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"Meet Me at the 50": A Critical Discourse Analysis of How Higher Education Curriculum Is Meeting the Needs of Black, Male Student-Athletes

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**“MEET ME AT THE 50”: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HOW HIGHER
EDUCATION CURRICULUM IS MEETING THE NEEDS OF BLACK, MALE
STUDENT-ATHLETES**

by

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ABSTRACT

“MEET ME AT THE 50”: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HOW HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM IS MEETING THE NEEDS OF BLACK MALE STUDENT-ATHLETES

Julia Diane Morris
Old Dominion University
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The overarching goal of this research is to make proverbial payments towards Ladson-Billings’ (2006) “education debt” owed to historically resilient populations by promoting equitable and democratic practices in all facets of education. Black men, specifically those who participate in athletics, are advocated for in this research because these men identify as part of a community of voices who are not only historically oppressed but are being failed by current educational practices. Further, student-athletes provide a predetermined and specific sociocultural context, and thus social location, by which to compare how various types of critical literacy assignments are addressing said contexts. Using a bricolage theoretical framework of critical sociocultural theory and critical literacy, a critical discourse analysis evaluates the course documents and assignments provisioned to students enrolled in 100- and 200-level general education courses. Using Kynard and Eddy’s (2009) coalition building framework, over 180 artifacts were reviewed and analyzed. Findings indicate that while faculty are willing to allow students to explore their sociocultural identities in isolation, classroom spaces—both physically and metaphorically speaking—are not yet being used to critically incorporate the diverse social situations of diverse student populations. Recommendations encourage faculty to consider students the expert learners they are in order to promote democratic and socially just curriculum and pedagogy in higher education classrooms.

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With the completion of this project—a marker of the five incredible years spent in mine and its preparation—I am now winged and permitted to take the proverbial flight into the next phase of academia as *Dr. Julia Morris*. With that opportunity comes the chance to appreciate those who so selflessly and generously took the time to put me on the way to make the biggest dream of my life come true. Therefore, this work and all the work it signifies as still-to-come is dedicated to

my village:

To my Dunkerly and Bean clan, Judith, Cam, Tom, and Shannon: being welcomed as part of your family is the greatest privilege. Specifically, to Tom: may the waves always be surfing worthy. Specifically, to Cam: may there always be Crocs involved. And, especially, to Judith from her FB: may the sign always be turned upside down because it means we are together.

To my Wheeler family: we represent the company at all times.

To my Poplin family: I come before you to stand behind you to tell you I love y'all.

To my family of friends: Valerie, who is the right shoe to my left: why don't you come on over; Melissa, who, in a cold world, builds the fires we so desperately need; and Amanda, alongside whom I solemnly swear we will always be up to no good.

As a graduate of Teaching and Learning, this work is also a proverbial nod to all those who have allowed me to both teach and learn along the way. Thank you to the more than 800 students I served while a doctoral hopeful; I will “see you next week.” Additionally, every student who has and will sit in a Morris classroom also sits front-row in the classrooms of the extraordinary teachers who brought me the joy of learning: to Mrs. Bernice Williams, who was not only my favorite teacher growing up, but the very first to tell me I had “that teacher look” in her sixth grade English classroom; to Dr. Katherine Hallemeier for her mentorship during my time at Oklahoma State and reminding me, “the secret to happiness is not doing what we like but in

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today's classrooms are failing Black male students. More than ever, classrooms are characterized as operating at a deficit if minority demographics populate the desks. At best, this is a misunderstanding. At its core, this perpetuates discrimination in academic settings; and our current political climate and education policies condone such. Characterizations such as misbehavior, incongruent learning styles, and cultural differences as enacted by social skills lead to higher levels of high school dropout, increased poverty, and incarceration in Black males (Lynch, 2017, para. 2). The reality of Black male students' situation in academic settings is that they are permanently impacted by the experiences they encounter in school settings well after they leave the classroom and enter the real world. The following vignette accounts contextualize the necessity for research that supports the education experience of Black male student-athletes by welcoming his voice into the progressive change that must characterize the future of education.

On our Campuses

A vibrant young man named Kalif, sporting his football jersey and weighed down with a backpack and gym bag waddles across his college campus quad. His leg is bound in saran wrap and ice, impeding his gait, as he is hurrying from athletic treatment to make an office hours appointment with his sociology professor. Upon being invited into the office, exchanging general pleasantries, and appropriate small talk, the student pulls out his journal pertaining to the upcoming assignment, prepared with questions to ask. Simultaneously, the professor pulls the class textbook from underneath a stack of papers. Holding her hand up to the student and flipping to a random page, she requests that the student read a few lines

from the first paragraph before any class or assignment conversation takes place. Caught off guard, the student does as he is asked and rattles off the first sentences of a chapter on mass media influences. With a satisfied chuckle, the professor stops him, with the following statement: “Well, okay then, Mister Football. Now that I know you can read, you may ask your questions.”

Understandably, the meeting was cut short, the student was shocked and hurt, and proceeded to my office to drop the class, without exception. He did not care, he seethed, what graduation requirements the course satisfied; he refused to spend one more moment as her student. He was furious and mortified, and devastatingly confused. This exceptional and bright student—who is now a master's candidate in kinesiology and a certified athletic trainer—was not asked if he could read because he presented as extraordinarily young. He was not asked if he could read because he was failing the course or refused to attend regularly, or because his grades or attendance were problematic. He was not asked if he could read because he spoke multiple languages and might struggle with English communication, nor does he learn with any impediments. He was asked if he could read because he was a Black football player.

