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THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM: A NARRATIVE STUDY ON INSTRUCTORS'  
NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIOR & SCHOOLING OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN YOUTH OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

by

DIA J. BENNETT

Under the direction of Makungu Akinyela, PhD

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the instructor perspective of their pedagogical approach to the needs of African American students of low socioeconomic status (SES) in urban school settings. Utilizing surveys and a questionnaire will prompt the dialogue for this narrative study. Thus, utilizing the narrative of the instructors will make their personal history and opinions an indicator for their choice of approach or if they recognize a need for specialized instruction for African American youth of low SES. This study will use a sample of 6 experienced and less experienced instructors teaching in urban low- income schools.

INDEX WORDS: AFRICAN AMERICAN, URBAN, EDUCATION, SCHOOL,  
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, CLASS, TEACHERS

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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May 2017



## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother. I cannot begin to describe how much I appreciate you. To my father for his continual support through everything I have ever needed and wanted. Also, but at no lesser value, I must thank my grandmother for not just liking me, but loving me always, in all ways. Lastly, but never least, to my Nana for consistently telling me that I can do anything I want to as long as I put my mind to it. To my ancestors, none of this would be possible without your power.

*We are our ancestors' wildest dreams....*

## Acknowledgements

Mama, I love you. Mama, I thank you. You were the first person to ever introduce me to the beauty of our people, the richness of our history and the strength in our glory. Mama, I thank you. You never let me see the struggle and heartache behind your eyes. There was never a time when you did not have my best interest at heart and I have yet to find the words to explain how great that feels. Your continuous support does not go unnoticed. Your selflessness is an aspect of you I can only hope to mirror in my future. You are my peace of mind and my motivating force. You are an image of beauty inside and out and one thing I can promise you is that this is only the beginning. No matter far or near, mama, you are my light.

Howard University, I must thank you—my foundation to higher learning and my second home. Howard, you did not just teach me, you molded me into something greater. Howard University, you did not just challenge me, but you fill yourself with peers that amaze me daily. Howard University is the gathering grounds for many a shining star. Howard University did not groom me, but it allowed me the space to groom myself into who I wanted to be and provided me with the tools to continue to groom, grow and learn. Once a Bison, always a Bison. To my alma mater, I am appreciative.

Georgia State University's African American Studies Department. Not sure where to start. Here is where I met some of the brightest and most caring instructors that I have ever encountered. Always honest, forever true and doing all that they can to ensure your success. I have learned so much in just one year and fostered relationships with people I can only hope will stay in my life. Without many of you, this would not be possible. Particularly, Dr. Makungu Akinyela. I will not get emotional because he knows we do not do that, but know that I love you granddad. And Dr. Sarita Davis, know that I have never met a woman so thorough and down-to-earth in my life. That's a bad (re: good) combination and you wear it so well, beautiful. Thank you both, dearly and sincerely.

## PROLOGUE

### HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Education has always been of utmost importance to me. Not sure if it shares the same level of importance as my passion for the Black community, but it is a close second. So the intersection between the two is where I often lie. I view knowledge and education as foundational tools of livelihood, maybe even success. We all know that success is subjective, however, we can all also agree that success is measured by overall quality of life. I see the educational system in America as stifling to African American youth of low socioeconomic status as it so much mirrors the same disenfranchisement that plagues African American people in totality. I think we would be remiss if we did not include poor quality of education in the extensive list of catalysts to the overall advancement of the African American community. Then, when we begin to consider that a large majority of teachers in urban schools may be teaching their student whose experience and view life, often times, very differently. Now, as one can see, that was a blanket statement that does not have much research. So, with this research, I aim to obtain the instructors' raw perspective of their experiences in urban schools that have significantly proven to foster a certain type of educational determinants that differ from the standard. Ultimately, I want to pose the question to educators: Is there alternative schooling that is involved in teaching and shaping the minds of African American youth of low socioeconomic status, particularly in urban schools? Because with microcosms such as the achievement gap being a household term, there must be a missing link that is needed to close this gap. My hopes is that gathering several narratives from these educators will be of some assistance.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>While there is an increasing number of African Americans earning undergraduate degrees, low socioeconomic status (SES) remains a persistent problem within the population. Research has found that African American children are three times more likely to live in poverty than Caucasian children.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, despite dramatic changes, large gaps remain when minority education attainment is compared to that of Caucasian Americans.<sup>2</sup> SES and educational attainment are not mutually exclusive. So, with African Americans being three times as likely to live in poverty that correlates to being three times more likely to be academically [and occupationally] unsuccessful. This research solely focuses on impoverished African American youth that are negatively affected by their socioeconomic status and the manner in which their instructors choose to or do not choose to use their instruction to aide these students considering the series of challenges they face.

<sup>2</sup>Recent and dated research suggests that the socioeconomic status (SES) of African American creates a reports a common relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment for African American youth. Low SES is an encompassing factor that effects the advancement and actions of the students as well as their instructors. Additionally, these educators are often times not privy to methods of teaching African American students who are burdened with the hardships associated with low SES. The literature often does not include solutions to the issues discovered subsequently allowing the reader the space to assume the placement of the blame. So, this research has noted the lack of cognizance in instructors as it relates to the manner in which one educates a child facing financial hardships amongst a host of other issues associated with

the like, whilst highlighting the necessity for the instructor to provide additional assistance [if needed] for African American students of low SES.

<sup>3</sup>While there are a myriad of factors that can affect a student's ability to achieve academically, researchers have focused predominantly on factors that plague the African American community and are in direct association with education. This study has contributed to that by dispelling the idea of 'innate' inadequacy that surrounds African American youth by highlighting the inadequacy and identifying the causes and effects from a teacher-to-student perspective and subsequently, discussing methods of change and enhancement.

## BACKGROUND

Research has shown that there is a large disparity in the socioeconomic status between African American families and other races—African American families lying closer to the bottom of that ratio.<sup>3</sup> With that said, studies have been done to examine if their socioeconomic status plays a role in academic performance and educational attainment. Throughout the research there seemed to be a heavy blame placed solely on the parent(s) and child(ren) and very little placed on the competence of instructors' ability to educate students who are not in an ideal learning environment. Fang Wu of Howard University states in their research, "Among the parenting variables, parental expectation of the child's highest education attainment, home-based parental involvement, parental beliefs in the child's academic competency and general development, as well as certain types of child discipline styles showed significant concurrent and/or longitudinal effects on children's academic achievement" (Wu, Qi

<sup>3</sup> Costello, Keeler, & Angold, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007

2006)<sup>4</sup>. It was noted that these measures could take a toll on the students' ability to perform as well as their counterparts in an academic arena. These factors are not usually considered by instructors and administrators when dealing with their African American students and should be taken into consideration to improve the way in which these students learn and the quality of their education.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research pertaining to cultural awareness in classrooms is sparse. However, that research is not nearly as lacking as the research on instructors' feelings towards that subject. Additionally, there is minimal research on the personal experiences of instructors in their time as students as well as their time spent as educators. This proposed research aims to explore instructors feelings towards the need for cultural sensitivity and exploration in their classrooms majorly populated by African American students and insight into their personal experiences that have shaped their beliefs and opinions. This study utilizes narratives of instructors for better future practices in academia with a strong focus on the underrepresented and disenfranchised African American youth population. The general population of study will consist of experienced and less experienced instructors of varying demographics in Atlanta, Georgia to maintain an unbiased group and reliable research.

<sup>4</sup> Wu, F., & Qi, S. (2006). Longitudinal Effects of Parenting on Children's Academic Achievement in African American Families. *Journal Of Negro Education*, 75(3), 415-429.

## PURPOSE

This research will be conducted using qualitative methods to readily identify belief systems and subsequently gain an understanding of the instructors' personal backgrounds. These mixed methods will be used in two phases. The process will begin with the interviewer completing and returning the Demographic survey (Appendix D) and the "Who Owns What?" survey (Appendix A). The first, aforementioned phase consists of a survey that will lead to address the demographics of the interviewer and the second, a survey to address the belief systems toward student achievement (Appendix A). The second phase will be a series of questions (Appendix B) comprised to delve into the narrative formation of the study. The questions will be open-ended. This research strives to reach instructors who teach in heavily comprised of urban communities. Facilitating research of these communities hones in on the areas that are immensely populated by African Americans of low socioeconomic status. When conducting research, more experienced and less experienced instructors will comprise the sample population. This research hopes to gather information to aide in the shift in academia necessary to close the 'achievement gap' separating African American students from their white peers.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

The idea of the 'achievement gap' is one that steadily penetrates American educational research and discourse. "Most research on African American education focuses on the "achievement gap," which erringly compares Black and White students' test scores, without accounting for school inequalities and structural barriers to achievement."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this study aims to relinquish the misnomer of incompetence in African American students and gather information from their instructors on the need for cultural inclusion and the additional factors that garner African American student

achievement. Urban communities are impoverished communities and within those communities are impoverished schools. “U.S. students who are not of European descent have little opportunity to learn from a curriculum that reflects their own cultural identity. It is important to expose students to this form of corrective history. History demonstrates that African American students have a lineage of excellence in education.”<sup>6</sup> Several authors and academics share these sentiments and use those ideals to promote the need for cultural relativity and sensitivity in classrooms. Additionally, an instructor's knowledge of African American history, culture and the current climate of race relations can be a catalyst to understand their students, assess their situations and use those assessments to best conduct their classrooms and connect with their students. Instructors understanding how the generational poverty that affects African Americans in urban communities shapes cultural nuances can mitigate those lines of disconnection between instructor and student.

Inasmuch, this shall add to the educational research previously conducted that seeks to close the achievement gap and administer alternatives to educating poor, African American students. From instructors and for instructors, this study will open listening ears for the voices that are often overlooked and under-valued which are the voices of African American students who are, quite frankly, suffering silently.

<sup>6</sup> Ani, M. (1994). *Yurugu: An Afrikan-centered critique of European cultural thought and behavior*. Washington, DC: Nkonimfo Publications.

Asante, M. K. (1990). *Kemet, afrocentricity, and knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Clarke, J. H. (1993). *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan holocaust: Slavery and the rise of European capitalism*. Buffalo, NY: Eworld Inc.

- Karenga, M. (2002). Introduction to black studies. Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Williams, C. (1987). The destruction of black civilization: Great issues of a race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D. Chicago, IL: Third World Press

## NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to address the concerns and ideals of those who reside in the urban classroom daily. Urban classrooms are underrepresented and when they are represented, it is in uncertain terms wrapped under the cloak of the “achievement gap.” This study utilizes a mixed method approach to provide statistical evidence and also firsthand experiences for the particular pieces of education that cannot always be described using numerical values. Understanding the instructors’ experiences will provide an uncensored view into their teaching methods for urban school students. This research also aims to answer questions about the varying needs of urban school students that do not match the needs of their peers in standard schooling and private schooling systems. The mixed method approach shall act as a means to begin by developing a rapport and trust with the interviewees. The researcher will be beginning with a questionnaire and subsequently transition into a dialogue centered on interview questions that inquire about the instructors’ personal education experiences and how that affects their teaching practices. Additionally, questions around their socioeconomic status will also add to gathering information about what fosters the manner in which they teach students of low socioeconomic status.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to investigate the need for instructors' to possess cultural awareness and instill cultural sensitivity in their urban classrooms populated by African American youth of low socioeconomic status.

1. What is the relationship between instructors' personal educational experiences and teaching methods?
2. What is the relationship between the instructors' race/class status and their pedagogical approach?
3. Do instructors believe urban classrooms require cultural awareness and sensitivity from their instructors in order to improve educational attainment for African American youth of low socioeconomic status?



