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Abstract

Education is said to be the great equalizer in the American society; however, poverty has shaped the educational experience for black and brown students in urban communities, like Syracuse, New York. White flight and unequal housing practices—redlining and the production of highway systems created segregated housing patterns, which in turn has altered how we think about integrated schooling in America. *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled racial segregation unconstitutional; however, white supremacy managed to find a way around the system. Today, Syracuse is plagued with poverty, dilapidated schools, and a below average graduation rate. Not only are students exposed to subpar school conditions as compared to their white counterparts in neighboring towns, but the lack of resources continues to keep black and brown students from competing in the race for equity. As we move toward implementing policies and procedures to undo hundreds of years of educational oppression, culturally relevant pedagogy is one of the methods, educators can utilize in order to make deeper connections with their students, embrace cultural diversity, and minimize behavior mismanagement in the classroom. The lives of urban youth deserve an education system that will prepare them to challenge the social, economic, and political inequities, and address literacies to make higher education opportunities more realistic and attainable.

SHIFTING FROM EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY TO EDUCATIONAL EQUITY:
BRINGING HOPE TO OUR URBAN YOUTH

by

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B.A., University of Richmond, 2014

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master's in Cultural Foundation of Education.

Syracuse University
May 2019

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Acknowledgements:

“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

-Audre Lorde

I dedicate this work to my students: past, present and future. You all have been the driving force that has enabled me to get through this program. You have motivated me to keep my head up and encouraged me when the roads darkened. I dedicate this work to my family and friends for supporting me through this journey and listening to me speak passionately about education and the inequities facing black and brown students. Lastly, I want to thank the city of Syracuse for awakening me to the beauty and resilience that lies within this city. For the time that I have lived here, I have seen community members rally behind each other to rewrite a history and for that I appreciate it you. Uprooting my life has been an adventure and an eye-opening self-discovery.

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Introduction

bell hooks (1994) wrote, “the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere” (7). It is quite evident that urban schools are failing. Failing, not because they choose to be subpar educational facilities, but failing in the sense that they are not measuring up to their counterparts. Given the overwhelming body of evidence that reveals decades of funding and structural inequalities between schools in high- and low-income communities, it is illogical to compare schools across these communities and then decry urban schools as failures (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008, p.1), even as the achievement gap between the two continues to widen. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) stated, “when one set of schools is given the resources necessary to succeed and another group of schools is not, we have predetermined winners and losers. In this scenario, failure is not actually the result of failing. On the one hand, urban schools are producing academic failure at alarming rates; at the same time, they are doing this inside a systematic structural design that essentially predetermines their failure (1). This predetermined failure has gone on for quite some time, dating back to the 1950s and 60s, when blacks fought for integrated schooling, thus creating their own schools in communities devastated by white flight, wrought by factory sewage, and separated by the erection of highways. Urban schools are not failing, they just happen to be the losers in this educational equation. Urban schools have been taken hostage by institutional racism and continue to open their doors every school year and serve an underserved community of black and brown students with dreams and aspirations for a better future.

At some point, we must come to grips with the fact that we are not a nation of opportunity for all but a nation built upon grand narratives of opportunity for all. It is no accident

that for centuries our non-white and poor communities have been disproportionately represented among our perpetually poor and poorly educated. It is not accident that those born into poverty overwhelmingly remain in poverty and those born in wealth overwhelmingly remain wealthy and that the gap between these two groups is at an all-time high. The predictability of this inequality is not borne from a system of meritocracy but from a system of oligarchy. We must address this structural reality if we are ever to develop a system of education that is meaningful for economically disenfranchised communities (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008, p. 5) Urban schools are particular by design, but eclectic at the core. It is important to know the history behind urban schools: how they were created and how they have managed to survive thus far; however, when we think about urban education reform, we must change our approach. In changing our approach to urban education reform, we have to shift our focus from a defeatist approach. We can no longer focus on what urban schools lack, because the bodies of evidence tell us of the alarming disparities.

One of the ways schools are beginning to change how students are learning is through culturally relevant pedagogy¹. A few scholars have used this term or some variant of it to discuss their own ethnographic work and the importance of its implementation in urban communities. Within this work, culturally relevant pedagogy is a framework that is being used to discuss not only its importance to students of color, but also its importance in changing the ways in which curriculum is designed, taught and performed within urban contexts. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) mentioned that “a critical pedagogy of urban education would push us toward fundamentally changing the ethos of K-12 education from one of knowledge consumption to one

¹ The term culturally relevant pedagogy will be used to interchangeably with critical pedagogy, engaged pedagogy, critically relevant pedagogy, and reality pedagogy. Each of these terms are used to talk about how to engage students within the classroom by bringing together the course content with their cultural context.

of knowledge production” (169). bell hooks (1994) stated, “when education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process” (21). Additionally, Stovall (2006) adapts hooks’ (1994) version of engaged pedagogy to reference the change in roles to a facilitator-researcher experience, where the concept of facilitating entails engaging students to shape the class throughout its progression (586).

Nearly 60 years ago, a culmination of five cases overturned the “separate but equal” ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The “separate but equal” policy that legalized state-sanctioned racial segregation violated the 14th Amendment was found unconstitutional by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. *Brown v. Board of Education* is one of the most profound and highly cited Supreme Court cases of our time. The decision prefaced that black and white children cannot be schooled separately. Although this may seem as no surprise because the United States has battled with civil rights and equality for some time before this case, *Brown v. Board of Education* is important for a few reasons.

Moreover, official policies designed to end segregated education have been consistently undermined and defeated by white resistance and refusal. In the *Brown* decision, the Court conceded that government bodies had played a crucial role in promoting and preserving racial differences by limiting black students to separate and therefore inherently unequal educations. Yet while ruling against de jure segregation in the abstract, the decision provided no means for dismantling the structures that crafted advantages for white students out of the disadvantages of students of color (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 33-4). Like the decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, the *Brown* decision worked in favor of prioritizing the rights of whites over the equality over school

spaces for blacks. Without regard to the privileges afforded to whites, the Court allowed sanctions of the *Brown* decision to manifest itself at the discretion of white privilege. Whites were able to use their privilege to ultimately determine how they sought to implement the new ruling within public schools.

Integration, however, at least in the way it is currently structured and implemented, has not led to the goal sought by Blacks: a quality education for Black children or, at least, minimum equity. Thus, when *Brown II* directed the schools to desegregate “with all deliberate speed” rather than immediately, it articulated a new and heretofore unknown approach to rectifying violation of constitutional rights – an approach that invited defiance and delay. It is clear that the nature of the injury to Black children was not what defined the scope of the remedy; rather the level of white resistance dictated the parameters of the remedy (Harris, 1993, p. 1755-6). The Court allowed the white perpetrators of discrimination “to control, manage, postpone, and if necessary, thwart change” (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 34). The *Brown* ruling made the road to integrating schools a vicious battle. For about a decade, many schools delayed desegregation efforts and instead implemented token forms of integration. When President Lyndon Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act into law, it took only 5 years for the South, which had been the most segregated area in the country, to become the most desegregated region (Asycue, Siegel-Hawley, & Kucsera, 2018, p. 6). Unfortunately, desegregation efforts only lasted as long as it was implemented. In the mid-1970s, however, a shift occurred that began to limit the extent to which desegregation could and would occur (Asycue et al., 2018, p. 7).

Brown v. Board of Education definitely had positive and negative effects for all those involved; however, for the hundreds of black and brown students who yearned for an equal education, the negatives outweighed the positives. From the North to the South, black and brown

children were being forced out of their spaces into integrated schools that continued to separate and segregate. Four years after the ruling, the Little Rock School District did the unthinkable, by a vote of 19, 470 to 7,561 to keep its public high schools closed rather than desegregate them. The following year, Governor Orval Faubus pressured the school board into leasing the public high schools to the Little Rock Private Corporation (LRPSC); however, it was quickly stopped by an injunction won by the NAACP (Kirk, 2018). A few states northeast, Prince Edward County in Virginia was met by mass resistance to school desegregation efforts. On May 1, 1959, instead of integrating its schools, the county instead closed its entire public-school system for five years. The Prince Edward Foundation created a series of private schools to educate the county's white children (Virginia Museum of History & Culture).

Approximately 500 miles north, the city of Syracuse experienced its own frustrations with school desegregation policies. Most schools in Syracuse were racially imbalanced. There were two majority Negro elementary schools (more than 50 percent Negro) and 25 predominately white (more than 90 percent white) elementary schools. Six schools were racially balanced. The two majority Negro schools enrolled 58 percent of the Negro elementary students. The one predominately Negro junior high school enrolled more than one-third of the Negro junior high school students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 3). Of the three predominately black schools in Syracuse, two were proposed for closure during the 1965-66 school year, which meant the black and brown families were to attend one of the predominately white schools, and today we feel the effects of white flight, segregation, and failing schools looking for restoration.

As stated before, it is evident that urban schools are in need of dire assistance. When talking about urban schools within this context, I am explicitly referencing district schools within

the public school system. The assistance needed varies from needing more teachers, better functioning spaces, updated technology and technology centers, culturally relevant curriculum, and funding; however, one of the most critical student needs is for teachers to employ culturally relevant pedagogy within their classrooms. From my personal experience as an educator and the research I have conducted over the year by scholars who are engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy, black and brown students need it. They need an outlet in which to connect their personal and cultural experiences to the course content, whether that be during the academic school year and integrated within the curriculum, or through afterschool and summer programs. For my qualitative research study, I looked at the connection between housing and school segregation within the city of Syracuse, which lead me to a research study about spatial and learning dynamics within schools. One of the key elements that connects most of the findings is around culturally relevant pedagogy – the lack and importance of it within the context of urban schools, and how it can be used to minimize classroom behaviors and maximize learning.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore —
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over —
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

-Langston Hughes, 1951 (Hughes, 1951).

Dreams. What do dreams look like as a child? Do they change over time? What causes one to dream into a sleep-like state with nothing but a care in the world. Life is like a dream, gently placing each of us in a position to aspire to great things. Many of us make it to the dream, many of us make it through the dream, and some of us never reach it. Life just seems like a dream, passing through with no intention to pick us up along the way. No intention to allow us to enjoy the moment while it stays. A dream...for many, it is here today and gone tomorrow. We all have dreams of being, of doing, of saying; yet, many times our dreams fade away and with each day, life's expectations become generational and the generation becomes a curse. For the youth in Syracuse, New York, what happens to a dream deferred, Langston?

Education continues to be one of the most pressing social justice issues of our time, especially for Black and Hispanic students. It has been over 60 years since the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, which declared the overrule of the “separate but equal” clause unconstitutional. School desegregation has been seen as not simply a means of providing African American students with access to the physical and financial resources of predominately

white schools, but also as means of enabling them to share in social and social psychological assets of white classmates (Bankston, III & Caldas, 1996, p. 537). African Americans were demanding the removal of any and all legal barriers that prohibited them from equal educational opportunities. After the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, African American students continued to face discrimination and violence in efforts of integrating white schools. A look back on the Little Rock Nine at Little Rock Central High School in 1957 and Ruby Bridges at William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans in 1960, are just two of the many cases where black and brown bodies were threatened in the pursuit of school desegregation and equal educational opportunities.

