their classes. They labeled the categories of issues that caused students to struggle academically and implemented changes and solutions in their classrooms in order to meet the needs of their minority students. In order to accommodate the similarities and differences among the students culture (labeling), the teachers acknowledged individual and cultural differences in a positive manner by having students talk about their culture and customs. They had students bring in different foods from their home countries and held a school-wide "Diversity Day" each year.

As effective teachers of culturally diverse students, they created a basis for the development of effective communication and implemented instructional strategies to ensure student success. The teachers developed an interest in the students' outside lives, fostering a connection with them inside the classroom (labeling/solution). This

relationship enabled the teachers to increase the relevance of lessons and make lessons more meaningful. Additionally, the teachers varied instructional strategies (labeling/solution) and approached their students learning to be in line with individual learning styles. The varied instruction allowed students opportunities to respond in their own communication style and helped to strengthen individual learning styles. Furthermore, the teachers provided frequent reviews (labeling/solution) and constantly checked for comprehension. They also reviewed previous lesson before continuing on to a new related lesson before a quiz or exam.

The teachers made the students feel comfortable asking questions and correcting their own work, and they made suggestions for improvement. Additionally, they acknowledged correct answers and made students aware of what aspects of their work needed improvement. Finally, the participants in this study engaged in thoughtful examination of their teaching practices, studied the issues-categorized/labeled the issues and put measures in place to ensure student success and meet all their students' needs, allowing them to monitor student reactions, reassess methods and revise their teaching methods to best meet diverse student needs.

The teachers exemplified these methods in the following discussion about a student. Participant number two said the student "had a chip on her shoulder," while participant number 4 noted, "She feels disrespected and needs someone to bond with her." However, participant number 1 commented, "I get along with her fine-she always comes by to see me-I'll mentor her." These teacher participants' individual experiences with this student stemmed from their own experiences with this student in their classes.

By working together they were able to create a profile of the student's strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, participant number two commented that the student "always had a book with her but refused to participate in class." Participant number 4 stated that "She had a strong vocabulary but she won't interact with any of the other students." The teachers labeled the problem as attitude issues on the part of the student more than cognitive problems and decided to assign teacher participant number one as a mentor for the student. Their original perceptions about the student were analyzed by others in the group and together they categorized/labeled the student's issues (attitude) and came up with the solution of a mentor. The participants made their practices more transparent to one another by sharing detailed accounts of their own practices and questioning their prior perceptions, thus enabling the flow of instruction for this student.

Sensemaking is about labeling and categorizing to stabilize the streaming of experience, the identification and classification as noted in the example above. The teacher participants identified/labeled the issue with the struggling student in their class, pooled their collective experience and came up with the solution of assigning a mentor. The teaching strategy of mentorship was deployed, and the teachers participated in a community of practice in response to the struggling student in their class. The teachers' perceptions and classroom expectations served as a lens through which they perceived messages about their teaching and learning of the student in their class. What the teachers learned from one another about how to reach their struggling student made sense to them and led them to collectively implement mentorship for the student. This study suggests that teacher perceptions/labeling and consequently "teacher perceptions

about their students" were crucial in how the teachers formulated a solution for their struggling student.

Social Sensemaking

The fourth sensemaking theme, social sensemaking, is influenced by a variety of social factors. These social factors may include previous discussions and information distributed among interdependent workers (Weick & Sutliffe, 2007), such as the participating teachers in this study. Furthermore, social sensemaking has been defined as a social process; human thinking and functioning are essential aspects of each other. What a person does depends on others, so the direct influence is not clear. To understand social sensemaking is to pay more attention to sufficient cues such as stereotypes and roles (Resnick, Levine & Teasley, 1991). Furthermore, Weick (1993) explained that the basic idea of sensemaking emerges from efforts to create order and make sense of what occurs. It is about the enlargement of small cues as noted in the relationships between the participants in this study. It is people interacting to flesh out hunches (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is first about the question "What does the event mean?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410) and is rooted in a complex cognitive activity of discerning the intentions of others. The ongoing nature of social sensemaking applies to the opportunity to extract cues. The result of the ongoing interrelated actions is driven by plausibility (Weick, 1995), as evidenced by the relationships among these teacher participants and the relationships they had with their students.

This social sensemaking theme revealed two sub-themes, "relational trust" and "effective teachers." Relational trust as defined by Bryk and Schneider (2002) is rooted

in a complex cognitive activity of discerning the intentions of others, as noted by Weick (1995) when he stated social sensemaking recognizes that "the social context is crucial…. because it binds people to actions that they then must justify, it affects the saliency of information, and it provides norms and expectations that constrain explanations" (p. 6). Relational trust is an organizational property whose elements are socially defined in the reciprocal exchanges among participants in a school community and is important in terms of enabling change.