That afternoon, that professor failed Kalif and lost an outstanding student from her course. Unfortunately, Kalif story is too similar to the narrative experienced in schools, from kindergarten to higher education, across America. Kalif left that classroom permanently and, for a time, contemplated leaving college altogether because of the hate he experienced that afternoon. His identity was, and is still, vested in being a proud Black man who plays sports.

Nevertheless, that moment brought about the realization that he could not be a Black male athlete who was taken seriously for his academics. His jersey, which so proudly bore his last name and number, represented a school that only valued him for his touchdowns, not

his intelligence. Kalif story brought me to the realization that academics are not welcoming of Black male students, even those as celebrated as student-athletes, the way I had assumed.

Across Our Country

In the summer of 2020, the United States suffocated alongside George Floyd from the injustice of disproportionate police brutality being applied to Black bodies. Student-athletes' voices have become part of both the vocalization and the epitomization of the historical realities of Black lives in America. However, student-athletes, especially our *Black male* student-athletes, seem to be only amorphous beings who should “shut up and dribble.”

Case in point: Chuba Hubbard, a highly regarded and successful running back on the Oklahoma State University football team, achieved a hugely successful athletic year during the 2019-2020 season. After rushing for more than 2,000 yards (the second most in Oklahoma State history, and 18th most in college football history) and scoring 21 touchdowns--more than all other scorers combined in the 2019-2020 OSU season--Hubbard was unanimously awarded the Big XII Offensive Player of the Year award, as well as the Jon Cornish Award, and the Weeden Award. He was hailed by local journalism as “amazing,” and a talent that “has not been seen in years” (Wright, 2019). National assessments commended Hubbard for being “built to be a pro” and an “NFL talent,” even as a redshirt freshman (Brunt, 2019; Saelhof, 2019). Popular opinion trended “Hubbard for Heisman” throughout the season.

In December of 2019, upon completing the regular college football season, fan commentary under a Chuba Hubbard post on the official Oklahoma State Cowboy Football social media account stated:

User 1: “*Congratulations, Chuba. It has been fun watching you!*”

User 2: *“Great job Chuba you made all of us that call ourselves a Pokes proud good luck whatever you do next year I’ll be watching [sic]!”*

User 3: *“So proud to call you a fellow Cowboy! You are an amazing young man and outstanding role model!”*

User 4: *“We would cheer for you no matter what! You are an awesome young man!”*

Many users and members of the fan website, which has nearly 200,000 followers, pleaded with Hubbard to return for the 2020-2021 football season, despite his likely NFL draft prospects.

Comments regarded Hubbard’s talent as unique and essential to the team, stating:

user 5: *“Please come back next year!”*

User 6: *“Please return for one more year! The Heisman could be yours!”*

user 7: *“Hope to see our Canadian Cowboy back next year at OSU!”*

user 8: *“Chuba, please Cowboy up another year!”*

Without fail, Chuba Hubbard’s recommitment to Oklahoma State as a college player for one final season was met with unanimous support and approval by the Oklahoma State University football fanbase:

User 9: *“Thank you Chuba for one more season! You make me proud to be a Cowboy!”*

User 10: *“Love this! I’m sure it was a tough decision. Cowboy nation is happy and we would have supported Chuba no matter what!”*

User 11: *“This is great news for all of Cowboy Country! Go Pokes!”*

User 12: *“Awesome news. I think he is the ultimate man of character.”*

User 13: *“In addition to talent as a football player, he always behaves as a young man of character.”*

Despite what appeared to be a clear consensus of “loyal and true” support, responses to Cowboy football social media posts would look entirely different just a few months later.

In June of 2020, following George Floyd's murder and the eruption of Black Lives Matter protests across the country, Oklahoma State's athletic program found itself in news headlines, again. But, this time, such was not in celebration of young talent or success on the field. Instead, the program and head football coach, Mike Gundy, received national attention for potentially promoting racial insensitivity and even discriminatory affiliates. While on a fishing trip, Coach Gundy was photographed wearing a tee-shirt bearing the "OAN" or One America News Network logo. The network is rated as "skewed" and "biased" by Media Bias, and is known to publish and push unfounded conspiracy theories (Unruh, 2020). OAN's published accounts of the Black Lives Matter movement refer to such as a "farce" and a "criminal front group" (Giambalvo & Bieler, 2020). In light of Coach Gundy's assumed "insensitivity" to the Black Lives Matter movement, Chuba Hubbard took to social media to publicly object to his coach's presumed support of the network, tweeting, "I will not stand for this. This is completely insensitive to everything going on in society, and it's unacceptable. I will not be doing anything with Oklahoma State until things CHANGE [sic]" (Hubbard, 2020). It was with this post that Chuba Hubbard became a pariah from the Oklahoma State fan community.

Within hours, Chuba Hubbard and Coach Gundy appeared in a video together, prompted, filmed, and promoted by the Oklahoma State University Athletic Department, agreeing that dialogue and real change are necessary at every level: players, coaches, and fans. Gundy issued several public apologies, referring to himself as a "dumbass" for not being informed and appearing to promote insensitivity to an issue that profoundly impacts so many of his players, stating, "[t]his was my fault" (Boone, 2020). Hubbard responded to several media outlets saying that he was proud to have initiated "steps in the right direction" at Oklahoma State University: "I'm just always some one [sic] who wants to pride myself on doing the right thing and stand for

the right reasons. I'm not a politician. I'm not anything like that. I'm just someone who stands up for what's right, and that's all I was trying to do" (Hubbard, 2020). Hubbard also tweeted, "I am a young black man that wants change. I want change that will bring a better experience for my black brothers and sisters at Oklahoma State. It's that simple" (Hubbard, 2020). But, it has not been simple.