Research conducted in the 50 years following *Brown* reveal that problematic trends persist in spite of the rhetoric of reconciliation and progress. America's classrooms and schools remain, for the large part, racially and socioeconomically segregated spaces. There are also huge spending discrepancies between the wealthiest and poorest districts and large gaps in academic achievement. More importantly, these schools fail to offer students the access they need to a quality education—an education that will largely determine their access to a well-paying stable job and the skills needed for critical citizenship in a multicultural democracy (Morrell, 2006, p. 111). Despite the gaps, scholars like Morrell (2006) have worked to create and implement programs where students become activists and take charge of resisting institutional and systemic issues of race and power around education. The activist approach is not new to the black and brown community, especially when it comes to education. Morrell (2006) and a few colleagues assembled a seminar at the University of California—Los Angeles Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) in which local teens were apprenticed as critical researchers who developed and carried out research projects in urban schools and communities (112). For six

summers, beginning in 1999, the youth collaborated for five weeks. Each summer produced a different topic – articulation of the Educational Bill of Rights and understanding of the state-mandated School Accountability Report Cards. Throughout the five weeks of the seminar the students read seminal works on the sociology of education and critical methods of educational research; they developed research questions, read relevant literature, collected and analyzed data, and created research reports; and they presented these reports to university faculty, policy makers, and, on occasion, to regional and national conferences of educational researchers and practitioners. Students also wrote individual papers where they contemplated practical applications of their research to the issues in their own schools and communities (Morrell, 2006, p. 114-5). Culturally relevant pedagogy has the potential as seen in this case, when given the tools, the youth can initiate research opportunities as a tool for advocacy and change in urban schools.

During the Summer 2002, the students conducted extensive research on school accountability report cards in which local actors would have the tools to assess the degree to which their schools adequately preparing their children (Morrell, 2006, p. 120). Therefore, they conducted a survey to gauge the opinions of their peers around the inequities in the public schools in order to make positive changes. Morrell (2006) reflected, “based on our critical research, we are able to see the obvious discrepancies that exist in our educational system. We could see that students do care about their education and that they want the same opportunities that the upper class has. They want equal access to quality resources. We were able to see that what the students want and what they deserve differ greatly from what they receive. Students in urban schools are not being given the same opportunity as students in the more affluent schools (122).

Being critical researchers is not the only in which urban youth can initiate change. Jocson (2006) emphasized that for youth whose voices and experience have been largely ignored in the schooling process, poetry acts as a site for critical transitions. It promotes a space for recognizing silenced voices and a place for writing selves within an “aesthetic safety zone” to claim and develop a sense of being (129). Jocson (2006) utilizes poetry as a form of empowerment for students to be able to express themselves and allows them to express their own “truths.” Similarly, in the Syracuse community, Syracuse University professor, Dr. Marcelle Haddix founded Writing Our Lives in 2009 after hearing parents’ dissatisfaction with the school system and experiencing her own frustrations (Krisel, 2014). In an interview, Haddix stated, “we’re kind of building on the momentum and the energy nationally and globally, where young people are organizing in ways to resist systems of oppression and power in their communities by raising their voices through writing and public speaking.” It is evident that student have pride in their education and given the platform to express their opinions, they embody how culturally relevant pedagogy makes a difference in their educational experiences. Additionally, our urban youth are aware of the pressing issues within their communities and programs such as the one implemented at UCLA and Writing Our Lives in Syracuse allow students to become activists and learn the importance of developing critical research from their own placement in society. These opportunities allow students to be in spaces where they are affirmed and where they see the opportunities to make a difference with their peers and adults who support their activist approach towards change in their communities.

Concentration of Poverty on the *RISE*

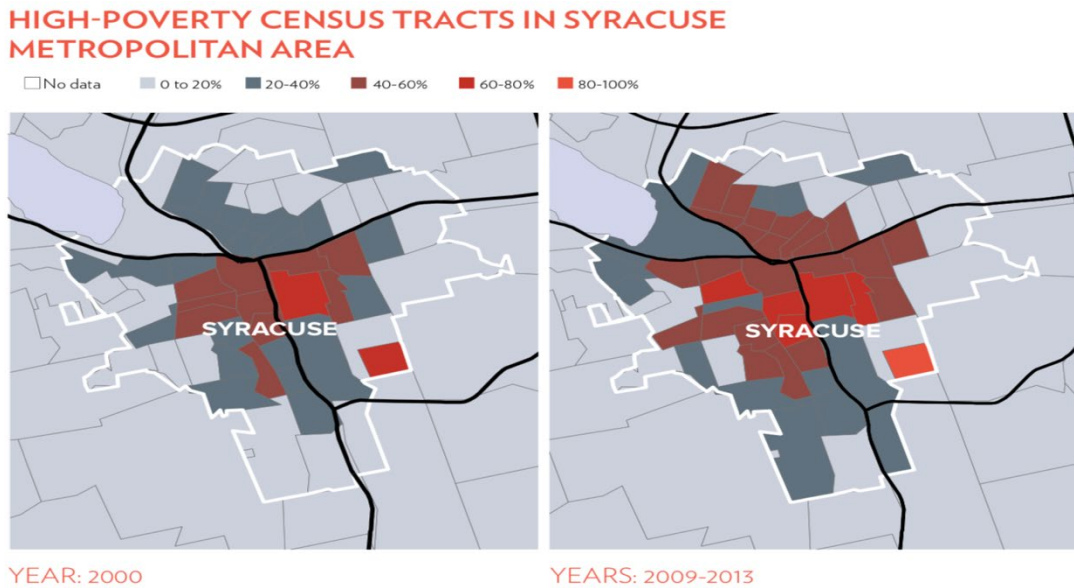
It is quite evident that segregation today does not look like it did 50-60 years ago. There are no “white only” or “colored only” signs written across public facilities, and although the

tangible signs of a scarred past are not visible, segregated spaces are thriving. Pockets of concentrated segregation continue impede urban neighborhoods and overflow into the school systems, and it is not by accident. It is as though whiteness as a status, a form of racialized privileges ratified in law (Harris, 1993, p. 1745) has intentionally created these segregated spaces where black and brown bodies are struggling. Something important, however, is being left out of this conversation: namely, that we are witnessing a nationwide return of concentrated poverty that is racial in nature, and that this expansion and continued existence of high-poverty ghettos and barrios is no accident (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 1). The Washington Post published an article, “America is more diverse than ever — but still segregated,” to praise efforts of diversification and expose the fact that racial segregation continues to permeate across the nation. Some 50 years ago, policies like the Fair Housing Act and the Voting Rights Act were enacted to increase integration, promote equity, combat discrimination and dismantle the lingering legacy of Jim Crow laws. But a Washington Post analysis shows that some cities remain deeply segregated — even as the country itself becomes more diverse (Williams & Emamdjomeh, 2018). This should not come to a surprise to anyone, simply due to the fact that enclaves of black and brown bodies are thriving. They are thriving to reproduce the same poor conditions that seem to crust over them and fail to produce four-year college bound students year after year. The cycle is never-ending and reform efforts have yet to pinpoint the exact root of the issue.

Concentration of poverty focuses on the spatial organization of poverty and is conceptually distinct from poverty measured at the individual or family level (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 8). There have been major shifts in the concentration of poverty overtime in mostly larger metropolitan areas; however, the phenomenon grew fastest in small to mid-size metropolitan

areas (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 8). In fact, the number of high-poverty tracts more than doubled, rising from twelve to thirty in Syracuse.

Figure 1: High-Poverty Census Tracts in Syracuse Metropolitan Area



Source: Jargowsky, *The Architecture of Segregation* Report (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 9).

As a result, Syracuse now has the highest level of poverty concentration among blacks and Hispanics (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 8) in the nation. Concentration of poverty or “racialized” poverty is a structural problem that has been embedded in the roots of black and brown communities, like Syracuse, and come to fester into the residential neighborhoods creating racialized stratification of people throughout each part of the city (Syracuse); affecting the schools, the racial demographics, student achievement, graduation rates and test scores. High-poverty neighborhoods produce high-poverty schools, both the school and neighborhood contexts affect student achievement (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 10).

Across the five high schools in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD): Fowler, Henninger, Corcoran, Nottingham, and Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, it is evident

that some students are graduating, but what happens to dreams, aspirations and achievement of the rest of the students, if not all of the students, who have to navigate through their poverty-stricken communities? What does life look like for them? Everyone has a dream, but what happens to a dream that cannot see beyond generational poverty, dilapidated communities, subpar school resources, faculty and staff who don't resemble them? Segregated schools are not effectively motivating students of color to achieve academic success beyond high school. This is due in part to residential segregation, which has created an influx of predominately minority schools throughout the Syracuse City School District. With the help of students, teachers, staff, administration and community members, my partner and I were able to take a deeper look into Syracuse, New York — we wanted to see race in the making of education.

School Desegregation Upstate

New York has the most segregated schools in the country — in 2009, black and Latino students in the state has the highest concentration in intensely-segregated public schools (less than 10% white enrollment), the lowest exposure to white students, and the most uneven distribution with white students across the schools (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. vi). Not only is New York home to one of the most segregated public school systems in the nation, but segregated spaces have traveled through the state and claimed home in Syracuse. Around the time of Reagan's administration, the state moved away from desegregation efforts and instead focused on other practices and policies like accountability systems, school choice, and charter schools (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. vi). Not only does this say a lot about the local and political efforts of the state, but it says a lot about the importance of education for marginalized youth. Efforts to reach racial balance across public school systems became official policy in 1960. In early 1963, Allen directed each district with a school enrolling more than 50% of black students

to report how it will eliminate racial imbalance — also referred to as the “Allen directive,” (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. vi) and during that year, Syracuse began efforts to desegregate. Syracuse’s approach to the problems of school segregation and educational equality was typical of many American cities. Responding to community conflict over racial imbalance in the early 1960’s, the school board denied that school desegregation was its proper concern (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 1). Today, it seems as though the efforts to desegregate Syracuse City schools were short lived.

In 1962, racial imbalance in Syracuse schools emerged when the Board of Education considered proposals for a boundary change to relieve overcrowding at the Sumner Elementary School; although most schools at the time were already racially imbalanced (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 1) due to the fact that mostly white people lived in the suburbs surrounding the city. At the time, there were two majority Negro elementary schools (more than 50 percent Negro) and 25 predominately white (more than 90 percent white) elementary schools. The two majority Negro schools enrolled 58 percent of the Negro elementary students. The one predominately Negro junior high school enrolled more than one-third of the Negro junior high school students (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 3). The problem of school segregation was then brought to the attention of the Board of Education and CORE. One board member, David H. Jaquith stated, “I don’t accept the premise that racial imbalance creates any kind of missed opportunity. I don’t think the school should accept responsibility for solving what is basically a housing problem” (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 3). Therefore, suggesting school segregation and the redrawing of boundary lines would not be an issue if there were not a housing problem, even though the housing problem was creating in part by white flight from urban communities to the

suburbs. As with the rest of the country, civil rights protest began in Syracuse. In response to board member Jaquith, Washington Irving, the one predominately Negro elementary school was boycotted for a day. The boycott was the first in a series of actions by the Syracuse Negro community designed to pressure school authorities to provide quality, desegregated education for Negro children (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 3).