The second sub-theme to emerge out of the social sensemaking theme is "effective teachers." Effective teachers, such as the participants in this study, have the ability to set achievable goals, while at the same time, building strong relationships (relational trust) with their students. The teacher participants in this study were "effective" in that they had the ability to provide instruction to different students of different abilities while incorporating instructional objectives and assessing the effective learning mode of the students (Vogt, 1984).

Relational trust. The term relational trust, as outlined by Bryk and Schneider (2002), was the first subtheme to emerge and was an important consideration in many factors of teachers' sensemaking. They noted that teachers must engage in subjects as well as to be involved in the lives of their students, parents, and professional colleagues. It is an organizational property with elements that are socially defined in the reciprocal exchanges among participants in a school community and is important in enabling change. The key factors of relational trust: respect, personal regard for others, and integrity is key to creating healthy organizations. In terms of this study, the teachers

displayed a mix of positive and negative emotions with regard to their relationships with the principal and students that ultimately impacted teaching practices and student engagement. Trust emerged as an important consideration in many factors of teachers' sensemaking. Byrk and Schneider noted that teachers must engage in subjects and ideas as well as be involved in the lives of their students, parents, and professional colleagues. The role relationships and the expectations associated with these roles form the basis of relational trust and required that expectations among members of a social network or organization be validated by actions.

The components of relational trust: respect, competence, personal regard and integrity as defined in chapter II, are revealed in the findings. The participants did not always feel respected by their school administrator (principal) and stated at times, "He seemed more interested in scores than addressing discipline problems." Teacher participant number two expounded on the issue of lack of respect when she stated that "There were broad discipline problems that the principal did not address; however, the school operates under the banner of success since the school is 'recognized' but the discipline issues are still there." Additionally, the participants thought that although the teachers sometimes did not feel supported the principal, supported them, they did believe that he was competent. Furthermore, the participants held one another in high regard as demonstrated by their respect and affection for one another, dependence on each other to serve on committees, share ideas, and how much the teachers were willing to cover for each in a class, giving each other a break.

Teachers one and two gave examples of how many hours they put in planning, getting materials together, sharing responsibilities, and so on. Finally, these participants demonstrated their integrity in how they dealt with their students and each other and were also aware of the principal's integrity and talked about his passion for kids and his follow through concerning school matters. Teacher participant number 3 stated, "Whatever I need, I can count on him to get it." Teacher participant number 2 noted, "He attends everything," and participant number four stated, "He always follows through with comments on a walkthrough form."

These four components of "relational trust": respect, competence, personal regard, and integrity contribute significantly to student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). These teachers collaborated and set on a mutual purpose of student success. They also had autonomy, felt supported for the most part, and worked hard. Environments of higher trust such as the one in this school develop Professional Learning Communities, an important factor in school capacity. The role relationships and expectations associated with these roles within the school formed the basis of relational trust.

Being connected to their students was an element of their success with these students. These teachers loved their students and loved to teach, which were motivating factors for both teachers and students alike. The literature reveals that teachers who are emotionally involved with their students find joy that spills over into the class (Hargreaves et al., 2001; Sergiovanni, 1992). The teachers *respected* where there students came from and supported their goals, as noted by teacher participant number

three, who stated: "I try to talk to them about goals and as a teacher it is import to make them realize what their goals are and how to attain them." This teacher had *integrity* and *respected* his student's plans and supported him by showing him (student) how to attain his goals.

These teachers depended on each other to meet their goal of improved performance for all students. There was a high degree of *relational trust* among these participants and in the school in general as reflected in the success they attained with their diverse population. The participants in this study maintained the critical components of relational trust, what Bryk and Schneider (2002) call "the behavior and intentions of others and the *respect* with which they there are carried out" (p. 42).

Effective teachers. The second sub-theme to emerge from social sensemaking theory is "Effective Teachers." Effective teachers, such as the participants in this study, know how to present content and to challenge and encourage their students. These effective teachers are willing to try new teaching practices and make the content meaningful for their students. These are the committed teachers who care about their kids.