While some praised Hubbard's courage for speaking out against systemic aggressions towards the Black community and using his platform to promote social justice and necessary change, the very fans who were waiting for Hubbard in the end zone after his many touchdowns could not wait to tell him to shut up and go back to being a football player. On the same social media platform that praised Chuba's successful sophomore season and cheered for his announced return for the 2020-2021 football season, comments under summer 2020 images of Chuba Hubbard scorned, mocked, and abandoned the young Black man, stating:

User 14: *"Hopefully he'll get the [college football] award for being "Offended Whiney Azz Nancy Boy this year."*

User 15: *"This entitled child better get ready to get booed off the field at home."*

User 16: *"Chuba is a punk."*

User 17: *"I would rather watch OAN [than Chuba Hubbard]."*

User 18: *"I have no respect for this player. No respect for a school that will allow a student to be a bully."*

User 19: *"I won't ever cheer him on."*

User 20: *"Hope he's not offended by any tee-shirts he is given this season."*

User 21: *"There will be no Cowboy football in my future since the school caved to*

Hubbard. Hope he has a terrible season and goes back to Canada where he doesn't have free speech."

User 22: *"After what he did to OSU...he needs to go back to Canada."*

One commenter even went so far as to say:

User 23: *"I think the coach and the Hubbard [sic] reached an agreement. Every morning the coach will select three different outfits he wants to wear that day. He will then face time with the overly sensitive pompous Hubbard at which time Hubbard will let the coach know which outfit falls under the guidelines set by Black Lives Matter as proper and non-offensive attire for crackers to wear on a fishing trip, in the locker room or just sitting at home watching CNN..."*

The hypocrisy that characterizes the criticism of Hubbard's call for accountability, education, and advocacy within and for the Black community is unconscionable, not to mention cruel. It is this treatment of a Black student-athlete by his own (supposed) fanbase that stands as the red flag signifying the necessity of this research: Black, male student-athletes are regarded as little more than athletic, or as this research contends *physical*, beings, whose value in our academic and political discourses is disregarded to the point of detriment.

Unfortunately, Hubbard is not an anomaly. Instead, he represents a history of telling Black American men where and how to use their identities. While Hubbard was still in his freshman year at Oklahoma State University, basketball sensation and decorated Black athlete, LeBron James was being told to "shut up and dribble" by Fox News' anchor Laura Ingraham for speaking about racial justice after a racial slur was graffitied on the side of his home (Sullivan, 2018). Ingraham condemned political speech from "someone who gets paid \$100 million a year

to bounce a ball" (Sullivan, 2018). Like Hubbard, LeBron's public use of a popular platform was seen as subversive to his value as (just) an athlete.

The rhetoric that surrounds the tension between those who promote "All Lives Matter" *against* the "Black Lives Matter" movement comes down to, in one opinion, the inability to appreciate a Black voice. Perhaps, it is even fear to hear what a Black voice needs to say. Otherwise, under what logic are fans so inclined to root for these men as favorite teams' caricatures, but scorn and silence them as individuals? As both football and basketball teams in the United States are overwhelmingly Black, is it possible in the twenty-first century, in one of the most (supposedly) progressive and free-thinking nations globally, that Black bodies are disregarded to just that: just *bodies*? These trends point to the alarming possibility that a Black man's sociocultural identity is valued less in America than his physicality. Both Hubbard and James represent the multi-billion-dollar sports industry that is continually carried to success in the hands of Black, male Americans. However, while fans are happy to wear these athletes' jerseys, these men are regarded as little more than just a number on the back of a Black body. However, Black voices such as those of George Floyd, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Alton Sterling, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, and too many more were silenced because of their Black bodies. There is danger in telling any individual, especially a Black man, to "shut up" and just be a Black body. It is an unfortunate reality that Black bodies are dying. Thus, this research stands astride the proverbial 50-yard-line ready to do more than to wax, wane, and prophesize about the distance institutions--such as education--have to travel for authentic social justice and equity to be reached. Watching from the stands is useless. Waiting in the endzone is not enough. Suit up; it is time we all start playing for the same team.

Context for Study

For many student-athletes, the decision to attend a university is separated from academics. Instead, student-athletes might elect to attend college based on the desire to play their designated sport and are said to see meeting their academic requirements as to how they can maintain their athletic participation (Horton, Hagedorn, & Serra, 2009). College is simply the natural "next step" in what many hope will be an athletic-oriented career. Student-athletes, especially those who identify as Black and male, are more likely to underperform academically and leave their institutions before meeting their intended goals (Feltz, Hwang, Schneider, & Skogsberg, 2013; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). A student-athlete fills two roles while enrolled in educational institutions: that of *student* and *athlete*. Unsurprisingly, these two roles are often at odds, and, to be blunt, the *student* is losing the battle in this dichotomy. As studied by Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, and Fletcher (2013), the lack of similitude between the "social location" of these two roles can be toxic to one's self-identity (Peters, 2017).

Black men represent less than 10% of full-time undergraduate male degree seekers at nearly every college in the Power Five conferences (Garcia & Maxwell, 2019). According to a report from the Center for American Progress (2020), many Black male students on these campuses are student-athletes. Black male student-athletes make up between 16 and 30% of all Black male students enrolled in Power Five conference colleges/universities. In contrast, white male athletes represent just two percent of the white male students enrolled on these college campuses. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), nearly 57,000 (11%) of student-athletes, across all divisions and sports, identified as both Black and male in the 2019-2020 academic year (NCAA, 2020). Of these, 29,000 played men's football, and 8,400 played men's basketball. That is to say, 66% of Black male student-athletes play either football

or basketball. The next most significant representative percentage of Black male athletes is in indoor/outdoor track for 12,300 athletes or 21%.