## OPERATIONAL TERMS

African Americans- “Anyone who has origins in any of the Black race groups in Africa. For the purpose of this study, both terms are used interchangeably with reference to anyone in the United States whose origins include Black Africa.”<sup>7</sup>

Socioeconomic status- “Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power and control.”<sup>8</sup>

Urban school- schools located in rural and large, central city areas. These areas are often poverty stricken and subsequently, the schools in that area are often stricken by poverty just as such as the community members.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, B-7

<sup>8</sup> Report of the APA Task Force on Urban Psychology Toward an Urban Psychology: Research, Action, and Policy. 2016. Web

Educational attainment- “refers to the highest level of schooling that a person has reached. At the primary and secondary school level, educational attainment refers to the number of grades completed. At the postsecondary level, it refers to institutions attended and certificates, degrees or diplomas obtained.”<sup>9</sup>

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study will be conducted using Critical Race Theory. “Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In adopting this approach, CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice.”<sup>10</sup> African Americans, and quite specifically, African Americans of low socioeconomic status are heavily affected by race. Race heavily affects the sanction of communities heavily populated by a minority race. So this concept will be used as the tool to frame how the race of the students affects their lives and should be understood and addressed by their instructors. This approach will be used to highlight the need for instructors to facilitate their classroom structure and work with their African American students in manners that recognize the needs of said students.

“The tendency is to attribute the disparities that exist between inner-city and suburban school resources and between achievement among white and non-white youth to issues of class, while dismissing or minimizing the influence of racism” (Kumasi, 2011). This tendency is high and of large concern as we consider the current state of education in this country. CRT manifests in the following tenets:

- Recognizes that racism is endemic to American life
- Expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity,

- Presumes that race has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage
- Insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society
- Works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Matsuda, 1993)

Dixson, A. D. (2007). What is Critical Race Theory in Education? *The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University*.

Inasmuch, with these tenets, CRT projects that an institutional sanction, such as education, serves as a nesting ground for racial inequalities. One must focus upon the realism of racism to understand the role it plays in the education system. Since the 1970s, CRT has been thriving and constantly growing with factual historical data that mirrors the data of present time. As it relates to education, CRT poses itself as the belief that although racism is a social construct; its effects and racism are, in fact, real. CRT also considers whiteness as a property. Inasmuch to understand that education is a property right and not a human right. So, the quality of education lies in the hands of those with the most and rights to *property*. Those who consider underprivileged Black people to be products of self-victimization often negate this idea. The issue with the negation is that it is ahistorical—using pieces of the Constitution and false ideas of freedom written by past presidents who also doubled as owners of enslaved African peoples to justify their rhetoric. “For many educational scholars, the power of CRT lies in its ability to avoid using cultural deficit paradigms to explain the persistent achievement gap between white and nonwhite students and in its demand for “a deeper analysis of the historical and contemporary conditions that have created socioeconomic disparities” (Dixson and Rousseau 2006, 122). This lends to the prior discourse surrounding the achievement gap.

Intellectual sectors of CRT date back as far as the mid-1700s to the historic battles against white supremacy. During this period nonwhite people in places such as Africa, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean began to “shake the foundations of white Western world hegemony” through their anticolonial efforts (Thurman 1996). This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of examples but a mere piece of history to corroborate previous statements of historical inequalities in race that have persisted throughout history, particularly in the educational realm. CRT also highlights one of African Americans’ greatest contributors to education and the history of race and racial theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—W.E.B. Dubois. So, I will end this analytical discussion of conceptual framework with term coined by Dubois known as double consciousness. Double consciousness is “The push/pull social psychological syndrome that African Americans experience in trying to both accommodate and resist mainstream white society’s cultural and linguistic norms (Dubois, 1953). This is, by and large, the basis of knowledge of the African American experience that one must have to effectively understand the daily life of an African American and how this affects the overall livelihoods of African Americans on a daily basis. Dissecting the intersection of race and education here using double consciousness in addition to a basic knowledge of the African American history and experience can make for a better learning experience in educational institutions heavily motivated by racial inequalities.

## LIMITATIONS, DELIMITATIONS & SCOPE

There is very little research that speaks directly to the instructor's role in the lives of their African American students of low SES. Yet, there is much research that has been<sup>1</sup> done detailing the issues faced by those students. Therefore, knowing the information about the issues plaguing the African American students of low SES is an excellent start to the conversation that must continue, hereafter, with the instructors of those students. Some gaps did emerge within the research. Including instructors at the collegiate level could have possibly been beneficial but I realized it was not necessary to address the research questions. The inclusion of alternative schools into the study could have been useful to examine the extreme end of the spectrum usually explored but with little contrast. Additionally, a major enhancement to the research is the option to also include the students as a part of the study to gather a grander understanding of the student-to-teacher relationships. A dialogue with the student would provide a more detailed understanding of the trials faced by African American students of low SES. Not much research has been done as it directly relates to the roles of the instructors of African American students of low SES, so the gaps are present but have yet to be recognized; therefore, there is a large hope for the continuance of similar research in the future.

## SUMMARY

The introduction was a compilation of how, when, where and why this research will be conducted. There is detailed information of the topic of the research and its significance. The introduction consisted of a brief layout of the background, purpose, significance, and nature of this research. It also included the conceptual framework that this study will operationalize, definition of operational terms and the study's limitations and delimitations. Following this introduction, this thesis consist of four more chapters, the literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion. Chapter Two contains the literature review that introduces the past and present literature surrounding this problem

and how the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory, is operationalized. Chapter three discusses the methodology that is employed for data collection. Then, chapter four presents the findings and results of the data collected. Lastly, chapter five concludes outcomes, further research, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is a study of the cultural presence in urban classrooms and basis of teacher effectiveness in said classrooms. The research mainly aims to determine the need for cultural awareness in these classrooms that are heavily populated by African American youth of low socioeconomic status. Through the lived experiences of instructors as students as well as their experiences as instructors, the research will utilize those narratives to dispel misnomers that disenfranchise Black academic success. Instructors working with the race and class status of their African American students as opposed to working against it shall shift the phenomenon that cultural awareness in a classroom is important to the learning culture. Additionally, class status and personal experience can shape the manner in which we view others—this is extremely important when dealing with an instructor-to-student relationship. African American youth of low socioeconomic status face alternate and, often times, adverse hardships that must be taken into account when considering what is necessary for the students to learn and how they must be taught. Using this narrative approach, the research will be conducted in a safe space where interview questions are not daunting and used to attack the interviewee, but rather, used as a conversational tool.



## INTRODUCTION

Instructors need to have a better understanding of how poverty affects African American students. There must be a sense of awareness, too, of the home environment of African American students of low socioeconomic status. It is imperative to effective classroom teaching. Instruction is not the only piece to successful academics in youth. After one has learned in an academic space, that must then be compounded at home. Additionally, a stressful home life can severely impact academic successes and cause much burden to the mind. So, it is imperative that educators are aware of how poverty affects their students. It is reported, “Educators tend to judge the credibility and diminish the literacy experiences occurring in low-income, African American homes because the experiences do not fit mainstream literacy practices.”<sup>11</sup> Biculturalism in the classroom is also a piece that is discussed as it highlights the need for cultural awareness in a classroom and a large need for that awareness in urban classrooms with impoverished youth. The hardships typically faced by children of low socioeconomic status (SES) and those are most effected by that low SES are Black and Brown people. Recent and dated research suggests that the SES of AA creates a chain effect that negates the effect of SES on educational attainment as an anomaly. “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex and class is often rooted in the fear that the classrooms will be uncontrollable, that

<sup>11</sup> Compton-Lilly, C. (2008). Identity, childhood culture, and literacy learning: A case study. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 6(1), 57 – 76.

Compton-Lilly, C. (2000). “Staying on children:” Challenging stereotypes about urban parents. *ProQuest*, 77(5), 77 – 98.

Compton-Lilly, C, Rogers, R., & Lewis, T. Y. (2012). Analyzing epistemological considerations related to diversity: An integrative critical literature review of family literacy scholarship. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 47(1), p. 33 – 60.

Whitehouse, M., & Colvin, C. (2001). “Reading” families: Deficit discourse and family literacy. *Theory into Practice*, 40(3), 212 – 219.

emotions and passion will not be contained.”<sup>12</sup> Cultural understanding and diversity in a classroom does not serve the purpose of replacing other classroom standards. “Some folks think that everyone who supports cultural diversity wants to replace one dictatorship of knowing with another, changing one set way of thinking for another. This is perhaps the gravest misperception of cultural diversity.<sup>13</sup> Instructors in urban schools must create safe spaces for their students. Often times, the low-income African American students are affected by obstacles unseen or unnoticed by instructors. When gone unnoticed, it is not consider as something that is adding to or sole reasoning for hinder the academic development of the students.

Inasmuch, instructors must also value the history of the African Americans past and present, systemic racism and racial disenfranchisement and how these factors and not mutually exclusive and also play a large role in the livelihoods of their African American students whether the students are aware or not. “To create a culturally diverse academy we must commit ourselves fully. Learning from other movements for social change, from civil rights and feminist liberation efforts, we must accept the protracted nature of our struggle and be willing to remain both patient and vigilant. To commit ourselves to the work of transforming the academy so that it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of our learning, we must embrace struggle and sacrifice.”<sup>14</sup> The history of African Americans is often times marginalized as something trivial though, as we know, that history has shaped much of the present African American narrative and if

<sup>12</sup> hooks, bell. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

<sup>13</sup> hooks, bell. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

<sup>14</sup> hooks, bell. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

that is not understood by the principal as well as the instructors then there will be discrepancy in the educational space. Therein lies the need to problematize the role as well as the expected role of the urban school instructor.

In recent research, a new term known as “reality pedagogy” has been deemed in regards to fully evaluating and understanding the realities of the students that are being taught. Though the term is new, the practice is very similar to authors Antonia Darder of *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, bell hooks and Charles E. Payne—just to name a few. “Reality pedagogy” is from author of *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood ...and the Rest of Y’all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*, Christopher Edmin. Edmin’s best teaching methodology exists in the best interests of the students. He is adamant about a certain type of teaching that is required for the advancement of urban youth and it is manifested in the culture that is found within Black communities outside of school. One must teach for their classroom and their students and not by the standards of students that do not sit in front of them everyday. One would assume that this idea is of the utmost common sense—that it would be logical to be mindful of who your students are and where they come from and use that to shape the lesson plans. Opportunities of mishap should be catalysts for teachable moments. Edmin describes how students should not be the enemies of teachers and people meant to conquer. He does not directly use this term but he despises banking learning and how detrimental it is to the success of anyone particularly urban youth. The consumption of test passing paired with the narrative of the inattentive Black student leads to a repetition of disenfranchisements and write-offs of students whose potential proved invisible in the eyes of white folk who teach in the hood.

Neoindigeneity was another nuance term that was used to better describe the discrepancy in urban schooling with a high level of concern. Emdin describes it as “their relativity to their communities and its effect on the manner in which they receive and retain information in a classroom.”<sup>15</sup> Many authors give credence to certain impediments to urban school reform that have been identified by low expectations for students, ideologies and used to explain school failure, teacher isolation and suspicion of joint planning, administrator reluctance to being branded a ‘reformer,’ and some state and federal regulations. However, she indicates that the more significant the impediments are, the more are “the political isolation and poverty of schools cities.

### Socioeconomic Status

The achievement gap continues to be a national concern, as low-income and ethnic minority children perform at levels below those of children from higher income families and European American children.<sup>16</sup> As stated before, African Americans are three times more likely to live in poverty. Living in poverty affects the entire household mentally, physical and emotionally. A lack of monetary resources can translate to a lack of motivation and no hopes for future success. This narrative transpires in cyclical form as one can assess that most African American living in poverty have achieved low levels of education which results in the child’s inability to desire to achieve more, to be educated on the steps to achieve more, no parental motivation to achieve more and no outside motivation because those who live in low income neighborhoods are surrounded by those

<sup>15</sup> Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood-- and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Print.