An effective teacher is committed to a mutual purpose and in the case of these participants' students, their purpose was to ensure that all of their students were successful. Classroom practices are important to learning. What happens in the classroom is critical, and how a teacher teaches is important (Wenglinsky, 2000). These teacher participants met this definition of an "effective" teacher and were dedicated to the mutual purpose of student success. They cared about their students in and out of the

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classroom (*high personal regard*) as has been noted by the teachers' personal calls home, attending their students events, and as one student stated, teacher number 1 "keeping it real" for his students. The teachers believed in their students' *competence*. Teacher participant number 4 stated: "There is no difference between one student or another student's ability to pass the TAKS, not based on ethnicity. We have to be willing to meet a varying set of needs." This teacher recognized that his students who struggled with TAKS had different academic needs. He believed that they were *competent*, but they just needed to be taught in a different way. The participants *respected* their students' different manners of learning. When asked about teaching strategies in his class, teacher number three talked about how he used "multiple methods, differentiated instruction, developed and expanded his course curriculum in the context of his diverse classroom." They had *integrity* and spent time collaborating with each other and constantly asked, "Why is there an achievement gap?"   The purpose of these teachers was the need to focus on meeting individual students needs in positive ways.

Student needs directed the classroom activities and guided the effective teachers' planning as they were highly *committed* to meeting student needs and to making whatever changes needed to be implemented to ensure student success. They worked in teacher teams with their peers and promoted teaching strategies that promoted students' feeling of success. Furthermore, they met the definition of an effective teacher as defined by Bain (2004) in a study that surmised a variety of instructional planning activities, teaching strategies, and materials were found to be common in the repertoires of effective teachers:

1) They had high expectations for student learning.

2) They provided clear and focused instruction.

3) They closely monitored student learning progress.

4) They re-taught using alternative strategies when children didn't learn.

5) They used incentives and rewards to promote learning.

6) They were highly efficient in their classroom routines.

7) They set and enforced high standards for classroom behavior.

8) They maintained excellent personal interactions with their students.

It became clear in the course of this research that the participants made sense of their perceptions about their students of color and how the various influences impacted their classroom instruction. Their sensemaking included all the complexities discussed above. The participants in this study had been formed by their experiences of working with their colleagues and the positive culture of the school. They trusted their judgment, and the *relational trust* they experienced allowed them to work as a team to ensure student success. They believed their colleagues had *integrity* and were *competent*. They *respected* each other and held each other in high *personal regard.* United, they were *effective* and *committed* to their students' success. There was a strong social system to support individuals. The intra-organizational trust exhibited among these teacher participants proved to be important in terms of teamwork, leadership and the direction of their objective-student success. The mutual trust provided a basis to increase the possibilities of experiences and take action such as tweaking teaching practices, as noted throughout the study. The social sensemaking exhibited by these teachers, (i.e.,

interactions, familiarity, and social behavior) was a critical factor in their students' success. Obtaining this high level of performance on the part of the teachers was possible because the teachers felt valued and that their work was important. In sum, they were totally committed to their students' academic success.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of four teacher participants' perceptions about their students of color and how those perceptions impacted instruction in the classroom. The stories these teachers relayed came from their experiences and beliefs. Four sensemaking themes emerged through analyzing the teachers' relationships with their students: a) student disruption of expected flow of classroom routines, b) retrospective sensemaking, c) labeling, and d) social sensemaking. The participants' behaviors seem to suggest that they "made sense" of their relationships with their students and were committed to ensuring their students were successful. Major sub-themes emerged from the sensemaking theory, i.e. "flow in teacher teams," "student flow," "teacher commitment," "diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners," "dealing with student stereotypes," "teacher perceptions about their students," "relational trust," and "effective teachers."

The data analysis of the participants' responses provided insight into the participants' experiences and the impact on student success in the classroom. For the most part, these teacher participants did not treat their students of color differently from their White students. The participants were culturally sensitive and always looking at ways to reach all of their students. Indeed, they understood that the students in class

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were racially aware, as teacher participant number two elucidates: "The kids really notice the racism in videos in class and will comment if it's an 'all White' film. They want videos to show things the way they really are."

These teachers were successful with their students in large part because they responded to the demands of their classrooms. They were in tune with the individual needs of their students and pursued effectiveness in their individual teaching practices. These teachers worked hard to establish *relational trust* with their students, worked in teacher teams, and included students in activities and made the learning experience fun. These strategies promoted well-being and motivated students while at the same time student learning directed the activities in the classroom. These *effective* teachers were highly *committed* to their students, and their *commitment* defined the teachers' preparation and planning. These teachers were highly collaborative and were sensitive to student needs. They embraced the students' culture and modeled *respect* for each other and the students in and out of the classroom. The teachers worked hard to promote relationships with their students and employed strategies to promote student well-being, in addition to forming bonds with the students' parents. *Relational trust* served as a filter between the teachers' sensemaking in the classroom and all the organizational influences. There was effective interaction between the teachers and students and their "perceptions about students of color" served as a framework as to how teachers reached their struggling students.