The emphasis on football and basketball players in this research is intentional for many reasons. Men's football and men's basketball programs generate the most revenue across the NCAA for an average of 40 million U.S. dollars each year per school (Gaines & Nudelman, 2017). Comparatively, the aggregate revenue generated from 12 other college sports (e.g., women's basketball, baseball, men's soccer, women's soccer, equestrian, men's lacrosse, women's lacrosse, track-and-field, rowing, swimming, volleyball, softball, *et cetera*) is less than 15 million U.S. dollars each year per school (Gaines & Nudelman, 2017). Football and basketball are also sports with the highest incidents of physical injury (Garcia & Maxwell, 2019). Football accounts for the most significant number of injuries with 47,199 injuries reported to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) during the 2013-2014 season; this accounted for 31.2% of all male student-athlete injuries. On average, these injuries required greater than seven days before the individual returned to normal activities (CDC, 2015) fully. Basketball sees the second largest number of injuries across sports, despite their smaller team size, with 16,000 injuries per season (CDC, 2015). These sports also see the most significant scholarship provisions. The average men's basketball scholarship is \$17,000.00 per academic year provisioned to 80% of the team, where the average football scholarship is \$23,000.00 per year given to up to 70% of the team. Both allotments fall above the annual average for a college athletic scholarship (e.g., \$14,000.00 per year) (Gaines & Nudelman, 2017). It should also be noted that Black male athletes represent the majority of players at the elite levels of performance in men's basketball and football. Where Black male student-athletes represent 45% of basketball players across all divisions and subdivisions, they represent closer to 60% of all Division I basketball players (NCAA, 2020).

Similarly, Black male student-athletes represent 39% of football players across all divisions and subdivisions; but, they represent 50% of all Division I football players (NCAA, 2020).

This statistical information is significant beyond its clarification of the Black male influence in college sports. It represents that the Black male student-athlete is a significant portion of college athletics and part of the most elite and successful population of college athletes. Moreover, this narrative sounds interesting at worst, and even positive at best. However, the reality is that Black male student-athletes, despite their representation and success, are not achieving in the classroom at nearly the rates they are succeeding on the field. Attrition rates of university student-athletes are higher than any other student demographic on college campuses (Rishe, 2012). Within the 65 universities that comprise the Power Five conferences in university athletics--the most dominant five conferences in college sports--an average of 55% of Black male student-athletes graduate within six years, compared with the average of 76.3% of all undergraduate students (Harper, 2018, p. 3). According to a 2018 study by the University of Southern California, graduation rates in Black male student-athletes have declined at nearly half of Power Five Conferences schools; 60% of these universities boasting lower graduation rates for Black male student-athletes than Black undergraduate men who are not student-athletes (Harper, 2018, p. 3). The governing body of collegiate sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), continues to boast high numbers of graduating student-athletes each year (NCES, 2018). However, this information is circumstantial and reported as unreliable. The NCAA employs its own tool for determining graduation rates, which circumnavigates students who transfer or do not complete their degree at the institution in which they initially enrolled (Wolverton, 2014). In a 2017 documentary, *The Undefeated*, Derrick Jackson reports that 24 of 65 universities in Power Five conferences graduated less than 50% of

their Black male student-athletes in football and basketball (Jackson, 2017). For context, of the average number of Black male football players (e.g., 30-40) on a Division I football team, fewer than 15 of these men will graduate (Mitchell, 2018; Bauer-Wolf, 2018; Harper, 2018).

With these discrepancies in mind, it is fair to assume that those men who *do not* find success within the classroom but *do* find success on the field, might pursue careers in sports, possibly negating the need for classroom education. Yet again, Black male athletes are overwhelmingly underrepresented and disregarded. Speaking generally, playing any sport at a professional level is of small statistical probability. Despite the more than 460,000 student-athletes that compete in 24 sports each year, only a small fraction are drafted to play their sport professionally.

According to the NCAA, football drafts only 255 players, equating to 1.7% of college players; men's basketball drafts 1.2% of college players (NCAA, 2018). From these statistics, it is evident that most athletes do not go on to play their sport professionally in their post-college life. However, there are five times as many Black players drafted by the National Football League (NFL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) (Garcia & Maxwell, 2019). There are certainly alternatives to playing professionally that still allow an athlete to be involved in sports. But, yet again, the odds are against the Black male athlete. The demographics of head football and head basketball coaches do not match the player demographics. In the 2014 sports season, nearly 90% of football coaches across all divisions and subdivisions identified as white, and 76% of men's basketball coaches identified as white (Garcia & Maxwell, 2019; Mitchell, 2018). Further, the NCAA's reporting of athletic leadership, including head coaches, assistant coaches, and graduate assistants, show that 85% of college sports leaders are white men.

Unpacking this information reveals a significant trend that is taking place within classrooms, as well as in the world beyond college campuses: Black men's skill sets in athletic

contexts are not only successful but regarded nationally and professionally as some of the best. However, despite this, Black men are not being welcomed to transcend their skills into other "social locations" (Peters 2017). Thus, most student-athletes battle a fruitless dichotomy of whether to pursue their student-identity or their athletic-identity while in college, only to pursue careers post-graduation that entirely negate their athletic sociocultural identity.

Research Questions

The overarching goal of this research is to make proverbial payments towards Ladson-Billings' (2005) "education debt" owed to oppressed populations by promoting equitable and democratic practices in all facets of education, from instruction to assessment. Black men, specifically those who participate in athletics, are an appropriate focal point for this research because these men identify as part of a community of voices who are not only historically oppressed but are being failed by current educational practices. Further, student-athletes provide a predetermined and specific sociocultural context, and thus social location, by which to compare how various types of critical literacy assignments are addressing said contexts.