As a result, there were two factors that contributed to the final decision to begin desegregation in Syracuse. First, then-mayor William F. Walsh called for the formation of an Education Study Committee under the aegis of the State of Commission for Human Rights as a result of community protests. Second, then New York State Commissioner of Education, Dr. James E. Allen, Jr. required all school districts in the State to report on the extent of racial imbalance in their schools and on their policies and plans to eliminate it (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 3). By 1963, the process towards desegregation was underway with opposition. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights stated:

“some opposition arose among white parents in districts where the Irving children would attend school. At one of the receiving schools, parents formed an organization to preserve neighborhood school assignment. This group, the Council for Better Education, argued that busing would downgrade the schools, and the middle-income families would move to the suburbs. The solution to Negro students’ educational problems, a Council member said, was more compensatory programs. Criticizing the school board for terminating the Madison Area Project, the Council for Better Education called for a public referendum on the question of school desegregation a few days before the board was to vote...” (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 6).

However, the proposed plan led to the closing of one predominately black school and the end to the Madison Area Project, an education program created by the Syracuse Board of Education to improve education on two of the three predominately black schools.

For the first time, most Negro children were attending predominately white schools, and white students had Negro classmates. Most of the teachers in the receiving schools were white

with little experience teaching racially mixed classes (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1968, p. 9). With the help of a steady plan in place, bussing, parents and teachers were effectively able to implement desegregation through the school district. During this period, communities throughout the state used local and other avenues to garner support for desegregation or racial balance in schools (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 14). However, because the plan was confined to the city, rather than the general metropolitan area, schools quickly hit what was seen as a tipping point at which middle-class students—and many teachers—fled. Before long, Syracuse, like many cities, was in the business of trying to fix its de facto segregation, high-poverty neighborhoods and schools (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 26).

School Segregation on Persists

Today, segregated spaces can be find all throughout the city of Syracuse from the Northside to Southside, the Eastside to the Westside, large concentrations of diverse and poverty-stricken communities exist. In the famous 1966 Coleman Report, Dowling and Borman (2010) determined that the racial/ethnic and social class composition of a student's school are 1 ¾ times more important than a student's individual race/ethnicity or social class for understanding educational outcomes (Dowling & Borman, 2010). Now even more, students are adversely affected by their high-poverty neighborhoods and schools. The Civil Rights Project at UCLA shared some rather stark data about Syracuse City schools. During the 1989-1990 school year, the district was 58.1% white, 36.8% black, and 2.8% Latino; however, in the 2010-2011 school year, the district was 26.8% white, 53.8% black, and 11.8% Latino (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 2). The percentage of white students decreased by over 50%, whereas the percentage of black students enrolled nearly doubled, which is proof that a shift towards residential segregation to the suburbs is causing school segregation. Syracuse University's School of Education

professor, Dr. Mario Rios Perez explained, “it’s important to consider how schools represent local communities when trying to understand segregation in schools. Schools will be shaped the way the residential patterns are shaped” (Siu, 2014). Whether we want to believe it or not, school segregation is an issue in Syracuse and although bussing improved efforts to desegregate during the 60s, it placed a temporary band-aid on a deeper racial conflict.

A majority of minority students (black, Latino and Asian) attend predominately minority schools throughout the Syracuse City School District. Mostly due in part to their residential neighborhoods which have produced these schools. As whites moved out toward the suburbs, they pushed blacks and other minorities within the inner-ring of the city, thus effecting the effectiveness of equal and excellent desegregated schools. Many racially diverse schools lack true integration. For example, Charles Clotfelter’s research on interracial contact among students since desegregation indicates that within-school segregation increases as the percentage of blacks in the student body increases. According to Clotfelter, schools between 30 and 60 percent black show the highest rates of segregation (Tyson, 2011, p. 8), which affects student achievement in a multitude of ways. In this case, student achievement looks examines graduation rates of the five high schools in Syracuse, as well as the impact of lack of exposure to white students. This is important in order to understand the ways in which segregated schooling affects the achievement of black and brown students, and if it does what needs to be done to ensure true desegregation is the key to overhauling issues of high-poverty within Syracuse’s neighborhoods and schools.

Similarly, substantial support exists in the literature for a neighborhood effect on achievement. Wilson (1987) argued that many of the negative outcomes observed in high-poverty neighborhoods, including high levels of dropping and low levels of student achievement, can be attributed to “concentration effects.” Children in high-poverty neighborhoods “seldom

interact on a sustained basis with people who are employed,” and that causes students to question the value of education (Jargowsky & Komi, 2009, p. 4). Therefore, the effects of living in high-poverty communities affect the social interactions of minority students. Currently, there are 32 schools in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). Of those 31 schools, five of them are high schools serving over 6,000 students. As of the 2016-2017 school year, the following data shows the some of the patterns thriving within high-poverty schools in the city. Based on the data

Figure 2: SCSD Race and Graduation Rates (2016-2017 SY)

School (2016-17 SY)	Total Students	% White	% Black	% Hispanic or Latino	Graduation Rate
Henninger HS	1,790	0.30	0.447	0.117	0.62 (+0.01)
Nottingham. HS	1,344	0.204	0.568	0.082	0.64 (-0.02)
Corcoran HS	1,429	0.169	0.637	0.118	0.58 (-0.06)
Fowler HS	267	0.217	0.427	0.228	0.50 (+0.06)
ITC HS	551	0.187	0.584	0.132	0.87 (-0.02)

Source: New York State Education Department (NYSED) (Syracuse City School District).

provided from the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the percentage of white students in the district is approximately 21.5%; whereas the percentages of black and Hispanic or Latino students is 53.3% and 13.5%, respectively. According to the research from Charles Clotfelter, Syracuse City high schools are racial segregated. Each of the five schools contains populations of black students between 30 and 60 percent, with the most students attending Corcoran High School. To say that America is diverse is one thing, but to see the reversal of desegregation taking place in communities, such as Syracuse is a testament to the fact that segregation never left after all. Whites have been protected by laws to create their own spaces around the real issues.

School Segregation on Student Achievement

Attitudinal differences toward schooling among low- and middle-to-high income students stem from a variety of internal and external factors, including difficulty level and relevance of the learning materials that are provided to students in different school settings. Schools serving low-income and segregated neighborhoods have been shown to provide less challenging curricula than schools in more affluent communities that serve populations of white and Asian students. The impact of the standards and accountability era has been felt more acutely in minority-segregated schools where a focus on rote skills and memorization, in many instances, takes the place of create, engaging teaching (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 28). Segregation, in short, has strong and lasting impacts on students' success in school and later life (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 29). To examine the effects of Syracuse's high-poverty neighborhoods on schools and student achievement, we decided to go into one of the local public high schools and interview students, teachers, staff and administration to better understand what is going on within the school walls. Are the city's graduation rates reflective of the poor local and political attitudes towards minorities, or do they reflect student's unwillingness to cooperate during the school day?

In order to conduct our mini-study, we went to a local high school and asked a series of questions regarding goals and aspirations, levels of support from teachers and administrators, resources that should be in their communities, inequalities noticed throughout the schools, and even differences in treatment of black and white students. Most of the students were very nervous at first to speak about their experiences at the high school, but after a while, many of them were sharing their different experiences. As noted, segregation does not look the same as it did 50 years ago; however, it exists today and for many of the youth in Syracuse, segregation does not exist, yet they are able to see and feel mistreatment from people who look nothing like

them. One white student, a graduating senior did not realize the extent of her privilege. When asked about her day to day routines and how she travels to school, she stated, “My day is fine. I enjoy it here. Now that I’m 18, I can drive to school.” We did not ask the number of students who drive versus who use public transportation. Furthermore, what startled us the most from her response was the way in which she was easily able to use the word “colored” twice to refer to her black and brown classmates. This says a lot about what is happening within the homes and even classmates of white students. It is evident that peer influences have a lot to do with student achievement, but how other students see the minority-majority dichotomy speaks volumes of the atmosphere within segregated schools.

Racially and socioeconomically isolated schools are strongly related to an array of factors that limit educational opportunities and outcomes. These factors include less experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less successful peer groups, and inadequate facilities and learning materials (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 27). Student achievement goes beyond the neighborhoods, but within the schools. Students are looking for teachers and administrators to be supportive in any way possible to ensure students are on the right track. Some students and even a security guard mentioned not having adequate representation in the schools. The security guard, who has been working at a local Syracuse City high school for about four years, stated, “there are only about um...two teachers of color.” When asked why representation is important for the students at the school, he mentioned that they need to be able to see what success looks like, that they are possibilities beyond graduating. Students can go out and become something and do great things. In an article entitled, “The Importance of Student Representation,” Young (2018) provided the following:

Role models play an important part in our everyday lives. They motivate us. They inspire us. They challenge us. They guide us. But what exactly is it about role models that

empower us so much? As we witness and admire the successes of our role models, whether it be an experience, hobby, talent, career, or goal, then we're more likely to believe that we're capable of the same things. In addition, if our role models can connect with us on a more personal level, there is the potential for a deeper, more meaningful relationship to form.

Representation matters, but it especially matters within schools. A 2016 U.S. Department of Education report notes that while American students have never been more diverse, minority teachers make up only 18 percent of America's educators and only 20 percent of public school principals. While racial diversity is important in any field, it is especially crucial when racial congruency—or lack thereof—affects young people in schools (Tuten, 2018). With the lack of teacher representation in the Syracuse City schools, this may directly impact student achievement, especially in cases where behavioral issues become race-based issues. But exactly why does representation matter in urban schools? Many practitioners, policymakers, and others in the education community have claimed that minority teachers are uniquely positioned to improve the performance of minority students directly and indirectly, by serving as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators for those students. Additionally, assignment to a demographically similar teacher may also affect student achievement more directly if teachers display unintended biases or different expectations for students with different demographic traits than their own (Egalite, Kisda, & Winters, 2015, 44-5).

Imagine student experiences and interactions with their peers if they were able to engage with administrators, teachers and school personnel who looked like them, or who grew up and live in their neighborhoods. Students are able to make deeper more impactful connections both in and out of the classroom. According to Egalite et al. (2015), they were able to find small but significant positive effects when black and white students are assigned to race-congruent teachers in reading and for black, white, and Asian/Pacific Island students in math (45). Thus, it is important to truly engage students, we must reach out to them in ways that are culturally and

linguistically responsive and appropriate, and we must examine the cultural assumptions and stereotypes we bring into the classroom that hinder interconnectedness (“Culture in the Classroom,” n.d.). With the lack of diversity amongst administration and teachers, dreams and aspirations of black and brown students not only become deferred, but there becomes a lack of engagement when students are not exposed to resources that have the potential of moving them beyond generational stereotypical labels.