<sup>16</sup> Dotterer, A. M., Iruka, I. U., & Pungello, E. (2012). Parenting, Race, and Socioeconomic Status: Links to School Readiness. *Family Relations*, 61(4), 657-670.

of the same demographic. The literature has exposed the verisimilitude of the depth in which African Americans are affected by living at or below the poverty line. The literature seemed to lack depth when highlighting additional issues faced by African Americans of low SES such as mental, physical and emotional health.

### Educational Attainment

This term is used for the purposes of statistics to refer to the highest degree of education an individual has completed. This was highlighted due to 2015 reports from the US Census Bureau that state “Asians and non-Hispanic Whites were more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with Blacks and Hispanics.”<sup>17</sup> With statistics such as these, especially considering the amount of technology and educational progression today, one begins to question why that is so. This research has been useful for answering that question because it was not limited to high school but explores low-income spaces of education from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This becomes rather significant when exploring educational attainment because the foundation of schooling ultimately can affect educational success. Educational achievement and attainment in American society have well-established links to life outcomes such as enhanced life satisfaction and well-being.”<sup>18</sup>

### Biculturalism in the Classroom

Critical race theory was high on the priority rank because of its importance as it pertains to biculturalism in the classroom. Lisa Delpit (p. 97) reports in her text *Other People’s*

<sup>17</sup> US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration. US Census Bureau, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Chavous, T. M., Bernat, D. H., Schmeelk-Cone, K., Caldwell, C. H., Kohn-Wood, L., & Zimmerman, M. A.. (2003). Racial Identity and Academic Attainment among African American Adolescents. *Child Development*, 74(4), 1076–1090.

*Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*<sup>19</sup> that, “The issue of a white person is an issue of that individual whereas, an issue of a person of color is representation of the entire cultural group.” This is a concern when the majority of a classroom is populated by a culture not mirrored or depicted secularly and thus misunderstood by most. Therefore, when instructors do not find solidarity in that culture, there will be inconsistencies in the classroom climate. There is power in our own education. There is more to education than textbooks and math problems. There was a point where students additionally learned how to be good human beings in school and not just the square root of a hypotenuse triangle. Delpit breaks down the intricacies of learning and how culture affects learning. She provides information from Papua New Guinea to Alaska to your average inner city school that details necessary learning styles and the benefits of the varying types. There was a standard question of versus—fluency versus skill, modernity versus tradition and liberal versus conservative. These challenges were brought up in light of the disparities in instructional methods of minority students. I found myself continuously asking the question, “Do Black students need to be taught differently?” Who is responsible for the best interest of African American students? Does representation play a role? These are some of the questions posed when discussing the intricacies of educating impoverished African American youth. Critical pedagogy involves explicit examination of the intricacies that plague the urban education system. Explicit examination includes no elephants in the room. Who is the main proprietor of the classroom? The instructor is. However, the instructor must too be a student willing to learn about their students—willing to understand their students’ differences, similarities and experiences. “It is OK

<sup>19</sup> Delpit, Lisa D. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New, 1995. Print.

for a teacher to present themselves as an expert in the classroom but they cannot be the ONLY expert.”<sup>20</sup> The instructor is a key piece to the puzzle in attempting to rectify the large issues that are plaguing African American education.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the characteristics of a narrative study. A narrative study provides certain levels of personal accountability and realism that other types of study are not as readily able to access. According to Creswell (2013), “As a method, it begins with the lived experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals.”<sup>21</sup> Narrative research collects the stories and documents about an individual’s told experiences, so it exists best in the realm of oral tradition. This personal data will provide a clear dialogue concerning the needs of African American students of low socioeconomic status from the point of view of the instructors. Considering the authenticity of the study by gaining real life happenings, the type of study could suffice in that respect. The chronology of the study tells a story that other studies fail to hone in on. As education is such a monolithic experience cross-culturally, being able to dictate it in the order in which it happened is thoroughly beneficial.

Additionally, this chapter addresses the characteristics of a phenomenological qualitative research design for an explorative interpretive study. First, this chapter seeks to discuss why narrative study was the most appropriate design for this study.

<sup>21</sup> Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches* (third edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.



Second, this chapter provides a discussion of how the sample was selected, and the criteria that was used in recruiting and selecting the sample. Next, the data collection strategy for this study, semi-structured individual interviews is addressed, as well as the survey instrument and its reliability. Lastly, this chapter discusses the data analysis' validity and reliability, as well as limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and researcher bias.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to investigate the need for instructors' to possess cultural awareness and instill cultural sensitivity in their urban classrooms populated by African American youth of low socioeconomic status.

1. What is the relationship between instructors' personal educational experiences and teaching methods?
2. What is the relationship between the instructors' race/class status and their pedagogical approach?
3. Do instructors believe urban classrooms require cultural awareness and sensitivity from their instructors in order to improve educational attainment for African American youth of low socioeconomic status?

## PARTICIPANTS

For the purposes of this study, a total of 5 experienced instructors (5 years or more) as well as less experienced instructors (5 years or less) will be interviewed to ensure that there are different instructor narratives. Yet, there were no additional stipulations or specific demographics of the participants. Additional data can be included if the demographics of the instructors reveals a particular pattern, however, the narrative shall remain focused solely on the educational and personal narrative of the instructors. This research uses purposive sampling, where the researcher will select instructors who teach in the inner city/urban environments where more than 80% of their students are African American. According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), a researcher uses purposive sampling when choosing participants for their unique characteristics or experiences. The researcher will not require more personal information from them until the interview process begins. Participants will be included by email flyer invitation. Researcher will request that the school principal send an email to all staff members. Via email, those who received the email will then have the opportunity to accept or deny participation. Upon acceptance, they will be prompted with an option to choose a time when they are available to interview. The researcher will receive the results of that choice directly. After receipt of interview confirmation, the researcher will send consent form (Appendix C) to those interested and wait for signed and returned consent form. The first 5 participants to respond with signed documents will be chosen for research. There will be an additional three instructors chosen to be standby interviewers in the case that some of the chosen ten decide to decline the interview.

Surveys and questionnaire/interviews are conducted in person. The research will request that the interview be conducted in their classroom to instill additional comfort for the interviewee.

## DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

This study begins with a survey (Appendix A) that consists of statements used to define, assess and ultimately attempt to transform school culture. The statements require the interviewee to answer who they believe is responsible for certain aspects of life that students, particularly, their students face. This will spark the dialogue that will include the questions posed from the created questionnaire.

This study includes a preliminary questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. All participants are reading and signing informed consent forms, then interview times are scheduled. All interviews last approximately 1 hour. Participants are asked to reflect as well as be descriptive in their experiences as students as well as their experiences as instructors. Participants are asked to consider all details and to not limit their conversation or responses as no detail is too small. Within forty-eight hours of the interview, data is transcribed and coded from the voice recorder. The interview method is a semi-structured face-to-face interview environment using open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviewing is chosen for the current project for the following reason: it provides the opportunity to generate rich data; language use by participants is considered essential in gaining insight into their perceptions and values; contextual and relational aspects are seen as significant to understanding the participants 'perceptions and lastly the data generated can be analyzed in different way (Newton, 2010). Rather than via telephone or Internet, face-to-face interviews are a better suit, to have more personal interaction, cue non-verbal communication, enhance credibility and trust, and build relationships with the participants.

## INSTRUMENT

The first instrument used in the interview process is a survey that will ultimately be a catalyst to address issues faced by the students. It shall serve as a purpose to begin the conversation surrounding the instructors' beliefs as well as their personal background. This survey covers several aspects of fully understanding some of the hardships faced by urban school students that often times largely hinders their success and educational attainment that is typically accredited to implied incompetence and behavioral issues. In addition to that survey, there will be a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) to gather supportive information necessary to gauge a better understanding of who the participants are and how those demographics may affect their opinions in the subject matter. The following interview will consist of questions that gauge how some of their survey questions were answered and also navigate through their background experiences, their class status and how it may affect their view and also delve into an opportunity for them to discuss what they feel is needed for their students.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of the dialogue will require close attention to detail and will be separated by experience level and also categorized by the responses to the initial survey. As it pertains to the data analysis, the researcher uses the raw verbatim transcripts of all interviews to gather information used for coding. The transcripts are marked for similar passages of text with a code so that they could be retrieved easily at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. According to Saldana (2009) a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or phrase that assigns a salient, cohesive and/or evocative attribute to language based or visual data. Values coding will be most beneficial to assess what the instructors' values are and how those values manifest for their students. Values coding shall be more helpful considering the fact that caring about the students played an integral role in affecting the manner in which they chose to instruct their students. This coding will differentiate between those instructors with personal backgrounds similar to that of their students and also make a separation based upon their critiques and responses to survey questions. Following transcription and coding, the participants are asked to review the information gathered, in order to make sure their experiences and stories are being accurately depicted and that all conclusions are appropriate. All participants are given pseudonyms, which hid the identity of the participants for purposes of protection.

## LIMITATIONS, DELIMITATIONS & SCOPE

There is very little research that speaks directly to the instructor's role in the lives of their African American students of low SES. Yet, there is much research that has been done detailing the issues faced by those students. Therefore, knowing the information about the issues plaguing the African American students of low SES is an excellent start to the conversation that must continue, hereafter, with the instructors of those students. Some gaps did emerge within the research. Including instructors at the collegiate level could have possibly been beneficial but I realized it was not necessary to address the research questions. The inclusion of alternative schools into the study could have been useful to examine the extreme end of the spectrum usually explored but with little contrast. Additionally, a major enhancement to the research is the option to also include the students as a part of the study to gather a grander understanding of the student-to-teacher relationships. A dialogue with the student would provide a more detailed understanding of the trials faced by African American students of low SES. This research only adheres to the notions of ten participations so there is not possibility for generalization. Not much research has been done as it directly relates to the roles of the instructors of African American students of low SES, so the gaps are present but have yet to be recognized; therefore, there is a large hope for the continuance of similar research in the future.

## SUBJECTIVITY, RELIABILITY & VALIDITY

To ensure that the interviews were reliable, post interview will include a discussion of the information they shared and their feelings about themselves as instructors. There is a conversation about how the interviewer would like to perform as an instructor moving forward and this serves as a reiteration of the interview as well as the start of the conversation about possible solutions, if they feel any are in place or necessary. Additionally, I will provide a printed copy of the transcription of the interviewee's in-person interview for their review and approval. This will be done to confirm that their narrative is accurate before publishing. To prevent the possibility of self-disclosure, the transcription, coding and data results will be peer-reviewed by two colleagues. Again all participants are given pseudonyms, which allowed the identity of the participants to be protected. After considering the risk and benefits the researcher determined the risk to be minimal and benefits greater. The researcher is aware of ethical issues and received informed consent forms prior to collecting the demographic questionnaires and conducting the interviews.

This chapter addresses the characteristics of a narrative study qualitative research design for an explorative interpretive study. This chapter addresses reasoning for the use of the narrative being most appropriate design for this study's research question. Second, this chapter provides a discussion of how the sample is selected and the criteria that is used in recruiting and selecting and the sample. Next, the survey for this study is explained and following, the data questionnaire is discussed and its reliability is also provided. Lastly, this chapter discussed the data analysis and its validity and reliability, as well as limitations, delimitations, and researcher bias within this methodological design.

After considering the risk and benefits, it is discussed that this study had minimal risk and is more beneficial than detrimental which are revealed in the findings.