This research contributes to the field of education and literacy through the exploration of the literacy practices and enactments of Black male student-athletes' critical sociocultural perspectives in university classrooms. Recognizing critical sociocultural perspectives in classroom curriculum and pedagogy is accomplished through Kynard and Eddy's (2009) coalition building framework, and guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of assignments characterize the literacy-oriented (i.e., reading, writing, and oral) work assigned in 100 and 200 level general education courses with a below-average success rate by Black male student-athletes?

2. How are assignments in 100 and 200 level courses with a below-average success rate by Black male student-athletes inviting critical sociocultural perspectives of individual students?
3. What shifts are required in literacy-oriented (i.e., reading, writing, and oral) assignments in 100 and 200 general education courses to better address social justice for Black male student-athletes' critical perspectives?

Theoretical Framework

The broader context of human learning that is celebrated by sociocultural theory allows for a more “fluid boundary” between the learner and the social world that surrounds learning (Polly, Allman, Casto, & Norwood, 2017). This is essential because it contends that learning is situated within both a physical and metaphysical environment, and learners are both a product of and an architect of their sociocultural environment. The value of a discussion of sociocultural theory in this research is that it establishes a student's learning environment as both a context and a tool. A student's learning is best contextualized by methods, approaches, and applications that are centered upon their sociocultural environment. In turn, this allows students to engage learning as an active inquiry into their environment, both for the sake of their scaffolding and context, but also as the foreground for the application of their learning. Furthermore, it allows the learner to expand upon and even extend their environment.

With roots in Marxism, as well as influences by Bourdieu (1975) and Freire (1970), critical theory shows how the construction of knowledge is tied directly to an understanding of a learner's social location (Peters, 2017). Critical theory enables researchers to bridge theory and practice. Freire's (1970) concepts of *praxis*, or reading the world and the word, invite theoretical

considerations that enrich qualitative understanding into a practical application of socially just classrooms, democratic classroom practices, and culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum.

Critical theory is an essential lens by which to view education, as established by Freire (1970) and Kincheloe (2003). Kincheloe (2001) asserts that critical theory in education should involve: (1) an ever-evolving criticality across areas of inquiry, (2) postformal theory of cognition, and (3) bricolage approaches to qualitative methodologies (p. 680). Kincheloe (2001) established the qualitative researcher as a "bricoleur," or one who uses a multi-methodological, multidisciplinary, and multi-theoretical process (p. 680). Researchers should consistently engage in multidisciplinary as a way to make sense of the structures and processes that produce knowledge, noting that knowledge is produced within social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. This implies the need to view research as not only a product of interpretation but as part of the process of interpretation. This research is directly in line with Kinchloe's assertions, as it stands to be an initiation in a multi-step process to evaluate the sensitivity to the Black male student's social location as a learner in athletic *and* academic contexts.

Critical considerations of education can no longer, in good conscience, classify education as Horace Mann's "the great equalizer" (Mann, 1940/2010). Instead, education is plagued by standardization practices, increasingly centralized curricula, and bureaucratization of the profession of teaching. The correct application of critical theory finds education in such a state and contends to enact social mobility through intentional reflection, advocacy, and Freire's *praxis*, or the unification of pedagogical theory and practice (Freire, 1970). Critical sociocultural theory, termed by Lewis, Moje, and Enciso (2007), maintains sociocultural theory's emphasis on an individual's learning as inherently social, but pushes for more direct attention to issues of power, identity, and agency that are central to literacy learning and practice (Lewis, Moje, &

Enciso, 2007; Pyscher, Lewis, Stutelberg, 2014). Critical sociocultural approaches expand on sociocultural approaches through the increased emphasis on critical reading and writing practices to help students engage in critical dialogue, contest ideologies, enable action to enact change and thus transform their sociocultural environment and the world around them (Pyscher, Lewis, Stutelberg, 2014).

As this research stands to consider and critique connections made to enrich the learning experiences of those students who identify as Black and male in United States' classrooms, an understanding of the applications of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a critical multicultural lens for empowerment, as well as perspective, is necessary. CRT recognizes that machinations within society--explicitly political and education systems--function to benefit a white majority (Chandler, 2010; Tottenham & Petersen, 2014). Delgado & Stefancic (1995/2013) established that racial inequalities are one of America's "most stubborn and enigmatic" problems. Indeed, the 1960's Civil Rights Movement seemed to remedy some of the more visible acts of racism against individuals who identify as Black. However, the byproduct of colorblindness has contributed to the systemic and day-to-day racism--perhaps even the "legal segregation"--that is still taking place in classrooms and includes ignoring a student's cultural experiences, disregarding individual and familial histories, homogenizing "social location" and community, and overlooking the sociocultural influences of one's racial identity (Scruggs, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 1995/2013). The harm of this, according to CRT, is that culture creates a social reality that is self-serving and does not promote genuine change because it is univariate rather than collaborative. CRT examines the social reality that has been established as a result of majority power dynamics and highlights how this disserves minorities and their cultures. Further, CRT capitalizes upon the principles established by sociocultural scholars (e.g., Vygotsky, Freire) by

requiring that CRT scholars, or Criticalists, to recognize that real transformation involves an enactment of an individual's agentic identity. This allows the individual to generate change through reciprocity and criticality during the learning process rather than via a passive bestowal of information. CRT asserts that a transfer of power by the majority is nothing more than a maintenance of the status quo. True equity invites every representative to the proverbial table with equitable access to a seat, an agenda, and a voice.