The cues these teachers received from others in the course of their profession are related to the value ascribed by the other teachers in their school and are the process

through which these teachers made meaning of their role and themselves as teachers. The teachers formed a bond that served to motivate students and teachers alike. The teachers' positive perceptions regarding their students of color and their belief that that they were all capable of being successful shaped the teachers' sensemaking process and required them to continually mediate the impact their perceptions had on students and instruction in the classroom. The teachers validated the sensemaking theory in the complex environment of their classrooms in pursuit of student success.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to explore White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color, which would allow them to look within themselves to see how their attitudes impacted their relationship with their students, with the hope of improving instruction and student performance.

This study took place at a small diverse high school in southwest Texas with four White secondary teachers, two male and two female participants. Throughout this process, the teacher organizational theory "sensemaking" emerged from the relationships among the categories evident in the data. These sensemaking themes included flow of classroom practices, retrospective sensemaking, labeling, and social sensemaking.

Teacher sensemaking helps us to better understand how teachers pick up cues from students and other phenomena that influence their teaching practices in the classroom. This theory emphasized the interpretive, social, and ongoing nature of constructing understanding that occurs in class every day rather than something that occurs at formally designated times and in predetermined ways.

As indicated in this research, teachers have the potential to engage in sensemaking any time they encounter a message about teaching they have difficulty understanding. This difficulty may occur when a student struggles academically or cannot grasp a lesson. As teachers struggle to make sense of these puzzling messages

and events, they depend on their identity, beliefs, current practices, and knowledge. Applying a sensemaking lens to the study of how teachers perceive their students' issues allows us to broaden our notion of what teachers teach and how they adjust their teaching practices so that all students are successful.

During the course of this research, the researcher found that sensemaking is rooted in practical knowledge and is retrospective. Additionally, these teachers were able to make sense of cues rooted in practical knowledge, which permitted them to construct plausible understanding of those cues and incrementally change their teaching practices. Furthermore, this research revealed that teacher commitment and sharing of individual student's issues and needs, curricular ideas, etc. are cues that sensemaking extracts from the ongoing flow of experience (Weick, 1995) and helps teachers to participate in the sensemaking process to focus their attention on individual student needs.

The researcher found that sensemaking is only one mechanism through which teachers learn to question their perceptions and learn to change their lessons as necessary. They also learned by interpretation and through messages about instruction and by sharing lessons among themselves. The teacher participants in this study participated in ongoing collaboration through PLCs, where they all discussed the issue of the achievement gap of their minority students. The PLCs, included teachers visiting each other's classrooms; common, well-defined high expectations for students, free-flowing conversation among the teachers, and the constant critiquing of instruction. These weekly brainstorming sessions were aimed at teasing apart the issues with

individual students and tweaking practices to close the gaps. This process took place

through sensemaking, interpreting, and resolving issues whereby teacher participants

used dialogue to create knowledge and is a departure from prior work. Rather than

relying on the enhancement of individuals' tacit knowledge and articulation of

participants' shared understandings (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), knowledge creation at

this high school led to 'practice,' whereby teachers collaborated regarding teacher

practices in order to meet individual student needs. While the teacher participants in this

study combined their knowledge, they also made sense and interpreted existing

knowledge, which allowed the subject matter to shape how they changed their practices

for student success. The findings revealed sensemaking themes that included flow of

classroom practices, labeling, retrospective sensemaking, and social sensemaking.

Summary

It is important to remember that the relationships and narratives explained in this

study are based on the participation of four high school teachers, their perceptions, and

the relationships among the concepts that emerged. As noted in this study, individuals

retroactively assigned meaning to their decisions and actions, and the narratives

discussed in this study illustrate the attributions these four teachers have assigned to their

varied experiences.

In the beginning of a research study, the central question is very broad. As the

research progresses, the central question may narrow in scope to focus on emerging

factors as the crucial concepts develop through the data. This narrowing helps the

researcher focus questions in ways that enrich the emerging themes (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Through the course of interviews, the participants made evident that they had all considered the experiences they discussed both on a personal and professional level. The phenomena influenced the classrooms at different levels and affected the teachers' ability to create effective classrooms where they could have a positive impact on all students. The classroom was the central focus for teacher sensemaking and was where the sensemaking themes emerged.

Altogether, relational trust served as a filter between the individual teacher's sensemaking in the classroom and the various organizational phenomena. The interrelationships among the teachers' perceptions and the influences in the classroom yielded insights in terms of how teachers chose to communicate their sensemaking in the interviews. The interviews were set up to obtain detailed stories of instances in individual teacher's experience. Hence, during the course of the interviews, the stories of each teacher's career experiences emerged. Anecdotes illustrated individual instances of success and frustrations encountered, and during the course of the interviews, each participant related instances with students or colleagues.