### CODING STRATEGIES

Values Coding proved to be the most efficient method for this research. Values coding is the application of codes on qualitative data that reflects the participants' values, attitudes and beliefs, representing their perspectives and worldview and was used as a first cycle strategy. The layers of values, attitudes and beliefs are essential in understanding the cultural significance of the research topic (Creswell, 2103). Considering the research is geared directly in the importance of cultural representation and with Critical Race Theory as the framework for this research, the researcher found Values coding most suitable.

The researcher used this coding to hone in on what the instructors deems of high priority in educating African American youth of low socioeconomic status. Because there is no monolithic entity that will be a catalyst in shifting this particular group of people, values coding provides clarity to the beliefs, attitudes and values of the instructors. The overarching themes present throughout this study are cultural awareness in the classroom, the intersection between education and personal experiences and intersection between students' lives outside of the educational space and within.

Table 4.2 is indicative of the coding strategies used to code the conversations with the participants.

### INNER RATER RELIABILITY

To gain the inner rater reliability, the researcher distributed one full transcript of an interview to one of the participants as well as a peer reviewer. She then asked the participant to read for the same codes that she developed in the analysis of the data.



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to examine the manner in which instructors are affected by and choose to respond or not respond to the needs of African American students of low socioeconomic status (SES) in urban school settings. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What is the relationship between instructors' personal educational experiences and teaching methods?
2. What is the relationship between the instructors' race/class status and their pedagogical approach?
3. Do instructors believe urban classrooms require cultural awareness and sensitivity from their instructors in order to improve educational attainment for African American youth of low socioeconomic status?

The study utilized a narrative design and was conducted from January to March 2017. During this time, instructors who teach in urban school settings majorly populated by African American youth of low socioeconomic status were recruited through word of mouth and association with the researcher. Out of those recruited, six were chosen to participate in the study who met the criteria—three less experienced and three more experienced instructors. Once recruited, they completed surveys and questionnaires followed by a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher. The subsequent interviews lasted from twenty minutes to forty-five minutes. I asked a series of open-ended questions pertaining to the experiences of general instructors as well as some geared primarily towards instructors in the aforementioned population. Teachers who agreed to participate did so by reading, signing, completing and returning an informed consent form, confidentiality agreement demographic survey and The “Who Owns What” survey. Upon receipt of those materials, an interview was scheduled. Within that interview, the various interview questions were answered in addition to a brief discussion related to their responses to the “Who Owns What” survey. Following is an in-person interview guided by several interview questions that can be referenced in the Appendix.

This chapter is outlined in three sections. The first details the individual profiles of those interviewed, providing background information and information of their experiences in teaching. Pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher and used in order to keep the participants true identities confidential. The second section presents data from the individual interviews to support the codes and the themes correlated to the research question. Lastly, the final section provides a summary of the chapter. Table 4.1 provides background information about the participants.

## THE PARTICIPANTS

Six African American teachers who have or currently are teaching in urban schools that are populated by African American youth of low socioeconomic status were chosen to participate in this study. Out of the six participants, three had five years or less teaching and three had six years or more teaching. The ages of those who participated in the research range from age 23 to 69. All of the participants are from African American communities. Again, place of origin was not of concern when choosing the participants. However, these three locations have high concentrations of African American people and poverty. I have included a table in the appendix of a summary of individual participants. Below is a detailed description of the interviewees' background in personal educational experiences and their current experiences as educators.

### *Delores*

Delores is an instructor who was born and raised in Atlanta, GA. She seems to hone in often times on her love for learning. She loves to learn and watch others learn and has been that way since she was a child. She mentions in her interview that, in her upbringing, her parents also stressed the importance of getting an education and going to school; however, she makes note that those two things are often mutually exclusive—particularly in urban schools. She stated “My dad would say that education was everything. So I felt like it was something that I had to do.” So education began as an obligation at an early age for Delores. Speaking of her school experience, she said, she often did not feel very connected. She was the quiet student and often looked over for that reason. This is parallel to the reasons why she tries her best to provide all her students with the same attention.

The beginning of her interview began with her seeing that there is mostly equal opportunity across the playing field of education no matter the socioeconomic status because anyone can learn if they are properly taught. However, there was a shift in that idea when we delved more deeply into some particular situations that she has had with her students. Here she recalled that they unfortunately and undoubtedly wore their family's socioeconomic status upon their sleeve. She tells a brief, but touching story about one of her past students:

*“I remember having a child and I just talked about her the other day, in my first class from some country in Africa and they were like refugees just leaving. She spoke minimal English. Um, and I found her one time, going through other people's lunches. Food was missing out of lunches because she was taking it, but she needed it for later on to feed the rest of her family. That kind of stuff, so, yes. And that really touched me and that really opened my eyes to kids not really having what they need every day—basic things.”*

This, in addition to her statements concerning the covert signs of poverty that frequently entered her teaching space were also important points to remember. She was honest in claiming that she taught all students the same, but admits that because she was so used to being around African Americans of low socioeconomic status that when it came to teaching them, she made concessions subconsciously that addressed some issues that they faced but of course, could not fix them all—even with a great administration. Delores also honed in on key points such as parental involvement and how she assessed her own experiences as a student and utilized what she did not receive as a tool to assure that her students receive the best education she could provide for them.

## *Tasha*

Tasha has been teaching almost the same amount of time as Delores. However, her upbringing in Detroit fostered something a little different than that of the first participant. Tasha was driven towards her love for education from the push that she did not receive at home. She watched several people around her be very short of success because of their lack of dedication to their education, which she tells is in fact due to the hardships created by the impoverished state they were raised in. She had a gift for math and she “let that grow in her and grow her into the instructor” that she is today. She attended Michigan State University where she was one of the only Black people in her cohort of peers seeking their Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics and also at the top of her class. She admits that she had a driving force to be better and excel regardless of the troubles she faced in her community but knows that everyone does not have that same force or some of the support systems she benefitted from. Moving forward, she spoke to her experiences teaching in alternative schools in Atlanta, Georgia. “There were some kids there that just showed up to school so they could have two meals a day,” said Tasha. Hunger and poverty can often times go hand-in-hand. She said that it was how impossible it was to teach children who traveled to school by two buses and a train just to get a mediocre meal. “They were volatile, emotional unstable and hurt children that thought they were so grown. It was sad, but something I had seen before in my own personal life and otherwise.” She described ways other than in the classroom that these children were aided. She spoke about the school having a washer and dryer on site to provide the students with clean uniforms when they came to school without their uniforms, which was “good” as she said. However, she said the school lacked adequate redirection and it just seemed like “a place to keep them

out of trouble for the day.” Which we both agreed was great, in a sense, but they need more. Yet, they did not have enough amenities to provide them with more and also could not change what they did or who they were involved with outside of school. She seemed to care for the student and their well-being before anything else. She wants them to learn, of course, but in the meantime, she states, “Experiences with the backgrounds of race, status and class cause positive and negative preconceptions that can impede their teaching.” She relied mostly on her experiences on the extreme side of urban schooling. It is not uncommon for people to carry childhood experiences with them into adulthood—whether they are positive or negative, but what stands out most is when people carry the negative. With Tasha, we see that she had negative experiences and made sure not to carry them into her classroom. Additionally, she made one comment that was profound and abundant to me which is that, “I believe that if there is no apathy, the physical, emotional and social needs cannot be met—decreasing the effectiveness of education.” This, in short, means that scholars need more than just textbooks by osmosis but also need their needs must be tended to. Her experiences were mirrored in her teachings but only because she learned from them and made conscious decision to act accordingly and act differently upon what she saw but provide an alternative for what she experienced. Tasha was not a stranger to poverty. She was not a stranger to the common struggles of African Americans of low SES. That is was led her to alternative schools and to teach at urban schools in her hometown. “I always wanted to help.”

### *Anne.*

Anne is the most experienced of the bunch. So her experiences were the most abundant of the bunch because they encompass over thirty-five years of teaching. She was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia and still currently teaches in the city. She provides

information across a large spectrum of experiences and starts her interview by stating that she “prefers to teach outside of the urban school arena because the kids are more motivated and have more assistance, but when I was younger,” she continued, “I had more time, energy and vigor to dedicate myself to what those kids truly need.” She said her parents were “old-fashioned.” School was important, but getting a job was more important.

Though her mother introduced her to her love for literature, because of the time period she was in, she had to be steadfast in finding a career. She chose teaching. Growing up in the rural South in 50s and 60s, being Black was almost synonymous with being poor. There were always some who were doing better than others, however, it was more common to be Black and below the poverty line than above it. Discussing home Anne said, “It was a family. Our entire neighborhood was a family. Most of us knew each other. We knew some of each other’s struggles and likes and dislikes and almost all of us attended the same school. We were told to get an education because we needed it to get a job. So I went and got my job and I loved it. I loved teaching when I began.” She then speaks of the shift in the community as the years went on and she learned more and more about the educational system. “There is only so much you can do sometimes.” She said this in regards to questions about when she saw her students struggling, what did she do, and she said sometimes it was not much because there are barriers that teachers, often times, cannot cross. They attempt in the best ways she can and find loopholes she says. Loop holes used to fill the voids of inadequate amounts of books and pencils for the students. Loopholes to fill the void of absent parents or hungry bellies, empty smiles, full hearts, but not sure what they are full of. Anne provided touching stories that suggest a shift in paradigm between her early teaching years in the early 70s then to the mid-to-late 80s. “Culture changed. We changed. Our people changed. So our education changed.” She states that this is where she

saw a different type of student enter her classroom. She was used to having a couple disruptive students in her classes and used to a kid or two that may be a bit behind, but at this time she was faced with a myriad of students who had lost a passion for education and she had to adapt to them. “The parents were less involved and the kids were less engaged. I began to concern myself with their personal lives more and more at this point.” She knows that our community struggles and the basis of her discussion was that our community does not need special attention but perhaps some type of recognition of our culture is needed. Her love for education was never lost and she carried it with her into every classroom she entered. “I loved kids. But I felt a particular kind of love for my babies that shared the same skin as me. We experience differently than everyone else and we bond in that regard. So I loved hard and strong my Black babies. And the ones that struggle, I paid close attention. I cared for them and I nurture them. Now that I’m a grandmother I feel like all I know how to do is teach and nurture.” Here is where she delves deeply into her passion for Black faces and Black education. Moving forward, she speaks of a context of difficulty in teaching these types of children though she loved them so dearly. “It has been a lot of year—a lot of hard years. I do not regret them one bit but I admit I am tired. Fighting to get students involved. Fighting ever harder to get parents involved. Fighting to feed. Fighting to making a flower bed of young Black pupil grow when it constantly felt like they didn’t want to. It was a struggle. It is a struggle. Our people struggle.”