The emphasis on student-athletes arises from a consideration of Black masculinity. Black men are found to experience their masculinity as a choice between either a hyper-sexualized and physical entity, or as an assimilated proponent of white culture as a result of abandoning African culture and heritage (Pelzer, 2016). The consideration of student-athletes exemplifies an examination of the multivariate sociocultural perspectives that should inform pedagogical and curricular strategies in classrooms with regards to assessing student needs and enacting student voices. Physical prowess is an essential consideration of Black masculinity (Bell, 2017). Thus, by way of appreciating the Black male experience in twenty-first century classrooms, this research capitalizes on an understanding of Black masculinity that embodies the sociocultural influences of these Black men, such as physicality, both within and beyond the classroom. According to Kirkland and Jackson (2009), an understanding of Black masculinity is often a comparison of differences between Black and white males (p. 294). Young (2004) finds that Black masculinity is often pitted against literacy and academic success and that “if [Black males] do well in school, they feel forced to abandon their race” (p. 700). Thus, Black masculinity--specifically, Black masculine literacy--is understood to exist at a junction between mainstream expectations and a “fringe world” (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). Kirkland and Jackson assert that Black masculinity uses literacy to “fill the space” around them, either in

tandem with others, or as a way to “push themselves” apart when necessary (p. 294). It is inherently problematic in this research to consider Black masculine social situations and sociocultural considerations as “fringe.” Instead, this research stands to assess what instructional practices are doing to “fill the space” alongside Black male students, using literacy as a way to bring them closer into classroom contexts, rather than “pushing” them farther away.

Methods

This research engages critical literacy practices as both a method and as a criterion. Qualitative research acknowledges that artifacts present content twice: first as manifest, or that which is observable in the material and, secondly, as latent, or that which is hidden and thus inferred or interpreted (Saldana & Omasta, 2017, p. 66). This duplicity allows for the implementation of the method of a critical discourse analysis. Discourse analysis provides for how literacy texts enact and capitalize upon contexts (Saldana & Omasta, 2017; Schreier, 2012; Altheide & Schneider; Gee, 2011; Rapley, 2007). Like Kinchloe’s bricolage approach, critical discourse analysis allows for a consideration of how elements such as language, topics, and themes work together to impart meaning. This is the most adept and valuable approach for this research for two reasons:

1. Discourse analysis allows for an overarching on the state of sociocultural considerations being made in university classrooms by considering all types of assignments and critical literacy tasks in tandem;
2. Discourse analysis also allows for this research to evaluate if and how critical literacy assignments are making a commentary on current social dynamics on a student-to-instructor level.

That is, discourse analysis allows for the interpretation of the process and product of learning by allowing for evaluation of assignments themselves and the relationship that is implied by the assigning of these assignments.

A critical discourse approach entails working in a “transdisciplinary” way in order to address social change, as Fairclough (1995) explains:

Discourse analysis gives more precise accounts than one tends to find in social research on change--of the ways in which and extent to which social changes are changes in discourse, and the relations between changes in discourse and changes in other, non-discoursal, elements or ‘moments’ of social life...the aim is to identify through analysis the particular linguistic, semiotic, and “interdiscursive” features of texts which are a part of processes of social change, but in ways which facilitate the productive integration of textual analysis into multi-disciplinary research on change. (pp. 452-452).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) privileges the “object of research” as pivotal to the analysis. The object of this research is the considerations made for Black male student-athlete identity building in classrooms. By putting this at the forefront, this research capitalizes upon the detailed textual analysis that is CDA through a consideration of how various texts, genres, discourses, and styles all generate a commentary on learning spaces. CDA necessitates the theoretical lens that is present in this research, in addition to its value of transdisciplinary applications. A transdisciplinary methodology is apt and applicable for this research in two ways. First, the data that informs this research is based on artifacts from various courses, departments, and academic colleges. This data spans all content areas in order to represent the universality of need for the Black male position in every classroom. Second, through the utility of student voices via the student survey data, this research asserts that perspectives from students

are beyond Black masculinity. The work done in this research is not meant to generalize Black men, but to recognize the individuality of the Black male voice. Again, student-athletes provide an easily identified social situation to refer to when critiquing if assignments are universalizing individuality to every student in today's classroom.

Conclusions

Coalition building between faculty and students places an intentional emphasis on student's social situations as a tool in both teaching and learning. This research finds that the exploration of literacy-based assignments, and written communication from faculty to students characterizes the relationship between faculty and students in higher education 100- and 200-level classrooms. The results of this exploration contend that students are being invited to explore their own social situations and to situate themselves socioculturally with course curricula through critical literacy. Faculty, however, are found in this research to be resistant to building coalitions with their students. Any sociocultural exploration is done by the student in isolation, and it is recommended that faculty employ critical literacy in their assignments and course documents in order to utilize more "color-conscious" and responsible pedagogical practices (Kynard & Eddy, 2009). Faculty are maintaining diversity as a marginalized and "fringe" part of educational space (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). This research stands to bring the most essential stakeholders in classroom learning—namely, students and faculty—to the proverbial 50 yard line to ensure that individual students' social situations and sociocultural factors are used to inform instructors' teaching, not just students' learning.

The next chapter considers the relevant conceptual and theoretical literature that informs and frames this research. First, Black male students and learners are described in a way that dispels the deficit narrative with which they are considered. Then, a critical framework is

applied in order to unpack the effects of the deficit narrative in order to make-way for the needs of coalition building and democratic alternatives. The review of the relevant and existing scholarship in Chapter Two establishes how this research is stands as the most necessary next step in developing socially equitable curriculum and pedagogy. Chapter Three discusses the methods by which this research pursues data collocation and analysis. Chapter Four describes the researcher's positionality and proximity to this work. Finally, chapters Five and Six discuss the analysis, findings, and implications of this work from both the perspectives of the researcher and student-athletes.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The athletic identity is an amalgamation of several factors that have been studied and evaluated for its role in the personal and professional future career of the student-athlete (Beron & Piquero, 2016; Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014; Houle & Kluck, 2015; Huang, Chou, & Hung, 2016; Kimball, 2007). Beron and Piquero (2016) assess the way athletic and academic identities of student-athletes correlate with academic prowess variables and fills a gap comparing the results of athletic identity across the divisions of athletics (i.e., Division I, Division II, and Division III). Athletic identity has six variables:

1. "The student-athlete believes his/her first year after college will be devoted to his/her sport."
 2. "The student-athlete chose his/her college for its athletics."
 3. "The student-athlete sees him/herself more as an athlete than an academic."
 4. "The student-athlete disagrees that he/she would sacrifice athletics for academics."
 5. "The student-athlete spends more time thinking about his/her sport than academics."
 6. "The student-athlete believes he/she is likely to be a professional or Olympic athlete"
- (Beron & Piquero, 2016, p. 145).