Aside from the student experiences at the local Syracuse City high school, student achievement is examined in other ways — test scores and graduation rates. As of 2017, the overall graduation rate for Syracuse City School District is 60% (“SCSD Graduation Rate,” n.d.). Across each of the five high schools, the graduation rates range from 50% at Fowler to 87% at Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central. Although 60% is relative to the national average, it is about 20 percentage points lower than that of New York State. We see that students are graduating, but what is happening to those who graduate and stay in Syracuse? Poverty can be a generational cycle and for most, it is hard to escape the harsh realities; however, in Syracuse city, segregated spaces have become a way of life. For older folks who have lived through the desegregation plans, times have gotten “worsen” as one woman told us, but for the youth, these times do not resemble the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 60s for equality. Many students feel as though they live in a diverse city yet attend a majority-minority school.

There is correlation between the concentrated poverty and average student achievement that exists in the Syracuse City School District. There is ample research that pinpoints Syracuse as being a heavily concentrated city with black and Latino populations. There are many questions still left unanswered and still in search of needing to be explored. If New York State officials do not see it as their problem to solve, then who is going to assist Syracuse residents in

uplifting the burden of segregation from their neighborhoods and schools. All children have dreams, but for some they have been deferred by teachers who have failed to see past the racial barriers, and for others poverty has chained them down from being able to find a way out. Studies have shown that desegregated settings are associated with heightened academic achievement for minority students, with no corresponding detrimental impact for white students (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 30). It is time to we all pitch in, and rather than place blame on failed agendas, we work together give new life and hope to Syracuse residents, but ultimately the students.

All in all, something needs to be done to address segregation in Syracuse. The research and comments from students, administrators and community members, suggest that there is a problem. Students should not be held accountable for the political actions of the white man to keep black and brown bodies from learning. It has been over 50 years since Syracuse first implemented a desegregation plan, and now it seems as though the only way to ameliorate the problem to desegregate yet again. In Langston Hughes' infamous poem, Harlem, he begins by asking, "what happens to a dream deferred?" In a city riddled by poverty, crime, violence and average graduation rates, we need to continue to ask ourselves what dreams and aspirations we have for the black and brown bodies in Syracuse, in addition to determining what the purpose of education is in a city that seems to be left behind.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods

“I mean I made the classroom as conducive to delivering instruction as I could with what I had and um...it’s not...”

-Ms. C, teacher at school in the Syracuse City School District

This research examines the impact on housing segregation, laws and policies such as redlining and the Federal Housing Act are directly correlated to reproducing segregated schooling in Syracuse, New York. Additionally, this research strictly involved samples of qualitative research design from interviews with school teachers and administrators to classroom observations that lead to the research questions that guided this study:

The research questions included:

- What do the implications of segregation (housing and schooling) have on black and brown students in urban classrooms?
- How does access to school-wide inclusionary practices for diverse student populations affect academic and social integration within school spaces?
- How can the works of critical theorists influence how teachers navigate segregated school spaces?

In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and school administrators (preferably a Vice Principal or Principal). In addition to interviews, field observations were taken within an elementary classroom of a school within the Syracuse City School District. This chapter provides the rationale for the research study and includes the research methodology and researcher positionality in the context of the study. Furthermore, a brief discussion is offered on the researcher site and recruitment of participants, description of sample, data collection and analysis, risks and ethics, and limitations of the study.

Rationale for Study

This thesis includes a qualitative research approach including field observations and in-depth interviews to better understand the classroom learning dynamics for diverse populations and to justify how the school district is managing changes that drastically impact their strategic planning around improving the academic performance of students within the school district. I decided to focus on access to school-wide inclusionary practices with particular interest on schools with “diverse” student body populations, because when we think about inclusion and inclusivity within schools, it is focused on two groups – students with disabilities and English Language Learners. Not to diminish the importance of these two groups, but inclusion within school culture and curricula must include every single student who occupies space within the school building. Additionally, the systems that are in place in many of the school districts around the nation are not conducive to creating positive and successful learning experiences for all of their students.

Scholarly articles have been written about the benefits of school inclusive practices, the impact of school segregation and integration, studies on school management structures, but I have not read anything that encompasses all of these elements with particular interest on access. According to the Inclusive Schools Network (2015), effective models of inclusive education not only benefit students with disabilities, but also create an environment in which every student, including those who do not have disabilities, has the opportunity to flourish. As magnificent as this sounds, the Inclusive Schools Network, along with Land (2004), who wrote “Effective Teaching Practices for Students in Inclusive Classrooms,” fail to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy within their works to frame educational practices that are inherently linked to a

students' funds of knowledge². Land (2004) stated, "even with well-planned inclusive services, general education teachers and co-teaching teams often struggle with how to effectively teach students with disabilities." She continues to provide tips for inclusive practices with disregard to culturally relevant pedagogy, which is an important aspect of inclusive practices within classrooms. Inclusive classrooms are connected to bridging the gap between students with disabilities and general education classrooms; therefore, the role of culturally relevant pedagogy will be imperative in understanding ways to engage students of color within school settings and the curricula to further impact their academic achievement. The dialectical nature of critical theory enables the educational researcher to see the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation (McLaren, 2003, p. 70). My research focused on how schools within SCSD provide access to school-wide inclusion. In my preliminary data collection, there were some observations that did not exactly correlate to the promises of the school district, and I want to make sure that schools in the district provide equal educational opportunities for all students and embrace diverse learning practices and spaces.

Methodology

For the purpose of utilizing student experiences to create changes to teaching practices and curricula, this research uses culturally responsive pedagogy as a framework to understand the qualitative research study conducted. Additionally, the use of funds of knowledge is a way to assist educators in understanding how students bring their knowledge into the classroom. As a

² Funds of knowledge refers to the skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture, and argue that integrating funds of knowledge into classroom activities creates a richer and more-highly scaffolded learning experience for students (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Here the use of funds of knowledge is a way to frame and enhance culturally relevant pedagogy. They are not the same thing. Funds of knowledge are brought into the classroom and teachers can activate these knowledges in order to enhance student learning.

dual approach, both culturally responsive pedagogy and funds of knowledge can forge the gap between the home and school communities, thus creating greater engagement and academic attainment, as well as minimizing behavioral management (or criminalization) of black and brown students. The rationale for using culturally relevant pedagogy is due to a greater need for students to engage in the “white man’s curriculum.” Students are often bored and not in tune with the material being taught which results in behavioral issues; however, the use of culturally relevant pedagogy can be used to mitigate lack of interest and widespread behaviors. When teachers are able to connect with student’s funds of knowledge, they are able to create a curriculum geared towards their students. Scholars have taken their own approach to culturally relevant pedagogy to better engage students, promote learning and activism within school settings and their communities.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) stated, “to implement critical pedagogy in urban contexts, it is vital that educators identify and articulate the vehicle for delivering critical pedagogy (critical research, critical media literacy, etc.). This vehicle must be intriguing enough to generate student engagement and relevant enough to warrant student investment. Vehicles for implementing critical pedagogy should draw from culturally relevant material that builds on students’ existing knowledge base (i.e. popular culture, language, culture, history)” (171-72). An equitable education is better defined as culturally relevant education in that it is designed to address the material conditions of students’ lives while maintaining high level of intellectual rigor. At the same time, an equitable education encourages students to embrace the sociocultural richness of the community as a resource, rather than as a barrier to be overcome (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 618). Emdin (2016) argues that teachers need to fundamentally shift their scope of teaching in order to incorporate more culturally relevant pedagogy. This approach to

teaching advocates for a consideration of the culture of the students in determining the ways in which they are taught (Emdin, 2016, p. 10). Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy as the next step toward positing effective pedagogical practice in a theoretical model that not only affirms their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions perpetuate) (469). Another aspect of culturally relevant pedagogy is the use of funds of knowledge, which represents a positive (and, we argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 134). From there, critical pedagogues can and should build bridges into other forms of knowledge that will give students access to the codes that allow them to crack into, extract resources from, and change dominant institutions. Critical pedagogues should also create opportunities for students to use what they are learning in ways that directly impact their lives. This means developing a curriculum and pedagogy that address the material concerns of students and their communities (education, housing, justice, jobs, etc.) and that permit and encourage students to use what they are learning to act upon those concerns. In addition, critical pedagogy should offer opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned, to evaluate their work, and to move forward with their work on the basis of the knowledge gained from that reflection (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008, p. 172).

By utilizing a culturally relevant pedagogy as my research methodology promotes an understanding of how educators, both teachers and school administrators alike can better adapt to the changing nature of urban education. Not only are urban schools segregated with black and brown students, but school districts like Syracuse City, need to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy to engage the diverse array of students within their schools. Through connecting with

teachers and administrators in interviews, I was able to gather telling information towards understanding how disproportionate resources are for the schools within the district.

Research Site and Participant Recruitment

This study took place at an elementary school in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). I chose to use the Syracuse City School District as my research site due to the increasing levels of poverty and segregation within the school district and the surrounding area. In fact, the number of high-poverty tracts more than doubled, rising from twelve to thirty in Syracuse. As a result, Syracuse now has the highest level of poverty concentration among blacks and Hispanics (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 9) in the nation. Concentration of poverty or “racialized” poverty is a structural problem that has been embedded in the roots of black and brown communities, like Syracuse, and come to fester into the residential neighborhoods creating racialized stratification of people throughout each part of the city (Syracuse); affecting the schools, the racial demographics, student achievement, graduation rates and test scores. High-poverty neighborhoods produce high-poverty schools, both the school and neighborhood contexts affect student achievement (Jargowsky, 2015, p. 10). The SCSD is comprised of 32 elementary through high schools and five alternative programs spread across the city. It is clear throughout the city that the state of black and brown students is an issue, and the appropriate steps need to be put in place to ensure educational equity in a city that is underfunded and overlooked.

When I began my research, my initial research question focused on access to academic and social integration for migrant and refugee populations, and I chose SCSD, because it is a refugee hub with growing populations of migrants and refugees. English Language Learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing population of students in the American school

system (“Professional Development,” 2011), half of whom do not speak English well enough to be considered fluent English speakers (Calderon, Slavin & Sanchez, 2011, p. 104). ELLs play a pivotal role in the changes taking place in the American education system. According to Faltis, de Jong, Ramirez & Okhremtchouk (2014), “as a result this demographic shift will considerably alter population trends and needs in the K-12 educational system” (7). ELLs are a culturally and linguistically diverse group of students. Many are immigrants who immigrate to America for a better life or to live with family members who have already established themselves, others maybe refugees or asylum seekers who come from countries where the living conditions are life threatening. However, as I continued to conduct my research, I realized that SCSD would be a great site not only because of the diverse study body, but also because Syracuse is one of the poorest cities in America that has succumbed to the shutdown of major companies, white flight, and segregation within the housing market and school district. SCSD is home to over 21,000 students from various parts of the city and countries such as Somalia and Ethiopia.