School culture is a given. The culture of this high school from the top down was one of caring. Everybody knew and liked each other, and the teachers wanted the students to succeed. This school was "culturally proficient" (Lindsey, Kikanza, & Terrell, 1999, p. 7), whereby the school "culture has a life force beyond the individuals in the school" (Lindsey et al., 1999, p. 25). This culturally proficient school enhanced the students' ability to learn and the teachers' ability to teach. This sense of belonging

resulted in students enjoying school and participating in their learning (Waxman &

Huang, 1996).

School leadership, i.e. the principal, is the force that drives a school's

improvement and is instrumental in student academic achievement. The principal drives

the discourse within the school community and is responsible for school culture. The

principal is the instructional leader of the school and is responsible for supporting a

quality staff so that the teachers can give the students their best in the classroom.

Principals hold the power within a school community, and the teachers and

parents are vulnerable to the decisions the principal makes. Bryk and Schneider (2002)

suggested principals play "a key role in developing and sustaining relational trust.

Principals establish both respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the

vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns, and eschew arbitrary actions"

(p. 137). Within this study, the teachers communicated their expectations and concerns

through their personal narratives. Understanding these participants' stories will provide

insight to the principal as to how he could effectively work with his teachers to enhance

the school's culture of learning.

Human factors were very important to these teachers. An environment of trust

and social interaction supported many facets of the teachers' practice. Strong

relationships were evident, while cultural influences included having a clear mutual

purpose. Human factors that sometimes hindered the teachers' were the principal's

focus on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores. However,

relational trust depended more on the relationships among the teachers and the teachers

and students. Positive interactions among teachers and administration occurred when teachers had access to materials and input in practices and policies. These materials and input helped the teachers bring coherence and continuity for individual students needing different instructional approaches in order to achieve competence. Additionally, these teachers were highly committed to the students in their classrooms, and the teachers regarded a supportive classroom environment as a right of students and a responsibility of teachers. Consequently, their individual sensemaking filtered the ways in which external phenomena entered their classroom.

For most of the teachers, the students were their first consideration. Motivating students and fostering learning were paramount. These teachers preferred problem solving through teacher teams, and the collaborative process affirmed the teachers' perceptions about what was important and what elements of the problems were integral. Social interaction between students and teacher and students in the school community was evident. Personal regard among students and teachers was essential for this level of relational trust. Competence, another critical factor in relational trust, was also strong at this school. The teachers held students to high standards of competence and expected their peers to do the same. The teachers believed in the competence of their peers and shared instructional practices. The collaborative environment seemed to enhance the competence of the teachers.

Deficit thinking, a theory that postulates that students fail in school due to deficiencies out of their control such as a lack of motivation and lower intelligence, allows teachers to categorize students. The participants in this study did not adhere to

the deficit thinking theory which, as noted by Carter and Goodwin (1994), maintain that a teacher's background influences the deficit thinking theory whereby White, middle-class students' culture is compared to a diverse student's culture in terms of language and culture. There is a need for teachers to make sense of their students' world: the society, school, and family where they come from.

Delpit (1995) asserts that deficit thinking is apparent in the classroom where interactions between students and teachers are fraught with assumptions regarding the abilities of students of color and the abilities of low income students, where the power disparity "nurtures and maintains stereotypes" (p. xxi). While Alim and Baugh (2007) maintain that students from diverse populations encounter issues when their cultures are viewed as deficient.

As evidenced in this research, the teachers are not the problem. Individual prejudices need to continue to be addressed in the larger context of societal prejudice as a whole, while a student's cultural background, as well as different learning styles, must be connected in order for a student to be successful. When teachers attempt to 'correct' a student's linguistic and cultural differences, they send the message to the student that something is 'wrong' with them and stymies their academic growth with lowered expectations (Garza & Garza, 2010). Recognizing the negative impact of deficit thinking, such as the teachers in this study did, is the first step toward eliminating the practices of deficit thinking which negatively impact student learning.

There was a sense of family among the staff members. All the participants agreed that the teachers were responsible for the school's success. The teachers were

able to see the students as individuals and recognized that when a student failed that it had more to do with flaws in an overloaded system rather than individual sub-populations. Although everyone tends to view situations and students through the lens based on their own experiences, teachers at this high school were able to overcome any negative effects of this 'lens.'

This study revealed that these teachers had high expectations for their students of color and cared for them deeply. The teachers' motivation for working hard was the success of their students. A further insight from this study was that the teachers were remarkably aware of their individual perceptions about their students of color and the factors that contribute to the students' success or failure in the classroom. Their time and energy was spent on their responsibilities to their students, and their mindset was similar to a study described by Barth (2001) and Hargreaves (2001), who argued that teachers who are most successful are those who care about their students and dedicate time and effort to help them succeed.