Of these factors, Variables 3 and 5 have a significant inverse relationship with grade point average (GPA) (p. 156). While it would appear evident that those student-athletes who identify more completely with their role as an "athlete" (rather than a "student"), and are found to think about their sport more than their academics, would have lower GPAs, this assessment of student-athlete identity is an honest, and therefore valuable, depiction of the way student-athletes view themselves. This might facilitate the type of advising that should be offered to student-athletes

while choosing a major and looking toward post-graduation options. Further, the results found that Division I women and Division II men felt that they would have the chance to play their sport professionally based on their response to variable 1 (p. 156). Thus, the highest academic risk for male athletes is in Division II programs, dispelling presumptions that only Division I athletes are at risk for tenuous academic performance due to an emphasis on athletic identity.

The results of this study allude to the damaging impact of athletic identity on academic success. Survey results found that, in response to the two self-appraisal variables (i.e., the expectation of pursuing a professional athletic career and the identification with being more student or athlete), student-athletes consistently reported lower collegiate GPAs across sex and Division when their athletic identity was higher (Beron & Piquero, 2016, p. 151). Thus, from this study, one might conclude that athletic identity is detrimental to student-athletes. Similar results and implications of the dichotomous battle between a student-athlete's athletic and academic identities and the effect of such are corroborated in other studies (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Feltz, Hwang, Schnieder, & Skogsberg, 2013; Lopez & Levy, 2013). Comeaux and Harrison (2011) found that athletic identity creates a "subculture of lower academic expectations" (p. 236). The detriment of athletic identity on self-efficacy measures, and thus post-college success, is that athletic identity skews the student athlete's ability to self-assess their social identity while in college.

Similarly, Houle and Kluck (2015) discuss the inverse relationship between athletic identity and career maturity and preparation. Strong athletic identity has been associated with increased anticipation of playing sports professionally and decreased career planning, lower levels of career adaptability, and decreased career maturity (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Where Beron and Piquero (2016) utilized a six-item assessment of

athletic identity, Houle and Kluck employed the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), which assesses athletes according to seven items. The Likert-type scale questions ask the student-athlete to assess him/herself and the role sports play in their identity.

As the student-athlete increasingly sees themselves as an athlete, spends more time thinking and engaging in their sport's activities, and has goals related to sport (i.e., items of the AIMS), then they experience lower levels of decidedness, exploratory intentions, *et cetera* (i.e., items of the CDSE). These implications suggest that the athletic role is not sustainable after college and is thus an injury to the student-athlete who intends to graduate. As established, very few athletes continue into the professional realm of their sport, making their years spent within the confines of their athletic tenure and athletic identity damaging to their future careers. Many of the skills that characterize athletics (e.g., hard work, dedication, goal-setting, teamwork, *et cetera*) are transferable to a professional setting outside of sports. However, the isolation created by a high athletic identity has contributed to the declining number of Black student-athletes who are not graduating from college (Harper, 2018). Athletics creates a culture of isolation, both psychologically (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011) and professionally, limiting the career possibilities outside of athletic identity. College is meant to stand as preparation for life after college. Student-athletes, as established in the literature, are not career-ready.

The Deficit Narrative

The issue of presenting negative, albeit truthful, statistics in research is that these statistics quickly become the narrative that negatively characterizes the work at hand; this is the case with Black male literacy. Haddix utilizes the theoretical literature surrounding Black male adolescents' literacy, specifically theories of urban education and critical literacy, to assert that

those frameworks surrounding issues of Black male literacy are deconstructive without being reconstructive. She asserts that there is too much "universal buy-in" (p. 341) surrounding negative racial stereotypes and the saddening statistics describing Black male literacy. This only stands to "reify notions of failure" and compels scholars to simultaneously fail this population of students by "fail[ing] to take up or complicate why this dominant discourse exists in the first place" (p. 343). Haddix describes how the very language surrounding Black males and their literacy in education settings is harmful, with admonishments such as "traditional dropouts" and "troubling" statistics (p. 343). The salience of her discussion is that the framework surrounding Black male literacy needs to remove itself from critical discussions and instead be framed by notions of rhetoric that speak to the "corrective educational experiences" Black men need (p. 354).

Haddix (2009) provides a powerful illustrative example of how writing is salient to the argument of Black male literacy. Black men are resistant to writing and view themselves as "nonwriters" [*sic*] because they define writing as a "demonstration of convention" (p. 341). *Convention* is not working for Black males in education settings; thus, literacy practices that currently stand are not helpful to this demographic and require reformation. Moreover and unfortunately, *convention* has become characterized by deficit constructs. Similarly, the work of Kunjufu (1982), Noguera (2003), and Morrell (2007) works to reframe the discussion of Black male adolescents requiring active rhetoric from these individuals, centralizing the voice of the student, which implies humanizing the approach to facilitating Black male literacy, not *fixing* it. Haddix (2009) implies that there are "new possibilities" for research that must subvert the "convention" of highlighting what is referred to as the "African American crisis" (p. 342). Despite the nearly 30 years since Ladson-Billings' assertion that being "culturally relevant" was

the only way to mitigate the "undeniable achievement gap" between Black males and their peers, too little progress has arisen to improve the literacy of Black male students (p. 661). Wood and Jocius (2013) argue that pedagogy is informed by three dimensions of critical literacy:

- The utility of culturally relevant texts
- Efforts towards collaboration
- The implementation of critical conversations

These are the "best way" to ensure rhetoric around Black male literacy to combat deficit theories and harmful preconceived notions of these students. While these three dimensions are compact, they overly generalize and appear to point to the best practice of critical literacy, rather than explicitly addressing the needs of Black male readers. Should this framework not be applied to all readers? The framework does not specify enough why "critical conversations," for example, are the key to addressing Black male literacy.