For this study, I chose this particular school due to a connection I had with one of their teachers, which made it easier for me to conduct my research. In addition to reaching out to the teacher, I sent a few emails to the principal of the school. I wanted to conduct research at each level: primary and secondary, but due to the time constraints, I decided to complete observations and interviews within the primary school setting. The interactions amongst students from different ethnicities and races, the interaction between students and teachers, the interactions between students and administrators, the “testing” culture, access to school-specific resources, and the benefits and challenges associated with working in a public school setting. There were different classroom settings within the research site of the study. Due to the nature of my original

research question, both fourth grade classroom, the first classroom did not have as many English Language Learners as the second class I observed, two compared to eight.

The only people I recruited for my research were the teacher I had prior connections with and one of the vice principals I met during my initial field observations. I spoke briefly with the vice principal and followed with an email to establish a date and time to conduct an in-depth interview. The email communicated that the in-depth interviews would be recorded, transcribed and only to be used for the nature of this research. I made clear that participants would remain anonymous. The one-on-one interviews were conducted in spaces within the school building that provided the participants with a level of comfortability. Prior to conducting the interviews, I told the participants of the rationale behind the research study and the benefit of their responses. At the end of the interviews, I followed up with a thank you email for their time and commitment to the social justice educational research I was conducting.

Description of Sample

Over the course of two months, I conducted three classroom observations. Two took place in Room 130, and one took place in Room 129. In order to get a variety of observation results, I decided to change the days and times I observed. For example, my first observation took place on a Wednesday morning from approximately 9:15am-11:30am. There were two weeks in between each observation. I went on a Monday from noon to dismissal, and a Tuesday morning, where I spent the entire day leaving right before dismissal. During my observations, I was able to see the school staff, teachers and students in different elements. I was even able to gauge changes that took place during the weeks I did not observe. Between my first and second observations, the students in Room 130 had their seats rearranged, which caught me off guard because I had to readjust myself to their new arrangements.

Students from Room 129: There were 15 students in the class, although the class had seating for approximately 20 students. The students were taught by a white, male teacher from the Northeast. The students who occupied the classroom came from different backgrounds similar to that of Room 130. There were approximately 8 students who were English Language Learners (ELLs), who were receiving additional assistance during small group instruction.

Room 129 is smaller than Room 130 but is designed for fourth graders. The seats are arranged in three rows facing the SmartBoard and chalkboard with poster pages of mathematical instructional signage. There is a small desk next to the SmartBoard where the teacher sits during instruction. Along the right side of the desks, there is a row of 5 desks facing the windows. An area near the door, the teacher has a table with up to 5 or 6 chairs for small group instruction. The teacher's desk is in the back of the classroom and a table sits next to the desk, possibly for small group instruction. Next the table, there is a library clearly labeled with signs, such as fiction, nonfiction, sports, etc. Along the wall behind the library, there is instructional signage. Students place their belongings on the back of their chairs.

Students from the Room 130: There was an array of diversity within Room 130. On the initial observation, the sample ($n = 20$) included 9 boys and 11 girls. Of the 20 students, the classroom's ethnic demographics were white, Asian, Black, and Latinx. There were two students who appeared to be Muslim by the garbs they were wearing. During the second observation, the sample grew by 3 ($n = 23$), although the teacher reported having approximately 26 students in the class. The students were taught by a Black, female teacher from Massachusetts.

On page 44, there is a sketch of Room 130 (not drawn to scale) that provides the reader with an idea of what the classroom's design. The classroom was rather small for fourth graders and included many elements beneficial for kindergarten and first grade rooms. The room was

arranged with a mixture of desks and tables where students were assigned seating. There was a space under the window where bookshelves and a plush pillow acted as the library, a bathroom in the corner, and in front of the SmartBoard, there was a carpeted seating area. Additionally, students were given a cubbies space for their personal belongings (backpacks, jackets, etc.) and a shelf near the SmartBoard with personalized boxes for their academic belongings (notebooks, worksheets, etc.) with their names on it. Three of the four walls were used for instructional signage or decorations, one of which was the row of windows facing the door.

Description of Interviewees

Two interviews were conducted for this study. Both of the interviewees were Black females, married, with children who work at the school as full-time employees. One of the interviewees is an elementary teacher and the other is the elementary school Vice Principal. Each of the interviews was unique in that I was able to spend a considerable amount of time talking to the interviewees. Because my research was conducted at a school, I had to be flexible with my interviews and my time.

The first interview was with SC and took place in the library due to her classroom windows being changed. She did not have a lot of time in between classes; therefore, our interview was broken into three parts over the course of the day. We started our interview around 10am, stopped for her to take the students to lunch, and continued around noon during the digital learning instruction for her class. I enjoyed this because I was able to see Mrs. C in her element with her students. Throughout our interview, her students would come to her with questions or she would pause to redirect behaviors and the noise level.

The second interview was with LB and took place in her office she shares with the principal. The interview took place after the lunch period and an interaction between a parent.

We were able to sit in the office and complete our interview in its entirety; although she was on-call whenever her walkie-talkie pinged for her, thus allowing me to see that as an administrator she spends a majority of her time around the school building interacting with students, teachers, support staff and parents.

Interviewee SC: The first interviewee is a teacher of the elementary school. She currently teaches one of the fourth grade classes. She is in her late forties and originally from Massachusetts. She has been in education for approximately 20 years and hopes to start her own afterschool program for high school students. She has taught in Massachusetts and the Caribbean, before moving to Syracuse approximately six years ago with her husband. Upon arriving to Syracuse, she started as a substitute teacher for the district. Due to increasing need, specifically for her, she was given a full-time role as a teacher at her current school, where she is working on completing her provisional certificate. Outside of teaching, she is doing work within the church overseen by her husband on the westside of Syracuse and works as a Chaplain at Syracuse University.

Interviewee LB: The second interviewee is the Vice Principal of the elementary school. She has worked in the field of education for approximately 20 years. She is a Syracuse native who attended LeMoyne College for her undergraduate career. She moved to a neighboring city in Upstate NY and began her teaching career before relocating back to the Syracuse area to continue working as a teacher. She happened into the Vice Principal position when the former Vice Principal left for maternity leave, and due to her great nature with the students and administration, she was eventually given the full-time role as Vice Principal. Throughout the days that I observed; the Vice Principal was rarely in her office. She would be monitoring the hallways, observing classrooms, or assisting with lunch and classroom management. Her long-

term goal is to become a principal of a school in the district. She is currently a mother of two and lives around the Syracuse city area.

Methods for Data Collection

I used participant observations and in-depth interviews as tools to gather data for this qualitative study. Reeves, Peller, Goldman, & Kitto (2013) stated, “through the collection of observations, interviews and documentary data, which are triangulated (i.e. compared and contrasted with one another) ethnographic research offers a qualitative approach with the potential to yield detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomenon (actions, behavior, interactions, beliefs) (1365). Ethnographic research allows the researcher to engage with the community as both a participant and an observer. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people (Glesne, 2015, p. 66). The ethnographer employs observations from the fieldsite, in-depth interviews, and an analysis of behaviors, patterns, themes of the site. The task of the ethnographer is not to determine “the truth” but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others’ lives. Furthermore, immersion enables the fieldworker to directly and forcibly experience for herself both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives, and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 2-3). I utilized participant-observation for this particular study. The researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know them and earns their trust, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 2). The ethnographic approach was the best way to observe and be part of the observations. As Emerson et al. (2015) stated earlier, an ethnographic approach allows the researcher to reveal multiple truths apparent in others’ lives,

and those truths will allow my research to add to the conversations around urban education reform, and ways to improve the state of black and brown students.

Participant Observations The first research method for this study was the use of participant observations. Participant observation provides the opportunity for acquiring the status of “trusted person.” Through being a part of a social setting, you learn firsthand how the actions of research participants correspond to their words; see patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected, as well as the expected; and develop a quality of trust, relationship, and obligation with others in the setting. Participant observation focuses first on the process and then on the researcher (Glesne, 2015, p. 63). For the participant observation, I chose three days spread apart by one to two weeks. During each visit, I spent approximately 3 hours at the site. I sat in the back of the classroom for each of the visits and occasionally positioned myself in proximity to the teacher during small group rotations in order to understand the academic and social nature of the students, and the teaching culture. I felt as though the participant observations would give me the most detailed information about the teacher, students and classroom dynamic, and thus by going for a couple hours I would be able to see classroom and school culture in action.

In-depth interviews The second research method for this study was the use of in-depth interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) write that in qualitative research, “the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the research can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (103). Interview questions that develop through observations are connected to known behavior (Glesne, 2015, p. 63). Participants were asked a series of in-depth, open-ended interview questions that covered topics such as challenges and benefits of working in the Syracuse City School District; what lead them to teaching in SCSD; opinions about the state of education in Syracuse; demographics of the classroom; and

challenges of working with English Language Learners (ELLs). At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time in person and via email.

Data Analysis

Upon completing my participant observations and in-depth interviews, I transcribed my notes. The transcription process for the interviews took hours longer than the participant observations. After transcribing the fieldnotes and interviews, I took a couple weeks off before coding each set. I thoroughly enjoyed the transcription process, because it allowed me to walk back through the observations and the interviews. I was able to recall student and teacher behaviors, as well as the participants' reactions towards responding to the questions they were most passionate about. For example, when talking to one of the teachers about their experience in SCSD, I could sense their frustrations with regard to the lack of resources necessary to implement components of the districts strategic plan. The coding process lead to themes that were undiscoverable at the beginning of the transcription process.

The data analysis lead to the identification of codes that lead to prominent themes throughout the observations and in-depth interviews. The data analysis was performed after the data collection process. The analysis of the in-depth interviews and participant observations were used to create memos from the coding and emerging themes. There was no specific pattern or technique when creating the coding categories and the emerging themes. As I reread through the transcriptions and field observations, I created themes after each sentence. Some of the emerging themes were in response to my initial research question but changed during the process.

Risks and Ethics

This qualitative research was centered on ensuring the safety and anonymity of the participants. Additionally, I chose to present my findings through observations and in-depth

interviews as accurate and thorough as possible. Ethics pertains to doing good and avoiding harm. Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles. Thus, the protection of human subjects or participants in any research study is imperative. Qualitative studies are frequently conducted in settings involving the participation of people in their everyday environments. Therefore, any research that includes people requires an awareness of the ethical issues that may be derived from such interactions (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001, p. 93). As an outsider of the school, I feel as though I gathered in-depth information to help me inform my research; however, after completing my data analysis, I felt as though my conversation with the Vice Principal would have been detailed if I conducted the interviews outside of school hours and if she knew me on a personal level. For example, when asked about challenges within the school district, I feel as though the VP was not as precise with her answer because of her position within the school ranks and having matriculated through Syracuse City schools.