The findings revealed that for this high school studied, while there were certainly some issues in terms of preconceptions about their students, in the end, teachers understood that students are human and want to learn. Teacher participant number 1 observed:

> While there may be a fundamental difference, two students from two different demographic backgrounds that were standard births possess the same sense organs, the same neurological functions, the same limbs, the same motor skills. They walk, they talk, they eat, they dream, they sleep, they fight. The difference

becomes only 'surface' difference for lack of a better word.

The teacher participants used teacher sensemaking to make sense of the complex personal and organizational influences affecting their perceptions about their students of color. This sensemaking process allowed them to absorb all the messages and individual concerns so that they would treat all students the same while meeting their individual needs.

This study made clear that teacher practices and perceptions were central to teacher sensemaking. The teachers used constant classroom leadership to mediate and to determine how their perceptions influenced classroom instruction while social interactions and the subsequent trust among participants facilitated the integration by the teacher of other influences in the classroom. The teachers did not make instructional and assessment decisions for their students of color based on their perceptions about those students. Teacher participant number 1 remarked:

> As the year goes by, it's about meeting in the middle, so I think on a high school level as that goal grows throughout the year, as the gulf continues to widen, the longer we go without addressing that, the farther that gulf tends to widen so you get to high school and there it becomes very simple to say, 'Yes, there is a fundamental difference between students, but there really isn't and they (students) should all be addressed the same way.

The teachers in this study were committed to all their students' academic and emotional success, which included disciplinary issues in the classroom. They believed their students' experiences should reflect coherence, stability, joy, and creativity in their

students' learning experiences. They helped students learn the fundamentals, including how to behave in certain situations, and allowed them autonomy in the classroom. Both teachers and students felt fulfilled, and students experienced success. These teachers made decisions based on how they would benefit students. White and Epston (1989) stated that our sensemaking activities guide our perceptions and actions based on the story of our lives. These teachers made sense of their backgrounds and perceptions about these students of color based on retrospective patterns of their past decisions, actions, and experiences. Their instruction and assessment decisions reflected their current and past experiences, and they were constantly looking at themselves and their teaching practices in order to become more effective for all their students in the classroom.

Additionally, these teachers had a high level of integrity and met their obligations to others in the school. They had stated expectations for their actions and a clear mutual purpose of success for their students while holding their peers to a high level of integrity. Their integrity was also exhibited in the respect the teachers had for one another. Their high regard and belief in their colleagues' competence was especially apparent when they collaborated with one another.

The teacher participants in this study were all White, middle-class, and from small towns that had few minorities in the schools they attended. However, the teachers were aware of their students' cultural standing, they were mindful of cultural differences, and their main focus was to make all of their students successful. The sensemaking phenomena of flow of classroom practices, retrospective sensemaking,

labeling, and social sensemaking were all elements that interacted with and influenced the teachers' sensemaking processes. The teachers' life lens was constantly reshaped by the teachers' conscious efforts to mediate the impact of these influences on the instructional practices for their students in the classroom. The teachers continuously made sense of their complex cues and messages in their classroom environment in pursuit of success for all of their students.

The teachers in this study were totally committed to their students and to each other. Their collaboration succeeded because they felt valued and in turn they valued their students. They believed adjusting their teaching practices to meet the individual needs of their students was their responsibility. Their high degree of relational trust supported the teachers in changing their teaching practices. In order for teachers to be successful, they need support, resources, and commitment on the part of the school.

Implications

As the instructional leader of a high school with a diverse student population, the principal can greatly influence the impact teachers have on the students of color in their classrooms. Indeed, Benard (1991) discussed the impact administrators have in creating a school environment that supports teachers' resilience as well. Further, Talbert and McLaughlin, (1993), note that administrators can have a huge impact in fostering the environment necessary for students to thrive by defining clear expectations and by believing in their teachers and allowing them to work together to come up with strategies so that all students can succeed.

The results of this dissertation have several implications for how we think about teachers' perceptions about their students of color and the instructional and assessment decisions they make related to those perceptions. These findings suggest that teachers have the best interests of their students at heart and are likely to change their teaching practices to accommodate student differences when they have support and some measure of control. In order to increase the likelihood that teachers will change their practices, they need to be included in conversations regarding policy and decisions that affect them as teachers. Administrators need to be cognizant of teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices as a starting point. Teachers' unique circumstances in each of their individual classrooms need to be considered.

The school principal needs to create a school culture that rejects deficit thinking so that all marginalized students achieve academic success. In order for this to happen, the school leader must work with the teachers to achieve social justice for all students (Shields et al., 2004). It is about collaborating with teachers, as the participants in this study did, to constantly adjust the curriculum and assessments as needed for different student populations.