### ***Kenya***

Kenya was my first young teacher and the teacher with the least amount of experience. She currently teaches 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at a Title 1 charter school in Brooklyn, NY where she was born and raised. When begin our conversation touching on her personal educational sphere. She attended public school in Brooklyn for Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup>



grade. She describes it as “cool.” Said she had some profound teachers here and there. “I enjoyed being a part of the public school system, I felt like it shaped me mentally and emotionally/socially. It wasn’t a sheltered environment. I was able to interact with different kinds of people and have different experiences, which kind of made me stronger. And the fact, you know, going to school in Brooklyn, you interact with all types of people. It was good. I definitely wish I would have learned more... or the topics would have been more diverse. We didn’t learn a lot of African American things except when I got to high school, it was a community-based school so I got to delve deeper into my African American side.” Yet, when asked if she utilizes any of this in her current teaching styles she admits that because she teaches 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, she feels like she doesn’t have to lay it on too thick. However, she attempts to make their Blackness present in her classrooms, which lends directly to the idea of biculturality in academic spaces. Because she’s at a charter school, their lesson plans are provided for them which filters and stifles much creativity in their teaching, but she works around it with her own personal finesse. Yet, she sees this as troubling because the administration seems to view the scholars as “data points.” There is minimal value in the scholars overall development and more focus on maintaining high levels of educational attainment which we both agreed is of importance but should not simultaneously negate the cultivation of the scholars overall well-being. For this participant, she says that “it is less about what content she can give them and more about what life content she can give them because that’s something that everyone can’t offer you. She aims to “build a brain and a person.” So when lessons pertaining American history that does not represent the African American narrative accurately or at all arises, she is able to step in and do her due-diligence to our narrative. “When having to teach them about the Declaration of Independence and Christopher Columbus, I introduce to them to not only

African American history but history of many peoples of color. “Because they’re so young, I think that them just knowing that as a Black person you have to be twice as good, I feel like that’s enough at this age because they’re young, but they have to understand the playing field they’re in. Not to be negative, but there are a lot of white teachers in the teaching force and some teachers don’t have that same care for the kids as a Black teacher would or the same level of understanding.” She wishes that there were more time to get to know her students. She references the “Dean of Curriculum” as a catalyst in the disconnect between her and her students because she sees the lessons as rigorous but not thought-provoking. However, she does have assistance from her administrative team when it comes to the issues of her students. They have outlying forces such as the “Dean of Students” and a club known as the “Friendship Club” that facilitate help for the students when the teachers cannot step in. The “Friendship Club” creates a safe haven for the scholars to address personal issues that may be of concern and act a main point of contact for parents to provide a bridge between what happens in the classroom and outside of the classroom and how the two often intersect. Kenya says that her scholars’ needs and outside issues often become transparent. Kenya was very vocal about her school and how she feels as though she teaching for tests and not for depth and it is disheartening, to say the least.

### *Kayla*

Kayla, a young woman from Baltimore, Maryland has been teaching in Washington, D.C. for two years now. Her school is culturally diverse with a heavy population of African American youth but also a concentrated amount of Latino youth as well. With a very strict educational background, this participant has always been grounded

in education and like the next participant had middle class parents who kept her on a path to success. She was not as impacted by low socioeconomic status in her upbringing however she wasn't completely sheltered from it. She took her home experiences and brought them directly to the classroom. "I tend to be very 'no nonsense.' I also don't take very kindly to excuses. I set the bar high for my students and maintain a very structured atmosphere because that's how I was able to thrive in school and at home. A lot of them don't have a support system at home, so I often have to remember that their drive is often times intrinsic because they don't have much extrinsic motivation." I could tell this was true because this participant was very clear, concise and direct in her responses to the questions from the interview guide. She denotes her tactfulness in making her lessons plans culturally relevant because it interests her students. Learning about their culture in a school setting is almost foreign to her students so it sets a precedent for peak learning. She says her school is extremely diverse and she works diligently to keep it so and because it is so she states, "It allows me to use students as teachers when it comes to exploring different cultures. My students know that my classroom environment does not welcome intolerance. I sit students next to those they normally wouldn't talk to. I encourage controversial questions and discussions. I try to have my students understand that my classroom is a safe place." Just as Kenya stated, when it comes to personal and home lives of the students, Kayla treads a thin line to avoid becoming too nosy but often times does not have to be because developing a rapport with her students and being able to pick up on their non-verbal communication opens the doors to verbal communication and makes for a better educational environment. As this participants current school, her students face many strenuous issues that affect their ability to be successful in the classroom such as: drugs, absentee parents, foster care system/group homes, violence in neighborhoods, deaths,

reading below the grade level, etc. And she strongly believes that her administrative team does not put forth enough effort or initiatives to be proactive in addressing these issues. “I often feel like when they do cater to students whose home lives are in disarray, they are the ones whom they feel show the most promise. The ones who are written off as “behavior issues” are often left behind.” This statement is a directly parallel to Delores who said her focus is in nurture all students as a means to cultivate an all-inclusive and overall more productive environment. Yet, for Kayla and Kenya, productivity is measured in test scores. Particularly for Kayla, the growth of their students on the basis of said test scores determines whether or not the teacher stays employed. That speaks volumes to the lack of value placed on the different aspects that are the make-up of the students as people and not just numbers.

### *Justice.*

Justice is a young teacher from New Orleans, Louisiana. She is in her second year of teaching in New Orleans. She has only had experience teaching in urban schools. Just as the previous participant, her parents presented education of very high priority. Her mother was on the school board and her father worked at a university. She, too, brought that exact rigor to her teaching. Yet, she admits that it was something that had to be learned. “I also have extremely high standards for them but that had to be developed over time. I had to get over the excuses stage where I, essentially, made excuses for them because of where they’re from or their home life.” She raised an interesting point here because the aim is not to necessarily make excuses for the students highlighted in this study, but to take notice and take heed to how their livelihood outside of schools affects the manifestation of their educational experiences. She wishes she had more experience in special education for the aide of her students who read 2-3 levels below their designated grade level. “Teaching

them is so difficult because I don't know how to teach them on their level when they have to perform on the grade level. For example, I have a 4<sup>th</sup> grader who reads on a first grade level. It's a toss up trying to get him to learn skills because I have to teach him the fourth grade material but he understands on a severely lower level." Aside from that, she also deals heavily with the constituents of her students outside lives just as the previous Participants. In detail she states, "As a teacher, you have to concern yourself with the students' lives. They come in the classroom as a representation of their home lives and communities. For example, one of our 5<sup>th</sup> graders wanted to go on a trip but couldn't because her mother is disabled so we had to find her mother assistance. Or my student acted out because her father just went to jail. Or I know certain parents I can't call because they'll come to school drunk or high. The most prominent is the absence of men in their homes so the young boys come to school overly aggressive everyday." It's difficult to hear but it's the reality that is known and deserves acknowledgment. Parental involvement is crucial in young minds who must grow academically and otherwise. "Most of my students spend their free time staring at the television in the dark and have been doing since infancy. They don't play with puzzles or read young so they have short attention spans and almost no retention ability. Like studies show, most children act out because they do not understand the information and get frustrated with the work. Children with very rough home lives either spend class 'with their guard up' so starting fights because classmates are looking at them or they're asleep. A lot of older students are responsible for younger sibling and so they're exhausted when they come to class." She does, however, say that her administrative team implements home visits and are aware of their students' home lives good, bad or indifferent. They have in place structure to attempt to address the issues faced by their students. Justice expresses how the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is still affecting

the people of New Orleans today. “And as the saying goes... ‘When white America catches a cold, Black folk catch pneumonia,’ Justice says as she explains how she has students in her school that missed two years of schooling because their families were trying to recover from Hurricane Katrina and they were never truly able to get all the knowledge they needed from that absence. Justice is completely heartbroken some days, because of the struggle that her students have to go through just to receive an education. She says that the emotional toll that teaching in urban education takes on you is honestly insurmountable to the experience of instructors outside this realm. “I have a hard time connecting sometimes with my peers who teach in private schools and such. We differ in opinion and experience.”

#### OVERVIEW OF THEMES

This research serves the purpose of utilizing the raw and unfiltered voices of instructors as catalyst to being change agents in urban education. Much research has been conducted using data points and numerical values as measures of the educational attainment of African American youth of low socioeconomic status. Therefore, this narrative study is a tool to begin a candid dialogue with the instructors’ of this population group because they possess first-hand experience dealing with the implications and discrepancies of urban education.

Using values coding, the researcher has outlined three themes to code the narratives of the participants and they are as follows: VALUES, BELIEFS and ATTITUDES. These three themes were prominent throughout the discussion for various reasons that I will highlight below. These six participants referenced literature and many personal happenings that lend to the discussion and theory for change of social climate in urban schools. From

childhood to present, the researcher requested that the participants be as frank as possible about the details of their classrooms, school administration and opinion. Inasmuch, the researcher received countless stories and a myriad of tears from individuals that have such a passion for teaching the young.

Participants participated both in a survey and an in-person interview to gather information about their values, beliefs and attitudes. The survey was merely used a conversation enhancer if need be and the in-person interview is where the coded data was collected to coincide with the over-arching themes used to answer the research questions. The emerged data themes specifically address but were limited to topics such as classroom climate, empathy to students overt and covert issues, finding common ground in shared experience and value of education in early life.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### General Understanding of Personal Educational Experience

#### *VALUES*

As it relates to values, all except two of the participants spoke of the value that their parents placed on education at an early age. They discussed how their parents said education was important so it was engrained in them to think that way and place the same type of value on education. In posing this question the researcher aims to understand the effect of parental involvement and if the positions placed on education at an early age as bearing of the educational attainment of youth, particularly African American youth. This beginning piece shed light on the manner in which these educators value education for themselves and then transfer that value onto their students who typically do not value it.

Delores spoke to the fact that her father placed value on education at a young age and it registered with her immensely and she began to get her neighborhood friends involved in education as well. “My dad would say that education was everything. So I felt like it was something that I had to do.” From an early age, children are often most influenced by those around them especially their parents. If the parent is not concerned with the child’s education, the child will struggle with building a concern for it. However, on a different end of the spectrum, there is Anne who said that because of the way her generation of folks operated around obtaining a solid career, that value of education was not awarded to her. So, in her conversation she said that she has a harder time instructing youth who do not value education because it is something she tried to stray far away from, however, she understands the disposition of those children who do not and admits that it is much harder to teach that type of group. With this, I was able to gather that all of the instructors’ personal background in education shaped who they were as educators. Some utilized what they learned and considered it necessary to implement into their classrooms, while others took their hardships and vowed to keep it away from their students and their learning experience. The past was present in their teaching, though manifested in differentiated ways.

### *BELIEFS*

On a more grandiose scale is where the researcher begins to delve into the overall beliefs of the participants on this subject. Delores was very verbose in her speech about her experiences with falling into the background with her teachers and never wanting that to be the experiences of her students. She is sure to pay as much attention as possible to every student. It was apparent at the beginning of the conversation with her that she makes



attempts to treat all her students equally regardless of race or class status. However, after more in depth conversations, there was notice that she was more attentive to their needs than she thought. There was a subconscious manner in which she assisted her students which may not have been even a thought for someone who was not aware of the types of hardships faced by a group of African American students of low socioeconomic status. She speaks of making breakfast for her students and how she knew when her students had not gotten enough to eat the night before or that morning because of their irritability and inability to learn. She still says that she believes that all students have the ability to learn but the stories that she shared suggest otherwise. Her stories suggest that every child has the ability to learn but for some, an educator must adjust the environment.

Additionally, it was very apparent that our younger and less experienced instructors placed much more value on race being an astounding part of their classroom structure. Kenya, who teaches at a Title 1 school in Brooklyn, NY where she says that she often times attempts to make small changes to her lessons to make her classroom inclusive. Kenya highlighted her school structure by sharing that because she teaches at a charter school, all her lessons are pre-planned. She is not offered in creativity in her classroom and she believes it is necessary. “My classroom is populated 100% by Black low income kids. I’m just as worried about what knowledge and content I can give them as I am about the LIFE content I can give them. And I teach second grade so I don’t have to lay it on too thick. Going to Howard University, I think I know just enough to help my second graders understand that in education a lot of things are ‘white-washed’ and I teach at a charter school so all our lesson plans are written for us already.” She emphasizes how she was able to utilize her lessons to add value and worth to her students who often show that they do not know much about the two especially as it relates to academics. So she does this by

incorporating African American history where she is able to advance self-worth and acceptance. Accordingly, Kayla, a high school educator who works with more advanced students says that she uses her students and their actions as teachable moments on a consistent basis. “My students that my classroom environment does not welcome tolerance. My school is extremely diverse; therefore it allows me to use students as teachers when it comes to exploring different cultures. Each year I try to make my lessons more culturally relevant. This really captures student interest. In addition, “I want to allow for more ‘student talk’ and less ‘teacher talk’. This allows the students to learn cooperatively. No one enjoys a lecture.” Kayla was open and honest about her beliefs in educational structure in settings that deal heavily with Black culture and because of her beliefs she makes it a point to share that with her students. This theme also delved heavily into the subconscious and even conscious actions of instructors who made concessions and moderations for their students. Knowing the covert challenges faced in the African American community are some that one may only recognize if they are a part of that community. Delores mentioned an idea that is profound. “You may have a young man who is one of five siblings in the home with a single parent. He’s considered to be the ‘man of the house’. He has a lot of responsibilities, adult-like responsibilities. So when he comes to school and has trouble following directions and dealing with authority, you have to be able to recognize that behavior.” This is important because if that behavior is not recognized as something to look more deeply into, then it can, quite easily, be written off as another bad kid in the class.