As a participant-observer, I experienced the insider/outsider status. As an educator, I shared a few biases that I managed to keep under control. Some of the biases came from the ways in which the school and classroom culture were being conducted, as well as the role of teachers and administrators within the school and in meetings. One benefit of my insider status was that I had a sense of school and teaching culture. I was able to discern certain behaviors and strategies being used within the school; however, a limit to being an insider was that I had concerns about how the school was being operated. I saw actions from students, teachers and administrators that caused concerns and made me question the roles and responsibilities. There were times when I wanted to step out of my role as an observer and participate in ways that may have interfered with my connection with the school. I was never concerned about my

positionality within the research field site. As a Black woman, I felt as though I was part of the school community. Students knew I did not belong, but it never occurred to them to treat me as an outsider.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this research. First, this qualitative research study took place at one research site in the Syracuse City School District: a K-8 school on the Westside. By focusing on one site, it made it easier to center my data analysis; however, it did not provide a complex understanding of how the schools throughout the district are working to provide inclusionary academic and social practices. Future research studies could include multiple K-8 sites and/or a compare and contrast between elementary and secondary school practices and techniques. Additionally, a wider scope of schools would allow a future research study to create and implement strategies to improve teaching pedagogy and curricula to critically engage students inside and outside of the classroom.

A second limitation of the study is in relation to the participants of the in-depth interviews. For this study, I only interviewed one teacher and one administrator. A future research study could include interviews of 2-3 teachers per grade level and 2-3 administrators (deans, principals, operations assistants). Teachers come with a variety of resources and experiences that would better help me understand the role they play in the school, classroom and community. Administrators are able to shed light on aspects of the school culture and its operations that are essential to this research. Additionally, I would like to add student perspectives to a future study that were omitted from this study due to time constraints. By interviewing students, I want to better understand how they interpret the meaning of school, and what systems are working or need to be changed in order to make schools more accessible for

their academic and social growth. Student attitudes towards the administration have made way for great reform in higher education institutions that the same could be done in K-12 schools.

A third and final limitation of the study is the time spent conducting the research. For this study, I only spent less than a month conducting participant observations and in-depth interviews. A future research study could be conducted over the course one or two academic school years, by spending a few full days throughout the week. During the first year, I would like to create questions specific to inclusionary practices, and during the second year, I would like to create questions that are geared towards changes in the strategic plan to target the feedback process for teachers, an accountability plan for teachers and administrators, and ways in which the school is working towards improving student academic achievement.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I outlined the research design and methods of my study. I described the methodology, research site and participant recruitment, research sample, methods for data collection, data analysis, risks and ethics, and limitations. In the next chapter, I will present my research findings and important themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews and participant observations.

Chapter 3: Data Analysis

Do You See What I See?

During my initial qualitative field observations at a local Syracuse City School District school, I expected to observe things that would enrich my initial research question around English Language Learner's social and academic integration due to the increased flow of refugee and migrant populations within Central New York. Instead, what I found was rather informative to how academic success is directly correlated to school segregation amongst all school-aged children. Furthermore, the observations that I made allowed me to interpret meanings of how the spatial dynamics of schools are being used to either support and/or dissuade students from actively learning and engaging with each other. According to Talbert-Johnson (2004), "the underachievement of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in comparison to their mainstream peers continues to be a pervasive problem in urban education. It is not surprising that many of these students come from low income families, are African American and Latino American" (22-3).

The aspect of school segregation discovered throughout my observations is around the spatial dynamics of urban schools. Henry Barnard insisted that the "schoolhouse should be a temple, consecrated in prayer to the physical, intellectual, and the moral culture of every child," thus taking great pains to create an environment conducive to their educational goals (Cutler, 1989, p. 1-2). Many of the schools that our nation's most vulnerable children attend, especially those in economically strapped urban areas, are dilapidated and segregated. In addition to attending schools with crumbling structures and little financial and moral support, poor children also face a myriad of challenges brought on by structural and social inequality. Therefore, these children may be predisposed to fail because of the effects of poverty, racism, and hopelessness

that are evident in urban classrooms (Talbert-Johnson, 2004, p. 22-3). I find this to be particularly important in regard to the buildings and classrooms that our marginalized youth are being exposed to 180 days out of the year.

When I think about a school building or classroom, I think of a space that is pleasing to the eye upon arrival. Students have access to the surrounding space to loiter before and after school with their friends, classmates and staff members. Students are greeted by school administrators and teachers. Hallways are lined with instructional signage, student work and flyers for school events. Classroom doors are brightly labeled and designed with themes or subject-specific décor. Inside the classrooms, students have assigned seating, the décor is specific to grade level curriculum, computer carts sit in the corner, and a SmartBoard are placed on the wall. The ideal school and classroom are set up for the success of its students; however, for students who attend overcrowded, underfunded dilapidated schools in urban communities, this “ideal school” does not come close to what they encounter on a daily basis. Instead of promoting daydreams, many American public schools and classrooms are a nightmare for both students and teachers. By not allocating the necessary funding to maintain our schools, we are sabotaging the odds of students and teachers (Bergland, 2016).

My observations provided me insight on how social integration and academic success of low-income students are threatened when their learning environments are not conducive enough. Urban schools are inherently underfunded and overly segregated. That is fact. Additionally, urban schools lack resources compared to their mainstream counterparts; therefore, the inability to address the adverse effects of poverty directly affects academic achievement gap (Talbert-Johnson, 2004, p. 24). Prior to entering the school for my initial observations, I noticed the structure and placement of the school building. The school I visited was placed on the corner, a

block behind a main street on the west side of Syracuse. The school was built in 1929 and continues to stand 90 years later. Compared to other schools, time does not appear to have affected its structure. According to Joint Schools Construction Board (JSCB) in 2015, the city of Syracuse and the Syracuse City School District submitted a proposal to provide architectural and engineering services to restructure some of the city's schools. One of the schools on the list is the school where I conducted my qualitative research observations. Although the school does not appear to have structural damage, approximately \$5.3 million has been allotted for reconstruction, which is the lowest budget of the 7 city schools on the list. The mission of the JSCB is to reconstruct existing schools in order to create cutting edge learning environments which will be at the forefront of educational design and which will deliver the flexible spaces, instructional technology and social support necessary to accelerate student achievement beyond the NYS (New York State) Regents standards, and into the future (JSCB, 2015, p. 10). Bergland (2016) emphasized that a range of studies have confirmed the importance of spending money on school infrastructure, maintenance, and architectural design. In 2004, a nationwide study concluded that in order for American school districts to maximize attendance, and minimize drop-outs, they need to provide students, teachers, and administrators with higher quality school structures, and pay to maintain these schools. It is evident that the Joint Schools Construction Board and the Syracuse City School District are attempting to make strides to improve the school and classroom environments for the students.

Beyond the edifice of the school which represents the genesis of the American public education system, pass the hallways the lead one to various classrooms with students in grades K-5, the classroom is where the multitude of learning takes place. From my observations, the classroom dynamics greatly impact student learning and engagement, behavioral management

and classroom expectations. An understanding of the classroom structure and design would allow teachers, staff members, principals and parents to better understand the functionality of the space in the school and how beneficial it is for learning. Is there a positive relationship between the schoolhouse and the learning of knowledge and skills? Representing the National Council of Chief State School Officers, Dr. Edgar Fuller told a Congressional Committee in 1950 that “good facilities almost always result in better educational programs” (Cutler, 1989, p. 34). A good school building may not create a good school; however, a good school provides the space and resources for students, which is not the case in the classrooms that I visited. There were three aspects of the spatial dynamics of the classroom that I found problematic, and it interfered with active learning and engagement: classroom climate, digital divide, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

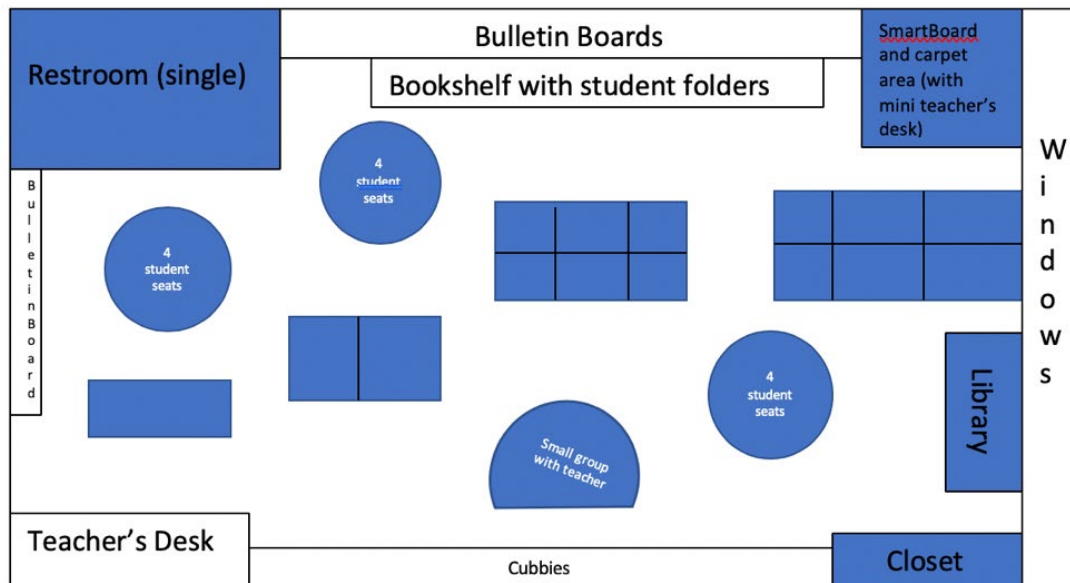
Classroom Climate During an interview, Sharon Castillo stated, “we spend our own money. So, to get \$300 is a blessing, but I mean I didn’t have it in August. I mean I made the classroom conducive to delivering instruction as I could with what I had and um, it’s not. I’m still waiting on the stuff I ordered you know maybe a little less than a month ago, because the whole district is ordering at the same time” (personal communication, November 13, 2018). As an educator, the classroom is your sacred space. You design it with the intent that your students will be able to benefit and utilize all of the features of the room. According to Pierce (1994), “the classroom is a critical locus for student interpersonal and educational development, where previous research has shown that student outcomes, such as subject matter achievement and attitude toward a school subject, might be improved by creating classroom environments that are more conducive to learning” (37). Moreover, there is a level of thought and precision that goes into designing and arranging the classroom at the beginning of the school year in order to

maximize student learning and engagement individually and amongst their peers. However, the recent attention given to testing and academic achievement, and sanctions for schools that fail to meet standards for growth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has not only dominated much of the education reform efforts, but as encouraged classroom teachers to focus more on immediate learning outcomes and less on classroom structure, where many of the practices that tend to reinforce the student's problems occur (Pierce, 1994, p. 37). Often, decisions concerning classroom organization are made without an understanding of the role played by classroom climate toward the ultimate achievement of these outcomes (Pierce, 1994; Matsumura, 2008). This is particularly important when working and navigating spaces occupied by "at-risk" learners within urban communities.