The principal is responsible for student success and has to engage the teachers in dialogue and connect student learning with social justice in order to eliminate deficit practices.

Also, understanding how to create the flow necessary for teachers to reflect and respond to student needs is also essential. What is the plan? For teachers to be successful, they need support and resources and commitment on the part of the

organization. Additionally, the teachers need feedback so that what the administration sees during an observation is reflective of what the teacher perceives is going on: They need to match.

Teacher practices and perceptions impact student success in the classroom. The findings from this study can contribute to meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds as well as influencing the policies and practices in college teacher programs. These college teacher programs can help teachers recognize the perceptions they have about their students of color and how those perceptions affect teaching and learning in the classroom.

Findings Related to Research

The findings in this study of low achieving students of color supported previous research that reported students who were encouraged by their teachers had a sense of belonging and improved their attitudes in terms of wanting to remain in school. Furthermore, these students had teachers who really cared about them and helped them through hard times (Scribner & Scribner, 2003). Those who stayed in school, they stated they remained because of a teacher who took an interest in them (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). This study revealed that the participants believed all children can learn and had high expectations for all of their students, regardless of race.

Always looking to improve student achievement, school administrators look to teachers to change their classroom teaching practices, asking them to use new pedagogical approaches or curricula requiring teachers to unlearn past practices. In order for instructional reform to be successful, it is important to understand how

teachers' learn. As noted in this research, organizational sensemaking is a process that allows for understanding the interpretive and ongoing social construction of understanding and allows teacher to learn and change. Teacher sensemaking, as outlined in Chapter II, is a mechanism for teacher learning.

This study added to the relevant literature on sensemaking whereby the researcher summarized the results of the study and discussed the results in relationship to the relevant literature in Chapter II, providing a context for the study. Sensemaking, a term introduced by Karl Weick (1995), refers to how we structure the unknown so as to be able to act on it. Sensemaking involves coming up with a plausible understanding of a changing world, then testing this understanding through data collection, action, and conversations (i.e. the participant interviews) and then refining it. Sensemaking is the process by which people give meaning to an experience. Sensemaking is a motivated, continuous effort to understand connections among people, places and events in order to anticipate their trajectory and act effectively. The literature review in Chapter II outlines the steps to effective sensemaking, enabling teachers, such as those in this study, to explore the wider system, create a map of that system and act in the system to learn from it.

This study adds to the literature as it relates to ways to improve student achievement in that in an educational setting, leaders need to engage in sensemaking to understand why their students are not successful. Additionally, in this era of school accountability, teachers can use the sensemaking process by refining curricular practices by using different approaches as a means to raise standardized test scores. In order for

teachers to change practices, we must understand how teachers construct understanding, as in how the participants in this study construct understanding of their world (Weick, 1995). Applying sensemaking to this study of teacher perceptions about their students of color broadens our idea of how instruction is impacted in the classroom. Specifically, the research notes how teachers use sensemaking with regard to race and racism (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Haviland, 2008; Housee, 2008; Leonardo, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Mazzei, 2008; Milner, 2006; Picower, 2009; Riviere, 2008; Sleeter, 1993).

In this study, the sensemaking framework is used to analyze and interpret the ideological sensemaking and transformation of teachers in a diverse public high school in which the participants examined their perceptions about their students of color. This sensemaking framework contributed to the literature by allowing the researcher to examine how White secondary teachers' perceptions about their students of color affect instruction and to better understand the teachers' sensemaking process and how these teachers' perceptions impact instruction.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this research highlight the importance of using teachers' knowledge, practices, and beliefs as a starting point for future research. Furthermore, the research from this dissertation revealed how teachers' perceptions about their students of color are different for everyone and the research explained why those differences (perceptions) exist for different teachers. What accounts for the different perceptions evident in respective teachers? It would be interesting to look at elementary

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school teachers' versus high school teachers' perceptions or urban schools versus rural school teachers' perceptions.

During the course of this study, the researcher was continuously surprised by how little impact race seemed to play in the high school studied. The teachers were White and had grown up in Texas but for the most past, their "White lens" did not seem to negatively impact their relationships with their students of color. The teachers were all highly committed to student learning and found ways to make all of their students learn. It would be interesting to have someone study the same diverse populations in a large high school. Invariably, the small class sizes and involved community in this study had a large impact on the "we're all in this together" mantra of the staff. They liked each other and the students so that the isolation that often occurs in larger schools was not evident here.