All six of the participants in the study made mention to race in their interviews but the younger group was more adept to address race and class status and the intersection between the two and how it manifest in their educational spaces. All participants’ beliefs

were true and balanced in a need for culture to be addressed in the classroom setting and how they deem it very beneficial to the overall progression and well-being of their students.

## ATTITUDES

The attitude piece of this narrative is the piece that typically involves action. In this study, it relates to the moderations and accommodations made by these instructors for their students. In this section, the conscious actions of the instructors are discussed. Attitudes relay to fruition and with that I found that several of the participants voiced openly that they struggle with finding meaningful ways to adjust to the shortcomings of their students due to low socioeconomic status. Justice, as well as two other participants, discussed the low reading levels of their students and how they have to constantly adjust lesson plans to reach the students with severely low reading levels and speech impediments. "It's much more common, in my opinion, to see African American children with low reading levels because it is apparent when I speak to their parents that their education level is low as well. Through generations, we have seen education not be a priority for African Americans and historically, education was forbidden for us and we, as a people, are constantly trying to redeem ourselves from that piece of our history. It's a factor that isn't commonly spoken about but it's prevalent and pervasive in my classroom." The data shows that educators have to, not only fight for their students' attention, but also the attention of the parents and the administration in order to run efficient classrooms. With this, all the participants listed race and class status as a main component in the commonality of these attitudes as well as their actions.

Below is a chart created to highlight quotes from interviewers to give further detail

into the coding methods and understanding their responses as it relates to the research questions.

MAJOR THEMES	VALUES	BELIEFS	ATTITUDES
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	What is the relationship between instructors' personal educational experiences and teaching methods?	What is the relationship between the instructors' race/class status and their pedagogical approach?	Do instructors believe urban classrooms require cultural awareness and sensitivity from their instructors in order to improve educational attainment for African American youth of low socioeconomic status?
DELORES	<p>"I was a quiet child and I did well based on that. Straight-A student. But I don't remember being all that smart. I just remember being really quiet. I knew my parents felt like education was important. They would always tell me I had to go to school. We had perfect attendance sometimes. My dad would say that education was everything. So I felt like it was something that I had to do. I enjoyed most of it—elementary school. My 4th – 7th grade was the best because my favorite teacher is in that time frame. I can often times tell what students don't get at home because it shows in their performance."</p> <p><b>With this quote, I was able to garner an understanding if these sentiments lend to her understanding of the importance of parental involvement in education and if this has any bearing on the manner in which she approaches her own students. Here, she employed education as an obligation in her early life and admits that it was something that sparked her interest in advancing her education. Also, she states that she recognizes what her students lack in their performance because her upbringing was not the same so that is an idea worth exploring.</b></p>	<p>"Money didn't have anything to do with it. We shared. I was at a brand new school so, the resources were abundant. We wanted for nothing. First school to get Promethean boards in each classroom. My principal was very supportive, she gave me anything I wanted. I started a dance team there so what we tried to do at Parkside was create a space where they could come to and it was equal. We didn't even think about money, in a sense. We raised a lot of money within the school."</p> <p><b>She was the only participant who began with sentiments such as this that did not typically include race as a factor because she believed that anyone could learn. Yet, this is a direct parallel to a previous quote in the text that accounts how African American youth are often written off upon entering the classroom, and here in her belief, she makes it clear that she does not share those same ideals about the competency of African American students of low SES.</b></p>	<p>"And you saying things like that makes me think of the things that I did to combat that because we had breakfast. I had little snacks in my room. I had a reading store in my class. I got a grant one time to do a reading store in my class. So that they could earn tickets to buy things based on how much they would read. I cooked breakfast 5 days a week and no parent, no one, had to worry about food or getting there on time or being late. We came early, we sat and ate breakfast together and then had our tests." <b>She was honest in the fact that she taught all students the same, but admits that because she was so used to being around African Americans of low socioeconomic status that when it came to teaching them, she made concessions subconsciously that addressed some issues that they faced but of course, could not fix them all—even with great administration.</b></p>

	<p>Delores also honed in on key points such as parental involvement, or lack thereof and how she assessed her experiences as a student and utilized what she did not receive as a tool to assure that her students receive the best education she could provide for them.</p>		
TASHA	<p>“My early experiences in education were very frivolous in that there was minimal direction from my parents or peers in what I should do as far as education. I come from a low-income family. I know what it looks like. I did the best I could to get away from it. I try my best to teach my sons, who often double as my students, and my students the places education can take you.” She watched several people around her be very short of success because of their lack of dedication to their education, which she tells is in fact due to the hardships created by the impoverished state they were raised in. She had a gift in math and she let that grow in her and grow her into the instructor that she is today. She attended Michigan State University where she was one of the only Black people in her cohort of peers seeking their Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics and also at the top of her class. She admits that she had a driving force to be better and excel regardless of the troubles she faced in her community but knows that everyone does not have that same force or some of the support systems she benefitted from.</p>	<p>“I believe that if there is no apathy for the physical, emotional and social aspects of the students, their needs cannot be met; ultimately decreasing the effectiveness of education.”  <b>Scholars need more than just textbooks by osmosis but also need their needs must be tended to. Her experiences were mirrored in her teachings but only because she learned from them and made conscious decision to act accordingly and act differently upon what she saw but provide an alternative for what she experienced.</b>  Tasha said that she treated her students like her family and a part of her because they mirrored so many things that she had experienced and the shared experiences made teaching them easier and understanding them easier as well. “I believe that if there is no apathy to the physical, emotional and social aspects of these particular kind of students, needs cannot be met; decreasing the effectiveness of education.” This direct belief illustrates the idea that these particular students require a certain type of attention to detail in their overall well-being and that is her belief.</p>	<p><b>Her sentiments were that of caring for the student and their well-being before anything else. She wants them to learn, of course,</b> but in the meantime, she states, “Experiences with the backgrounds of race, status and class cause positive and negative preconceptions that can impede their teaching.” <b>Her sentiments relied mostly on her experiences on the extreme side of urban schooling. However, this does not depart from the idea that these happenings on the extreme side are happening on the less extreme side but are less concentrated. She found herself often times treating her students like they were her own children. Watching out for them in the tough neighborhoods they grew up in. Providing them with as much support as she could because she remembered what she did not have and knew from that experience, what she needed. Her attitude in this was that of a constant action plan. What can she do to make sure they these students are secure. “They come to school just to make sure they have two meals a day. So I made sure they always had that and tried to offer a little bit more any time I could.” This is the premise of making the concessions when the instructors understand what is needed.</b></p>
ANNE	<p>“It was a family. Our entire neighborhood was a family. Most of us knew each other. We knew some of each other’s struggles and likes and dislikes and almost all of us attended the same school. We were told to get an education because we needed it to get a job. So I went and got my job and I loved it. I loved teaching when I began. So if I could love education, though I ain’t come from no education background, then I knew I was going to figure out how to get people like me to love it too.” <b>This was major display of value and I do not feel like she even knew that that was what she was saying. She speaks here to her understanding that there is a lack of value on education in the</b></p>	<p>“I loved kids. But I felt a particular kind of love for my babies that shared the same skin as me. We experience differently than everyone else and we bond in that regard. So I loved hard and strong my Black babies. And the ones that struggle, I paid close attention. I cared for them and I nurture them. Now that I’m a grandmother I feel like all I know how to do is teach and nurture.” Here, and throughout her interview, she expresses her belief in the power of nurturing and caring for young Black children. She addresses that there is a certain manner in which she nurtures her babies that share the same skin. Again, I have a participant speaking out to the power in the relationship between</p>	<p>“It has been a lot of year—a lot of hard years. I do not regret them one bit but I admit I am tired. Fighting to get students involved. Fighting ever harder to get parents involved. Fighting to feed. Fighting to making a flower bed of young Black pupil grow when it constantly felt like they didn’t want to. It was a struggle. It is a struggle. Our people struggle. I’ve found myself giving up on the struggle it was to truly WORK in urban schools, but somehow I always found my way back—back home.”  This is an open statement of her dyer actions to have to not only fight for the attention and care of the students but also for the care and respect from the parents. If the parents of the students did not take action and responsibility for their children’s education then neither did the students. “It was more</p>

	<p><b>Black community and it often times stems from not having anyone around you/at home placing value on it. She was one of the lucky ones to find that value and she wants to help those who do not find that value as easily. “The Black babies” needed to find that value. She understands this from experience and the experience of what it means to be Black in America.</b></p>	<p>Black bodies and our history. As a mother and grandmother in the community she expresses a genuine love and dedication to the improvement and the model of teaching a Black child. She states that she remembers what it was like to be poor and to be disrespected by people of a different race and because of that journey, she aims to nurture differently—alternatively.</p>	<p>of a job to get students to pay attention than it was too teach. It’s even worse now with all this technology, but then was just as saddening. I worked twice as hard for my Black babies. Always have. Always will.”</p> <p>Her attitude is heavy on the side of being tired and disappointed but that causes action. She says that she worked twice as hard for those babies that needed it. She admitted to extra attention to her Black students. Her actions were in tandem with her attitude towards the needs of African American children to be aware of themselves in the classroom.</p>
<b>KENYA</b>	<p>“I enjoyed being a part of the public school system, I felt like it shaped me mentally and emotionally/socially. It wasn’t a sheltered environment. I was able to interact with different kinds of people and have different experiences, which kind of made me stronger. And the fact, you know, going to school in Brooklyn, you interact with all types of people. It was good. I definitely wish I would have learned more... or the topics would have been more diverse. We didn’t learn a lot of African American things except when I got to high school, it was a community-based school so I got to delve deeper into my African American side.”</p> <p><b>Kenya was the first instructor to vocalize learning African American history or more about her culture at a young age. She mentions that her father gave her some knowledge about it but it would have been much different experience learning it in school. She also attributed it to her undergraduate career at Howard University. She says that learning African American history at Howard University constantly made her thinking about what she learned as a young child and how we teach and value our children and when you value your child enough to teach them about themselves in addition to what they learn in school, you’re doing a “pretty good job.”</b></p>	<p>“Because they’re so young, I think that them just knowing that as a Black person you have to be twice as good, I feel like that’s enough at this age because they’re young, but they have to understand the playing field they’re in. Not to be negative, but there are a lot of white teachers in the teaching force and some teachers don’t have that same care for the kids as a Black teacher would or the same level of understanding.”</p> <p><b>A belief being an idea or even an opinion is conveyed here. The concept of being twice as good just because you’re Black and just to be recognized is a common idea across many an African American and Kenya voiced a strong belief in the concept. She knows that they’re young and won’t always understand what she is saying, but from an early age she acknowledges the importance of recognizing not only race, but the structure of race and where it places you in this world and this is a lesson she shares with her students because she believes in it. It’s not a statement of fact based on research analysis, it is simply an opinion shared by a large amount of the Black community, thus highlighting her belief.</b></p>	<p>She aims to “build a brain and a person.” So when lessons pertaining American history that does not represent the African American narrative accurately or at all arises, she is able to step in and do her due-diligence to our narrative. “When having to teach them about the Declaration of Independence and Christopher Columbus, I introduce to them to not only African American history but history of many peoples of color.”</p> <p><b>Kenya says that she feels the district and administrators view the students as “data points” more than they view them as students or even as individuals. Kenya is very honest about the fact that at her charter school, they teach pre-written lesson plans and are expected to follow it exactly. Yet “it allows no room for creativity. So when I see something in our history book that I do not think is accurate or displays the African American narrative negatively or not at all, I am sure to be upfront about what we, as a people can bring to the table. I can’t just sit back and tell my students about how we have to work twice as hard without providing background knowledge. I became a teacher to teach my students and just like a performer or speaker speaks in the likes of their audience, I do the same for my students.” Her attitude does not favor systemic oppression or cultural discretion so she makes adjustments for her classroom.</b></p>
<b>KAYLA</b>	<p>“My educational experience at home was rather strict. As soon as I got home everyday, I was expected to do my homework before I could engage in any extracurricular activities. C’s were unacceptable and B’s were often questioned. During elementary school and middle school, I stood out academically, especially as it pertained to</p>	<p>“I want to allow for more ‘student talk’ and less ‘teacher talk.’ This allows the students to learn cooperatively. No one enjoys a lecture.” <b>This, though short, was viewed as a belief system because it what drives the way she pursues knowledge in her classroom. “I utilize real life situations that they deal with to fuel learning sometimes.</b> “I want</p>	<p>“My school is extremely diverse; therefore, it allows me to use students as teachers when it comes to exploring different cultures. My students know that my classroom environment does not welcome intolerance. I sit students next to those they normally wouldn’t talk to. I encourage controversial questions and discussions. I try to have my students understand that my classroom is a safe place. “ <b>Here</b></p>