One of the most noticeable aspects of the classroom was the size and layout. I found the layout of the room very troublesome in producing a comfortable learning environment for the students. The space did not allow students to move about in structured way. I remember walking towards the classroom and upon reaching for the door, it was locked. One of the students was asked to open the door and I immediately walked over the teacher's desk, at the right of the door and sitting down. The appearance of the classroom was warm and inviting, but it did not feel suitable for fourth graders. For a fourth grade classroom, I expected an atmosphere where students would be able to grow into middle school students. I expected the students to occupy a space in which they would be able to grow academically and socially; however, they were confined to their assigned seats. Inside of the classroom, there were groups of tables where students sat facing three to four of their peers (see Figure 3), often engaging in conversations or talking during independent work time. Some of the "desks" were round tables, while others were a collection of desks that were in pairs or a set of 6. The teacher's body in front of the class was

positioned where their back faced the class, which was not necessarily intentional given the spatial accommodations and the number of students in the class. The teacher had a desk with a computer next to the SmartBoard, where she conducted whole group instruction. In front of the SmartBoard, there was a space with a carpet that was utilized during whole group instruction for students who could not see from certain parts of the classroom and during rotations with the paraprofessional. There were no other spaces in the classroom where students could utilize for independent practice. Even the space designated as the library had seating for one student to position themselves comfortably; however, the distance between the library and the nearest cluster of students allowed for additional distractions. The quality of the classroom climate and teacher-student relationships may be especially critical during students' transition to and through middle school (Matsumura et al., 2008, p. 294). In many classrooms transitioning from

Figure 3: Layout of Classroom 130 (not drawn to scale)



elementary to middle school, students have their own desks and are able to collaborate within one another. This classroom was nowhere close to providing students with the academic and social arrangements needed to be successful.

During my second observation, I walked into the classroom and went straight to the teacher's desk, as I had done in the past. I started the process of taking notes, when I noticed that the students were all working on different assignments. Some students were at their desks, some with the teacher and others were seated on the carpeted area for small group instruction with a paraprofessional. In this particular classroom, rotations are a time for students to complete different assignments within a certain amount of time. The students positioned themselves on the floor while the paraprofessional sat in the seat above them. Typically, this is a sight preserved for kindergarten and first grade classrooms, but with minimal space in the classroom, it is as if the teacher and the paraprofessional had to make do with the resources without regard to how it would impact student learning. While observing the rotations, I was baffled by how the windows were used to post instructional signage due to that lack of space on the walls. Depending on your positioning within the classroom it was hard to see the posters. On lunch break, I remember walking around the classroom to get a feel of the different angles of the classroom and feeling a sense of claustrophobia because everything was pushed together. As an educator, I prided myself on being able to maneuver through my classroom at the throughout the lesson and designed the seating arrangements in a way that students from every position could see the board or instructional signage. This is not always an easy feat given the dimensions of a classroom; however, it is important one to keep in mind. Students who may be seated in the back of the classroom with limited visibility to the board are often the easiest targets of behavior issues or distractions to their peers. Some of the other classrooms with lower grade levels occupied spaces that would better accommodate third-fifth grade students.

Perhaps the Syracuse City School District is taking the necessary steps to cultivate classroom climates conducive to higher levels of academic achievement and emotional well-

being across the city, but how many students must suffer in silence or on paper because their needs are not being considered? Pierce stated, “the term at risk appears to be a euphemism for students who exhibit a wide range of educational problems, including the failure to respond positively to the instruction offered in basic academic skills, the manifestation of unacceptable social behavior in school, the inability to keep up with their classmates in academic subjects, and a limited repertoire of experiences that provide background for formal education (37). Although these are complex characteristics of a much larger issue, the research shows the benefits of classroom and school climate on student learning in urban communities; yet, teachers cannot be pushed to accommodate the needs of their students with minimal to subpar resources.

Other elements of classroom climate involve the creation of safe spaces for students. Although the use of “safe space” is a term heavily aligned with institutions of higher education, it applies to K-12 schools as well. In the news, we are hearing more and more reports of students, black students, who are criminalized in schools by administrators, teachers and security guards (or school resource officers) for not following school rules or acting out. In Mrs. Castillo’s classroom, there were numerous misbehaviors; however, there were no guidelines for when student behaviors escalated. Throughout each of the lessons or rotations, Mrs. Castillo reminded students of the noise level and utilized a point system, known as ClassDojo, to log points. In our interview, Mrs. Castillo mentioned the Behavioral Intervention Center (BIC) and In-School Suspension (ISS) as two intervention measures taken by the school, but also cautioned that the school did not have a Dean of Students to help mitigate behaviors and implement restorative conversations with students. At a local high school in Syracuse, the security guard went on to say that there have been times when he was asked to removed black girls from the classroom because they had headscarves on which signified that they needed to get their hair done. He said that the

white teachers who were prone to follow the rules, were unable to allow these black girls stay in the class. Not only do students need to understand where teachers are coming from, but teachers need to understand where students are coming from,” he noted. Morris (2016) exclaimed:

“the criminalization of Black girls in schools is more than just a function of arrests on campus, or even the disparate use of exclusionary discipline—though those outcomes are certainly important to mapping the impact of punitive policies. Historic representations of Black femininity, coupled with contemporary memes—about “loud” Black girls who talk back to teachers, “ghetto” Black girls who fight in school hallways, and “ratchet” Black girls who chew dental dams like bubble gum in classrooms—have rendered Black girls subject to a public scrutiny that affects their ability to be properly situated in the racial justice and school-to-confinement narrative. What suffers is not only their ability to shape their identities as young scholars but also their ability to develop agency in shaping professional and personal futures where they can live with dignity, respect, and opportunity” (12-3).

This is not to say that Black boys are not being criminalized at the same rates, they are at disproportionate rates to their white counterparts; however, girls of color are dealing with challenges posed by racism but they’re also suffering as a result of adversity due to sexism. Additionally, poverty, high rates of trauma, and over-policed communities are compounded when already facing discrimination by staff in schools (Misra, 2018; Morris, 2016). What do we do when our students deal with the social, political and economic issues of everyday life, and then come to school, a “safe space” only to be mistreated and misperceived? School spaces are places where adults interact with children³ and instead of minimizing their experiences, educators have to begin or continue to provide socio-emotional supports to repair relationships and rebuild connections in order to provide safer learning conditions that promote academic success. According to Morris (2016), “when we prioritize discipline over learning in our educational institutions, we engage in a reactive politics that maintains a status quo of inequality (178);” thus she provides a few strategies to achieving equity amongst Black girls and their

³ Children is referring to students in K-12 educational system.

counterparts, which can be used holistically to shift the lens of how students are being disciplined in schools.

Furthermore, how do school staff (teachers, administrators, support staff, etc.) maintain a sense of support for their students when dealing with the lack of resources, behavioral issues, burnout, and a laundry of interrelated issues? Last year, a classmate and I conducted a mini-study at a local high school,⁴ where we learned firsthand how lack of representation and over-policing of black bodies impacted their day-to-day realities on the campus. In keeping with ways in which students garner support to enhance their academic performance, we noticed the disparities along racial lines between black and white students. One black student spoke about the impact of administrators on her academic achievement at the high school. She stated, “I don’t think administrators are supportive. I wanted to be a dental hygienist when I grew up, but my guidance counselor told me that I should change that because my science grade was not good.” Black and brown students already deal with the inadequate living and learning conditions, but for students to be exposed to educators who are not supportive in their dreams results in low academic achievement. The young lady has not even graduated from high school and already she is being weeded out of a STEM-related field, because of a low science grade that has potential to improve. Another group of young ladies who were interviewed mentioned, “I just wish they got on me,” in response to ways in which teachers and administrators could be more supportive. The white student from earlier mentioned that she feels more supportive from teachers and administrators but fails to see the same support system from her “colored” peers. Teachers are the most powerful influence on academic achievement in schools (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014, p. 27). Another student mentioned that he wants to find the legal way to do things, talking about

⁴ The local high school has been referenced throughout this work and will remain anonymous for safety purposes.

wanting to go to a two-year school, get into realty and establish his own business. The fact that high school students in high-poverty areas have to think about ways to make money legally is a testament to the conditions in which they live. There is an array of factors that contribute to the decline of student achievement, and high-poverty is one of them, especially when students do not have the support system to make an impact in their individual lives.

Digital Divide There are different elements from my qualitative research that are essential to understanding the spatial dynamics of predominately black and brown schools and classrooms throughout the nation. Sharon Castillo, one of my interviewees, shed light on a lot of issues that she continues to face within the SCSD. Each day, she attempts to provide instruction to nearly 26 students; however, without the proper resources, her delivery is nearly capsized and attempts to prepare 26 eager minds for academic achievement fail. Her frustrations were emphasized:

“I guess teaching in the urban school district is most challenging when the resources that you need are not prevalent. Right now, what their expectation is from the district level and what the trends are across education is with digital learning and using digital content to create personalized learning for kids. My greatest frustration is that they want us to do that, which I think is awesome, but we have eight computers to my 26 kids in the classroom. So, the management aspect of that for the teacher can be daunting when you’re told they need to be on this for 45 minutes a week, they need to do this many lessons in a week. I think the biggest thing that we don’t have, is that we don’t have the resources. You know they give us money; they give us requisition money. Three hundred dollars for the year to buy things that are going to help us carry out instruction. Even still Liverpool, every kid has a Chromebook. They’re one town over...How could we have poured that money into classrooms and got the technology we needed since you want us to do personalized learning?” (S. Castillo, personal communication, November 13, 2018).