Encouraging dialogue among elementary educators on how teachers' incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom would be beneficial since it is never too early for teachers to self-reflect on how best to ensure all of their students are successful. Also, numerous studies highlight the achievement gap between White and non-White students as well as the challenges this gap presents for teachers in the classroom. However, there are not many studies researching the achievement gap at the elementary level, where the teachers' perceptions regarding their students of color are first formed.

Finally, further study is needed to broaden our understanding of pedagogical practices that are effective in teaching in diverse classrooms. Another study might involve the relationship between professional development programs and

transformational classrooms. Programs that train teachers how to teach diverse student populations are lacking. There is a need to assess the impact of teacher development programs on faculty's pedagogical practices, and curricula to meet the needs of diverse student populations and faculty.

Conclusion

Teachers' perceptions about their students of color are enmeshed in their own background, ethnicity, and race. This study is important as teachers' attitudes regarding their students' abilities affect the learning and teaching process.

The researcher embarked on this study to examine the impact of teachers' perceptions about their students of color in instruction and assessment decisions and discovered teacher sensemaking is a key component to this study. The researcher was impressed by the strong culture of caring and the commitment and "team" mindset among teachers. As the leader of a school, the researcher was constantly asking, How do my teachers' perceptions about their students of color impact instructional decisions in the classrooms? Are they *effective* teachers? Do they provide "Diverse Strategies for Diverse Learners?" Are they totally *committed* to all students? Do they collaborate and reflect? Is there *relational trust* among the staff?   For the most part, the response is "yes" but as the school leader, it is important to remain vigilant to make sure that we are always looking at what we need to do to reach all students.

This study reinforced the notion that judgment is critical for teachers to successfully make sense of the complexities of their profession (see Figure 1 below). They must act and make judgments based on numerous sources of information and

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messages. The school environment is continually changing, and teachers remain flexible and focused to ensure success for all students. Teaching in diverse classrooms demands significant personal investment, skill, and the willingness to question assumptions, beliefs, and paradigms. The researcher began this study in order to understand how distant teachers are from recognizing the extent of their deficit practices and how these deficit perceptions of their students of color impacts instruction and student success. Not surprisingly, the research revealed that some of those deficits exist but in the high school studied, however, the teachers' dedication to their students overrode most of the deficiencies. These teachers are aware of some of their deficiencies and have developed thoughtful, complex ways of addressing different learning styles and abilities in the classroom. They address the wide range of abilities and deficiencies, cultural differences and language barriers. They embrace the challenge of diversity and know that positive change comes about one teacher and one student at a time.

> Although for over a century our nation has advanced the ideal that a high-quality and excellent public education is the birthright of all children, our schools cannot fulfill this ambitious and noble purpose unless all of us-parents, policymakers, and the general public-commit ourselves to sustaining education as a public trust and a promise to future generations. (Nieto, 2005, p. 6)

Student Success

- Flow of Classroom Principles
- Retrospective Sensemaking
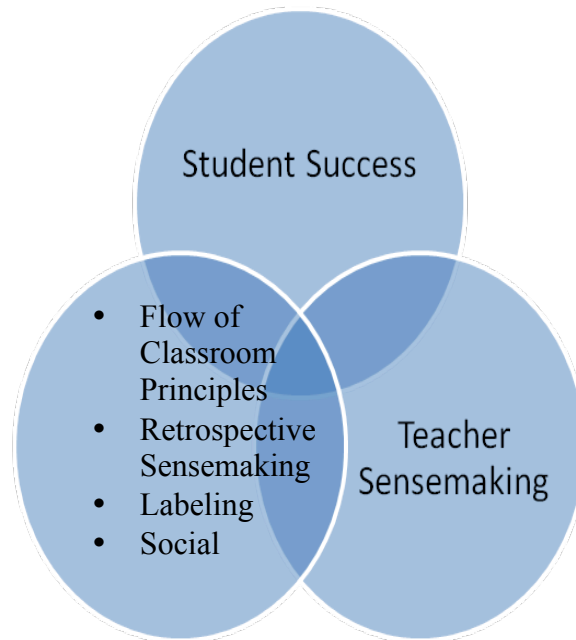- Labeling
- Social

Teacher Sensemaking

Figure 1. A "successful" I.S.D. Such a school district has a codependent relationship between the various aspects of teacher sensemaking that results in student success.

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APPENDIX A

REFLECTIONS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my own race most of the time.

- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which. I can afford and in which I would want to live.

- I can go shopping most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

- If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on White privilege.

- Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not work against me.

- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

- I can be pretty sure if I want to talk to the "person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.

- I can easily buy poster, postcards, picture books, dolls, toys, etc. featuring people of my race.

- I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body will be taken as a reflection on my race.

- I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

- I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.

- I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match.

- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

- I can be sure if I need medical or legal help, my race won't work against me.

- I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.