	<p>language arts. In high school, I went through the whole “fitting in” stage and academics became second priority to social activities. However, I still maintained good grades.” <b>She, just like Justice had upbringings that did not exist directly in poverty but its not as though they were not aware of it. So, again I am using this information to understand if not being raised in low income households has any bearing on the manner in which instructors respond to students who were raised in that environment. Kayla proved that it affected the way that she teaches them but only to the extent that it causes her to push them even harder academically.</b> I tend to be very “no nonsense.” I also don’t take very kindly to excuses. I set the bar high for my students and maintain a very structured atmosphere because that’s how I was able to thrive in school and at home. A lot of them don’t have a support system at home, so I often have to remember that their drive is often times intrinsic because they don’t have much extrinsic motivation. <b>Yet, here she does make mention that she has to remind herself sometimes that what she had growing up as far as academic support in home and at school they do not have so has an effect on what she values in regard to their performance but she is a new teacher and she is learning to make the adjustments.</b></p>	<p>them to have an interest and I do not like the idea of disregarding the reality that the lives that many of them live are unrealistic just because they do not fit mainstream ideas of livelihood. My students experience drugs, absentee parents, foster care system/group homes, violence in neighborhoods, death, reading below grade level, English being their second language, etc. so for those not to be topics of discussion is beyond me. I do understand that everything is not for the classroom but I do not pride myself in silencing their realities like I’ve witnessed so many teachers do before to my friends, or even current coworkers have shared similar stories with me.” <b>This was a very strong and valid belief in culture in the classroom but mostly still lends to her as an instructor having a basic understanding and reality of her students’ experiences and the realism of their lifestyles that may be silenced or misunderstood by others.</b></p>	<p><b>Kayla is bringing in cultural discussions into the classroom without obligation. This theme was coded any time an interview mentioned biculturalism in the classroom that they recognized or even preformed without prior obligation.</b>          “Each year, I try to make my lessons more culturally relevant. <b>As it pertains to cultural sensitivity, she speaks again about the home lives of her students and attitude and understanding of what she is and is not able to do about it in most instances.</b> “I often tread a fine line between trying to be informed, and being too nosy. Over my past two years of teaching, I have found that students will just open up to you, especially if they can sense that you are not judgmental. Many of the things I know about my students’ home life were told to me voluntarily. I never try to delve too much into the “why’s” and how’s” of their situations because I don’t want to cause them to be uncomfortable. Instead, I simply ask, “is everything ok?” or, “is today going to be better than yesterday?” Many times, I get non-verbal responses that tend to speak volumes. It seems simple, but it is how I have been able to establish a rapport.” <b>I, myself, have witnessed instructors have absolutely no idea on how to proceed with so her description of her action speaks to her attitude about the situations seeing as though she is familiar with them from some personal experience and understanding of the African American community. She says that her teaching in urban schools was a choice because she knows the struggles and has seen them around her and wants to address those particular struggles the bet way she can with her work.</b></p>
<p><b>JUSTICE</b></p>	<p>“I grew up and went to the top public schools in the city. My classmates were middle class children of all races. My mother was on the school board and my father worked at a university so my parents stressed school. It was the most important thing in my house. If my grades were not all As and Bs then I would have to stay home or be punished. I try not to excuse my students from working hard because of where they come from even though I feel like I do because I didn’t come from there.” <b>In research, you find that people often admit to things or address ideas that they have never addressed before that moment. Here you</b></p>	<p>“I wish I had more training in special education. Most of students read below grade level (two or three years) and so teaching them is difficult because i don't know how to teach them on their level when they have to perform on the grade level. For example, I teach a fourth grader who reads on a first level. It's a toss up trying to get him to learn skills because I have to teach him the fourth grade material but understands on a severely lower level. As a teacher you have to concern yourselves with students lives. They come in the classroom as a representation of their home lives and communities. For example, one of our fifth graders</p>	<p>“I’ve found that the ability to retain information is a result of two things 1. Poor prenatal care - mom smoked, drank, etc 2. Lack of academic exposure at a young age. Most of my students spend their free time staring at the tv in the dark and have been doing so since infancy. They don't play puzzles or read young so they have short attention spans and almost no retention ability. Like studies show, most children act out because they do not understand the information and get frustrated with work. Children with very rough home lives either spend class "with their guard up" so starting fights because classmates are looking at them or they sleep. A lot of older students are responsible for younger siblings and so they're exhausted when</p>

	<p>see <b>Justice realizing that she isn't where here students are from and she has to come to that realization. After this statement, she thinks aloud</b> "Am I pushing them too hard?" <b>Here she admits that her values are different.</b> "I push my students to the be their best because I know that if they work hard they can possibly go to better schools as they get older. I also have extremely high standards for them but that had developed over time. I had to get over the excuses stage where I essentially made excuses for them because of where they're from or their home life."</p>	<p>wanted to go on a trip but couldn't because her mother is disabled so we had to find her mother assistance. Or my student acted out because her father just went to jail. Or I know certain parents I can't fall because they'll come to school drunk or high. The most prominent is the absence of men in their homes so the young boys come to school over aggressive everyday." <b>These sentiments fell under the guise of belief because it solely addresses issues faced by her students that Justice wishes she had a real grasp on how to deal. She is requesting training for special need"s because it is her belief that this all stems from the issues faced in a type of home life she can assume about but has not experienced. However, based her short stint of teaching in the beginning of her career, these are things that she has seen before and now believes that she needs help addressing said issues. She expresses many research-based but still opinionated theories i.e. the anger or aggression form young boys because of their lack of father figures.</b></p>	<p>they come to class. So when I see all of these issues, I make it a point to make home visits. I request parent-teacher conferences constantly. My administration often says that after so many failed attempts at involving the parents that I should give up and let administration or the authorities handle it, but I just can't. I know what the school-to-prison pipeline consists of. I know that getting their parent 'locked up' for neglect is not necessarily going to help because now the kid doesn't have a parent. I'm so conflicted a lot of times and I feel like I constantly have to take action into my own hands with minimal support. I feel a lot of things towards this job and sometimes I have to stop and realize that I don't have time to feel and I just have to act." <b>One of the most emotional pieces of her interview was here when she began to show that raw feeling. She has a true connection to her current experiences with her students. She is invested. She takes action. Her attitude resides in her because it is a part of her personality and it is fleeting but embedded in the same concepts that stem from her values and beliefs that manifest in her current attitude. She is just beginning as a teacher so she has a lot of fight left in her.</b></p>
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## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the participants were all unique in their own respect, but their understanding of the intersection between race and education was consistent. All participants made mention to the presence of culture in their classroom. That culture existed in tangible and intangible form. The younger instructors want to continue to take their values, beliefs and attitudes into every classroom and educational space they enter and the older expressed that their pedagogical approaches have transformed throughout the years however, that that they feel that African American youth of low socioeconomic status face many of the same issues then as they do need and those issues need be tended to.



The following and final chapter concludes the study. The chapter includes a discussion and implications of the findings and recommendations for future research on the subject of instructors' need to understand the behavior and schooling of African American youth low socioeconomic status.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the need for instructors' to possess cultural awareness and instill cultural sensitivity in their urban classrooms populated by African American youth of low socioeconomic status. In more depth, the questions being addressed are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between instructors' personal educational experiences and teaching methods?
2. What is the relationship between the instructors' race/class status and their pedagogical approach?
3. Do instructors believe urban classrooms require cultural awareness and sensitivity from their instructors in order to improve educational attainment for African American youth of low socioeconomic status?

Six instructors that currently teach in urban schools participated in this study. Three of the instructors have less than five years of experiences in teaching in urban schools and three have more than five years of experience. They were interviewed in person and asked a series of questions pertaining to their own personal experiences as students as well as their experiences as instructors. This narrative study was employed to find relationships between personal knowledge of culture and the effects of class status and how that is manifested in the instructors' pedagogical approach. Additionally, the research sought to discover the needs of African American youth of low socioeconomic status in and outside of the classroom as well as what help the instructors need to address issues faced by those students.

An analysis of the data revealed three major themes—values, beliefs and attitudes. From these themes, there was a concentration on the relationship between personal

experience and pedagogical approach, the relationship between race and class status and the pedagogical approach and if there is a need for action in creating or maintaining clarity and sensitive of culture in the classroom.

This concluding chapter provides highlights of the findings, general conclusions of the study, followed by implications and plans for future research.

### Conclusions and Discussions

After the emergence of the themes was designated, the research was able to delve into the intricacies of teaching in urban schools. The instructors were candid and honest about the many different spectrums of their careers. They were able to provide insight to sufficiently answer the posed research questions. After collecting the data, it was concluded, based on the conversations with the participants, that race is very critical in urban classrooms. It is critical in understanding the cause and action of their students, understanding their mistakes, being critical in your responses to them and utilizing the educational arena in the best way possible. “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex and class is often rooted in the fear that the classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passion will not be contained. (hooks, 1994). Cultural understanding and diversity in a classroom does not serve the purpose of replacing other classroom standards. “Some folks think that everyone who supports cultural diversity wants to replace one dictatorship of knowing with another, changing one set way of thinking for another. This is perhaps the gravest misperception of cultural diversity. (hooks, 1994). Some participants confirmed this idea when speaking of the strain to involve administration in their work to include culture in the classroom. Many of the participants admitted to doing so without the consent of their administrative team. Previous literature also continues to dote on the concept of the achievement gap but does not always consult those who have such a large impact on the students—instructors. It was apparent throughout the research that these instructors were

ready for their voices to be heard. They were critical in their speech and steadfast and willing to share any knowledge that they possessed on the subject to assist. The older participants noted that many of the same issues faced by students more than fifteen years ago are still being faced now. So, their question for me was, “Well, what can we do? We are ready for our voices to be heard and understood. I am pleased to have been able to allow their voices and opinions to shine on such an important manner.