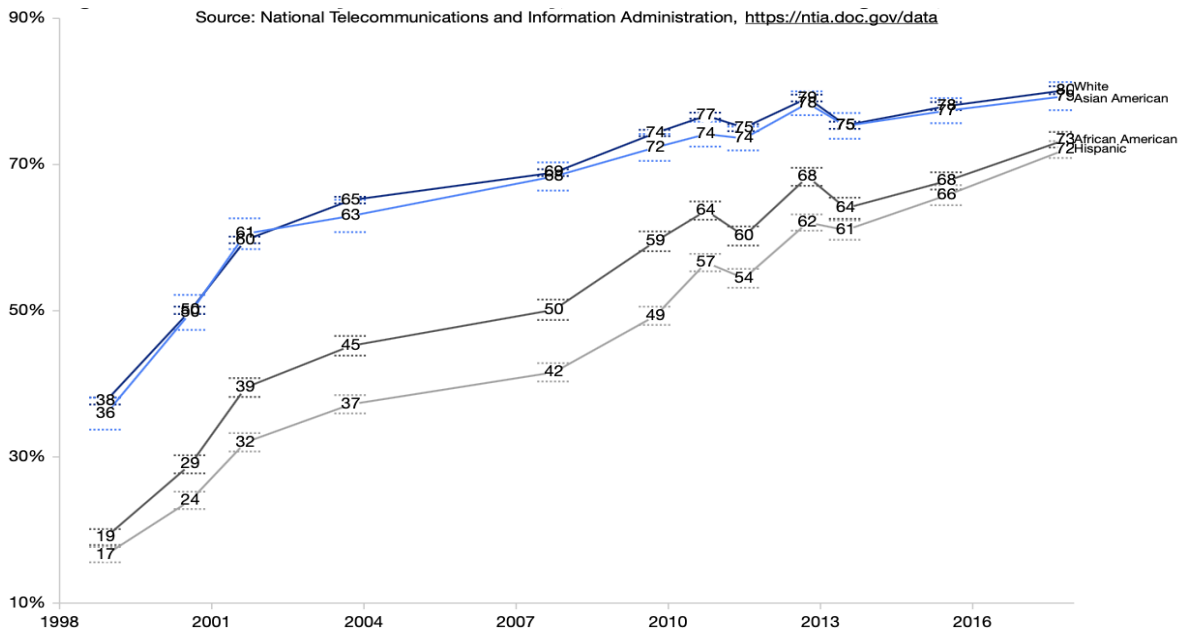
Sharon Castillo’s frustrations with the district mimic sentiments that many teachers around the nation feel when working in urban communities – a lot of progressive ideas with little to no funding to back these changes. One of the prominent foci of her frustrations is the implementation of digital learning and digital content, a recent phenomenon to school curricula;

however, only so much can be done when she has eight computers to divide amongst her 26 students. As many communities throughout the United States lack technological knowledge, equipment and advancement, this idea of the digital divide has become a potent issue within many aspects of society as it relates to the growing divide of digital access between the rich and the poor.

The “digital divide” refers to the growing gap or separation between underprivileged, who do not have adequate access and effective use of technology and privileged members of society, who have access to and can effectively use technology. The term “digital divide” refers to unequal access to information technology (“The Digital Divide,” n.d.; Tarman, 2003).

Although this may be true, the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information, David Redl (2018) stated that the digital divide is showing signs of giving way as more Americans from all walks of life connect to the Internet. Several historically disadvantaged groups showed significant increases in online adoption (“New Data in Internet Use”); however, these gains do not seem to be evident in urban schools where access to digital technologies continues to further the gap between urban and suburban communities like Syracuse City and Liverpool School Districts.

Figure 4: Usage of Technology and Internet (1998-2018) by Race



Source: Redl (2016) “New Data in Internet Use”

During my observations, I observed Mrs. Castillo’s frustrations with accessing digital technology for her entire class. Instead of having all the students use computers to complete digital content lessons, she had to rearrange her lesson plan to accommodate the eight computers at her disposal. In order to do so, she created “rotations,” where students would be tasked with specific assignments either in small groups or individually. One might wonder whether the digital divide is a new version of discrimination (Tarman, 2003, p. 5) that has infiltrated schools since the inception of the public school system in America, which was believed to eliminate the problems of the unequal distribution of property by increasing general wealth of society and consequently, improving the economic conditions of the poor (Tarman, 2003, p. 5). Additionally, Pearson (2001) mentioned that a 1999 report from the National Center for Education Statistics reported that in schools with a minority population greater than 50%, only 37% of the instructional rooms have computers. This is compared to 57% of instructional rooms in schools with a minority population less than 6% (390). Although these statistics may sound surprising,

they reflect the sentiments felt in Mrs. Castillo's 4th grade classroom over 20 years later. There are technological inequities that exist within schools. Students may have greater access to the Internet, but at what cost? Vick (2017) makes a great point that for many, phones become a substitute. Pew surveys from 2016 found more people have smartphones (77%) than have broadband (73%). But depending on a phone has drawbacks. Policymakers trade stories of kids' completing assignments by cadging wi-fi outside closed libraries or camping out in McDonald's. A lot of kids will try to do things on the phone, but they run out of data ("The Digital Divide," n.d.). Perhaps if schools and households had more access to the technological advances and Internet, students in urban communities would be able to not only complete their digital learning tasks at school, but also at home. We cannot have high expectations for students, teachers and schools to make advances in academic achievement without providing the resources to make such gains. With that being said, the sentiments of Mrs. Castillo and possibly other teachers at her school or within the school district are valid, especially when their students are constantly being compared to their peers in surrounding suburban areas.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Another vital component of working with youth in urban communities is around how critically engaging the curricula is for students. For many black and brown students, school and often the classroom becomes a place of boredom when not only the classroom climate is not appealing and an effective learning environment, but also when the curricula made for white students and taught by primarily white teachers is often out of reach. In her book, Ladson-Billings (1994) acknowledges that African American students continue to lag significantly behind their white counterparts on all standard measure of achievement (1) but provides a solution – culturally relevant pedagogy as the solution to teaching our most “at-risk” youth. Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, social,

emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 20). Additionally, Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students (33). In my own classroom, incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy was not a given. It was a fact of life. I knew that to ensure my students could actually understand the material, they needed to be able to see themselves doing the math or interacting with English literature; however, my observations also focused on the teaching dynamics that made these classrooms work wonders and culturally relevant pedagogy was often amiss.

Critical pedagogy is hotly discussed and highly debated in the academy. Increasingly, critical pedagogy is being discussed as a potential component of urban school reform, as educators and researchers look to critical pedagogy as they consider ways to motivate students, to develop literacies and numeracies of power, and to engage students and their communities in the struggle for education justice (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 49). Of the two classrooms I observed, I noticed the use of the critical pedagogy approach in relation to a history lesson on the Boston Tea Party and Boston Massacre. As Mr. Shader worked with a group of eight students, mostly English Language Learners (ELLs), he used the following example to assist his students in understanding the concept of the lesson, which was not only visionary, but the culturally relevant pedagogy that brings students of color into the lesson. Mr. Shader stated:

“If you heard something, draw a picture of anything to help you remember, so when you come back to it, you know what you thought about. So, we are trying to take notes.” Mr. Shader asked, “Who did they send to carry out the rules and laws? Bright red jackets, marching around.” A student across from him said the army. Mr. Shader responded,

“Yeah, so they sent soldiers.” He proceeded to tell the students, “I don’t like paying taxes, but they go to my government that I am part of...hopefully something we can use like schools. Our schools that you’re part of. How can we write...?” Another student said that they wrote they were unfair. Mr. Shader pushed, “Why were they unfair?” A student from a pair got up to sharpen their pencil. Mr. Shader provided another example. He said, “What if I had a stapler tax? You have to pay 10 cents any day you’re at the table, but you can’t use my stapler.” A student stated, “Wait!”

This is just an example using culturally relevant pedagogy within the context of a history lesson. The students were not only attentive but were able to make a connection with the lesson, because Mr. Shader utilized aspects of their everyday classroom experience – a stapler and money, to bring the students into the lesson and allow it to click.

Other scholars, such as David Stovall, Christopher Emdin and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade have recently spoken about the use of critical pedagogy in a multitude of ways and its impact on urban youth. Stovall (2006) and Emdin (2013) bring their own scholarly interests into the classroom. As an alternative to situations that are dehumanizing and depersonalized, the infusion of hip-hop culture can provide the context for students to develop a critical lens in approaching subject matter and its relevance to their daily lives. Hip-hop culture, as relevant to the lives of many high school students, can provide a bridge to ideas and tasks that promote critical understanding (Stovall, 2006, p. 589). Additionally, Morrell (2002) stated that the influence of rap as a voice of resistance for urban youth proliferates through artists who endeavor to bring an accurate yet critical depiction of the urban situation to a hip-hop generation. Given the social, cultural, and academic relevance of hip-hop music, a colleague and I (Morrell) designed a classroom unit that incorporated hip-hop music and culture into a traditional high school senior English poetry unit (74). Emdin (2013) utilizes his science background and interests in hip-hop to strength and support youth to see themselves as scientists through an idea called sciencemindedness, an amalgamation of scientifically aligned thinking, behaviors, and

understandings that all human beings possess, and then express both inside and outside of the science classroom (85).

The purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy, critical pedagogy, reality pedagogy or engaged pedagogy as termed by bell hooks (1994) emphasizes a need to empower students and enables them to become more confident within the classroom and enhances their critical approach to academia. Culturally relevant pedagogy needs to be encouraged and should be used as a tool for students in urban communities to protect their educational freedoms and rights. When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process (hooks, 1994, p. 21). My observations cannot speak for the entire district but imagine the power that teachers have when their students are enveloped in a curriculum designed with their academic needs in mind.

Conclusion

Our focus needs to look at urban schools as a whole: educational performance takes place in school buildings with lesser resources, substandard curriculum, unqualified teachers and administrators, and the resources that students bring to the spaces they occupy for 8-10 hours a day. The unique lives and conditions of urban youth deserve an education system that accomplished two goals in concert with one another: preparation to confront the conditions of social and economic inequity in their daily lives and access to the academic literacies (computational and linguistic) that make college attendance a realistic option (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008, p. 7). As an educator in urban schools, I have seen first-hand the struggles students face with access to schooling in their urban communities. Our students want the best education and the benefits that come with having access to a great education; however, those dreams fail to become a reality when students in urban schools are unable to make connections with the curriculum and relationships with their teachers and administrators. The fight for educational equality has been a long battle for marginalized people. It has been a battle that extends as far back as Fredrick Douglass and W.E.B. DuBois. A battle that continues to suggest that black and brown kids are undeserving of the obtaining an adequate “American” education.

For far too long, black and brown communities have taken the brunt of institutional racism, rigged politics and laws intended to better their access to equitable educational spaces; therefore, directly impacting their educational outcomes. These structures and countless others, shape what our urban youth are able to do, but it does not define what they have the potential to do. There is a long and tireless history that portrays these findings which remain true not only in Syracuse, but throughout many urban school districts throughout the nation. When it comes to urban education, there are countless pieces that make the puzzle inequitable. During my research

observations at schools throughout the Syracuse City School District, I encountered countless spaces that questioned the access to learning for all students either within the classroom, school or neighborhood. However, it is how I processed these observations toward ensuring the proper implementation of classroom climate, the digital divide, and culturally relevant pedagogy that will change the direction of the urban educational narrative for black and brown students.

Hope is a positive feeling that comes after a negative experience. Our ancestors hoped that we would have better access to education than they did, and we do. Each and every day, we hope that tomorrow will be better than yesterday. As educators, we bring hope into communities, schools and classrooms each and every day. We give our students the power to be hopeful to overcome generational stereotypes, to be better than their predecessors. As educators working in urban communities, it is our responsibility to undue to the structures of white supremacy embedded in the curriculum we are forced to teach our students. We need to be activists and nourish our students' knowledges so they can be their own activists within their communities. We bring the hope of an equitable education system, but it starts by engaging in our youth and their potentials and using those energies to fuel the necessary changes needed within urban communities.

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