More dated research does not include the opinions of instructors. The data is collected by sociologists and humanists or anthropologists. This is not to say that these opinions are not valued but there is a question of the presence of the stakeholders in educational policy and superintendents and principals and instructors to fill the gaps where the research is missing. “Educators tend to judge the credibility and diminish the literacy experiences occurring in low-income, African American homes because the experiences do not fit mainstream literacy practices (Compton-Lilly, 2008).” Biculturalism in the classroom is also a piece that is discussed as it highlights the need for cultural awareness in a classroom and a large need for that awareness in urban classrooms with impoverished youth. The hardships typically faced by children of low socioeconomic status (SES) and those are most effected by that low SES are Black and Brown people. Recent and dated research suggests that the SES of AA creates a chain effect that negates the effect of SES on educational attainment.

Instructors in urban schools must create safe spaces for their students. Often times, the low-income African American students are affected by obstacles unseen or unnoticed by instructors. When gone unnoticed, it is not considering as something that is adding to or sole reasoning for hinder the academic development of the students.

So as I wrapped up my data collection, it was apparent in the data that the instructors shared many a sentiment with that of the myriad of authors cited throughout the literature review and idealism of theory. When detailing the hardships of the

participants' students, they easily coincided with literature on the effects that poverty has on African American families. There were direct parallels poverty and generational poverty and the demanding lives of instructors who must take on these issues just as their teachers do. Coding the data had no difficulty because of the true honesty of the participants and their passion throughout the interview. The millennials of the participatory group seemed to be the most vocal and verbose in their honesty on the racial issues, whereas the more seasoned participants spoke in chants on the issues of social climate and class status. The range of age was important for this study and provided a nice spectrum of information for the data.

For research question number, I found that each participant took some part of their personal experience and applied it to their teaching habits. Whether negative memories were made sure to never be a part of their classroom or if there were certain aspects that were learned behavior that seemed necessary for their classroom, it all existed and pervaded consistently through all participants. There was a mix of those who were raised in low SES and those who were not but they all were understanding of the struggle regardless of experience. Those who had been exposed to low SES in their early lives made heavy mention to it and it seemed to be the reason for their actions and understanding of their students. Whereas the two participants who did not grow up in the means of low SES suggested that they were still learning and growing with their students and their needs.

Research question number two is when the participants began to open up more about who they feel they are as instructors as well as people, and how that affects their pedagogical approach. They considered some of the earlier questions of the interview that pertained to their personal lives and began to inadvertently reference those previous answers in those pertaining to how they viewed themselves and what effect that had on their students. The relationship between teacher and student in this instance became

clear. Every participant in their own way discussed that they made the choice to teach in urban schools because it felt right and because they believed in the power of the Black community. In that regard, race/class status was a factor but did not change the love for the community. With that love came understanding even if they did not immediately understand from experience. And with all the understanding came action or even requests for actions.

With the final research question, the interviewers began to make their experiences in teaching in urban schools tangible. There was action to their attitude and such eloquent and passionate discussion about how the Black plight is alive and well so they would be remiss to not include it in their classroom. Participants Kenya and Kayla say that it was part of their purpose as a teacher to be able to teach Black faces and grow Black spirits in the classroom. In a current climate where race is removing the moniker of being the elephant in the room, it was important, especially for my younger participants to always consider who they were and who their students were culturally because they have experienced having their culture silenced and did not want that in their educational space.

Though the research questions were answered, there was much room for improvement and implications and limitations to discuss that are below.

### Implications and Limitations

This research is significant because it displays a side of this research that is, again, often overlooked. The scholars and scientists are approached to design answers and fix an issue that they do not witness or involve themselves with on a day-to-day basis. Instructors do, however. This research shall act as a catalyst for advancement of education for African American youth and the dismantling of the achievement gap. As

powerful as one would like this research to be, it just was not enough. I believe that this research required more participants to be more valuable. Additionally, comparable data from more academically adept schools would have, too, added more validity to the research. When conducting the interviews, I considering my questions to be thought-provoking, however for such a convoluted topic, there should be much more depth and additional content must be covered. There was no discussion surrounding educational policy and inequity in urban areas. Education is extremely political and that facet must be addressed in order to further the discussion. Without the sustenance of political theory and education policy, the conversation seems to lack depth because some of what the instructors mentioned was not included in the research because the educational policy research was not present. Ultimately, I suggest a more diverse pool of participants and substantial attention to detail because of the many levels of American education and African American culture and history.

In conclusion, the research proved to be moderately successful but lacking the depth needed to discuss such a heavy topic. I would be remiss if I did not provide honesty and full disclosure in saying that. Providing the participants with more in depth questions would have thoroughly benefitted this research and the progress in minimizing or closing the achievement gap. The world will never be perfect but one step in the right direction is still a step worth taking.

APPENDICES APPENDIX A: SURVEY

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

TABLE 1.1

TABLE 1.2



## APPENDIX A: SURVEY

To Reveal the Invisible and Start Conversations | 99

**Fig 7.3** The “Who Owns What?” Survey

**Directions:** Given the following situations, determine who should have the most responsibility for it by placing a number 1 in that box. The second most responsible person will get a 2, third gets a 3, and the one least responsible gets a 4.

<b>S=student P=parent T=teacher A=administrator</b>	S	P	T	A
1. Student tardy for school.				
2. Student tardy for class.				
3. Students bullied at school often.				
4. Homework not getting finished.				
5. Learning in the classroom.				
6. Student with poor hygiene.				
7. Enforcing school dress code.				
8. Most students failing a test in one class.				
9. Student performance on state-standardized tests.				
10. Care and maintenance of school property.				
11. Warm/welcoming school.				
12. Teacher attitudes toward students.				
13. Teacher morale.				
14. Repeated misbehavior by students.				
15. Student attendance rates.				
16. Students' desire to come to school.				
17. Teachers' desire to come to school.				
18. Parent involvement/concern/support.				
19. Ensuring conditions for student success.				
20. Graduation rates.				

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What was your educational experience like growing up—at school as well as at home?
2. How do you feel those experiences shaped you as an instructor?
3. What do you think can be added to your instruction method or style that would better benefit your students, if anything?
4. Discuss how you promote biculturalism in your classroom.
5. Do you concern yourself with your students' home/personal lives? If so, why and how?
6. What are some issues that your students face inside and outside the classroom that you believe affects their abilities to learn, retain information and perform academic duties, if any?
7. In regards to the issues aforementioned by yourself as well as outlined in the questionnaire, how does your administrative team assist with these issues?
8. If in any way, how does your administrative team assist you in addressing said issues?
9. Does standardized testing and other state educational requirements/benchmarks control your administrators expectations of your teaching styles or limit you in the classroom?

\*Additional questions/responses may arise through unfiltered conversation.

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Georgia State University  
Department of African American Studies  
Informed Consent

Title: THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM: A NARRATIVE STUDY ON INSTRUCTORS' NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE BEHAVIOR & SCHOOLING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela

Co-Investigator: Dr. Kristina Brezicha, Dr. Sarita Davis

Student Principal Investigator: Dia Bennett

### I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate instructors' need to understand the behavior and schooling of African American youth of low socioeconomic status. You are invited to participate because you are an instructor who teaches African American students of low socioeconomic status in urban schools. A total of six participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require approximately two hours of your time over a span of four to ten days.

The purpose of this research is to gather detailed information from the instructors of African American youth of low socioeconomic status who often times are victims of the academic achievement gap. Gaining this knowledge from you will aide in closing this achievement gap and lend to the discussion amongst those change-agents in the urban educational sphere.

### II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign and return this Informed Consent form along with a Confidentiality Agreement. After you have read, signed and returned those forms, the researcher will make copies to return to you. Next, you will be asked to fill out a demographic survey and also a survey to gather some background information on what you value and expect from your students and also during this time you will schedule a time for an in-person interview with the researcher to collect information for this narrative study. These interviews will be audio recorded and will be immediately destroyed after publication of final document. Post interview, you will be allowed to view the interview transcription if you would like. This should take up to two hours of your time over a span of four to ten days.

The participants will range in age from 23 to 65 years old.

The interviews will be held at Atlanta-Fulton Public Library located at One Margaret Mitchell Square NW, Atlanta, GA 30303.

This will conclude your participation in the study.

### III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

### IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. Personally, you may benefit from your personal narrative possibly being a catalyst for growth in the educational realm. Overall, we hope to gain information about African American youth of low socioeconomic status and urban school systems.

### V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dia Bennett, the student investigator will be the only person allowed access to your personal information. In the research, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use pseudonyms rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a folder on the student investigator's personal computer in a password encrypted folder that only that investigator has access to. Information will be immediately destroyed after final publication of document. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

### VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Principal Investigator, Dr. Makungu Akinyela at (404) 413-5141 or the Student Investigator, Dia Bennett, at (708) 764-0128 if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

### VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below. (If the study involves recording this sentence will need to state, "If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio or video recorded {choose which applies}, please sign below.")

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Participant

Date

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Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

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## APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender identity?
4. What is your race/nationality?
5. Where are you from?
6. How long have you been teaching?
7. Have you taught in both urban and traditional school settings?
8. What do you like most about teaching?
9. What do you like least about teaching?

TABLE 4.1

	Age	Gender	Race/Nationality	Hometown	# Years Teaching	Like About Teaching	Like Least About Teaching
<b>Delores</b>	39	Female	African American	Atlanta, GA	15	“Learning new ideas and concepts”	“Inequity of resources”
<b>Tasha</b>	40	Female	Black/African American	Detroit, MI	13	“The students understanding and enjoying and thriving from what I teach them”	“Students/parents that are closed minded causing damage and roadblocks”
<b>Anne</b>	69	Female	African American	Atlanta, GA	35	“The opportunity to show my love for books, to help mold great minds, to see students achieve and provide students with the best academic experience possible”	Sometimes the lack of (students’) parents involvement in learning”
<b>Kenya</b>	23	Female	African American	Brooklyn, NY	6 months	“The ability to be able to shape young minds. You don’t have to just teach them about math and science. You can teach them about being good human beings and how to treat others. You can teach them about themselves. There’s no limit to education.”	“Sometimes it feels like a babysitting job. I don’t think teachers get enough credit”
<b>Kayla</b>	24	Female	African American	Baltimore, MD	2	“Seeing the students progress	“The restrictive curriculum

						from the beginning of year to the end of year. Whether minuet ore significant, it is truly rewarding.”	I am bound to. My students could be reading so many more books that would stimulate their minds but we are restricted to only the books the district chooses.
<b>Justice</b>	23	Female	African American	New Orleans, LA	2	“I love building relationships with my students.”	“I hate the fact that I know some of my kids are being failed by the system.”



TABLE 4.2

Table 4.2: Coding and Themes

Research Questions	Coding Themes
<p>What is the relationship between instructors' personal educational experiences and teaching methods?</p>	<p><i>VALUES</i>            Value of education in early life             Their education deemed important at home/during childhood             Their education not deemed as important             Lack or presence of parental involvement</p>
<p>What is the relationship between the instructors' race/class status and their pedagogical approach?</p>	<p><i>BELIEFS</i>            Found common ground in shared experience             Empathetic to students overt and covert issues             Alternative instruction and direction methods             Made concessions and additions to their instruction and involvement with students without being asked or obligated to do so.</p>
<p>Do instructors believe urban classrooms require cultural awareness and sensitivity from their instructors in order to improve educational attainment for African American youth of low socioeconomic status?</p>	<p><i>ATTITUDES</i>            Classroom climate             Mention of classroom instruction and lesson plans that are shifted to address race and culture             Involves culture in the discussion without obligation</p>

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