Wood and Jocius (2013) situate their approach to discussing Black male literacy according to two theoretical lenses: Tatum's (2000) approach to Black male literacy in urban classroom settings and Willis' (1995) assumption that social constructivism shapes school dynamics. The framework, combined with critical literacy, finds that literacy should not be isolated to skill-based learning within the classroom, but should encompass "social, political, and historical" contexts to inform cooperative learning and allow for "the development of social justice" (p. 664). This study stands as a practitioner's guide to implementing culturally relevant texts and practices into classrooms, focusing on teachers who wish to address the ever-distressing gap that exists between Black male readers and their peers. Wood and Jocius (2013) use the critical analysis of transcribed dialogue amongst groups of students to illustrate the necessity of connecting pedagogy, classroom tools and strategies, curriculum, and frameworks of thinking

around specific students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. There is little regard or mention for methodology apart from the heavily steeped theoretical framework used for interpretation. However, the article's significance highlights that the framework currently in place for Black male literacy in classrooms is regimented, based on a deficient mentality, and relies on invalid and generalized tools, such as African American children's literature. To achieve a more copacetic definition of Black male literacy, we need to focus on individuals and the needs for the dexterity of rhetoric and conversation that exist for Black men outside of classroom settings. The rosy picture painted by Wood and Jocius (2013) is innocuous but equivocally ineffective – the idea of having students encourage each other to be better readers is idealized and does not combat the issues at hand, such as the achievement gap or racial graduation rate disparities (pp. 662, 664). The article's salience is its failure to do what it hopes to do, which is assesses how a more specific critical approach can help a large population of struggling students. Thus, this highlights the need for individualized critical literacy that extends *outside* the classroom, not just by allowing outside influences to infiltrate *within* the classroom.

The risks of the deficit mentality and this negative narrative are the most harmful for Black male students. Case in point: the idea that education is futile is a more potent concern for Black male graduates than almost any other demographic as Black men are the least likely demographic to achieve graduation of any student group (Tate, 2017). Tatum describes that Black men's failures—as evidenced by three separate case study examples—can be traced back to a failure in literacy education. Tatum (2003) narrates the experiences of three Black men's relationship to higher education. The first man left college just shy of graduation because he was so unsure of the utility of a degree and did not see the point in continuing to completion. The second man never attended college because he was not exposed to it as a "mainstream"

possibility the way music and sports were in his formative years. As a result, he forewent college for a technical trade. The third man did attend and graduate from college because he was too afraid of being stuck in the same repetitious pattern as his friends and family (p. 821). All three of these examples point to what Tatum refers to as *now what* mentality (Kunjufu, 1982). As Tatum describes, Black men who are *degreed up*, or arbitrarily credentialed, are unable to move forward in life with their education in tow for three primary reasons: (1) there is an ever decreasing lack of value for education; what use does an individual have for a degree for that is not prescriptive in its purpose? (2) Black men are not exposed to education as a possibility in the same way alternative options are, such as music or sports. There are several reasons this could be true—Tatum (2003) does not address these—but it is probable that the deficit mentality referred to is a contributing factor in the presentation of alternatives to pursuing/using education. (3) Finally, the idea that there are only two options for a Black man who comes from stereotypical circumstances is frightening. As one of the participants states, "My motivation was just not being in the "hood" (p. 821). The idea that fear is the only motivator to pursue education might explain why Black males are under-exposed to education and literacy education. Possibly, in choosing to be "not from the "hood," they feel they are unable to return to their roots to show and prove the utility of education as if the two settings are anonymous. The significance of Tatum's (2003) argument that Black men are underserved by literacy education implies that literacy education, and the agency of dexterity between pre- and post-education life, should be the focus of education reform research.

Black Male Identities

Surveying Black males for their problems has reinforced a historically reinforced stereotype that problems are all that is to be found in the characterization of Black male literacy.

Tatum and Muhammad's study is a two-phase review of the historical literature surrounding Black males' literacy development. The purpose of the review is defined as a desire to "reframe the discussion" of Black male readers in both their development of literacy skills and what Tatum and Muhammad (2012) refer to as *human development* seems to disrupt the deficit mentality that surrounds the discussion of Black male students, as established in Kirkland (2011) and Haddix (2009). The first phase evaluated both quantitative and qualitative literature from the 1980s and forward (nonspecific timeline) and included searches through peer-refereed journals based on the terms: *Black, African American, male, boy, literacy, reading*, and other terms associated with reading (pp. 437-438). The second phase of review considered historical accounts of literacy, specifically Black males from the 1800s, to identify "the role of literacy" in the lives of these men (p. 439). The results found that the current literature does not adequately address or focus on Black male students' literacy development. The issue of Black male reading achievement is not the problem; it is the cause of issues in reading achievement that requires addressing. It is significant to note that history has not always characterized the Black male reader as "struggling." Historical narratives should accurately address that Black male readership has only been recently lensed as a "problem" any discussion of reform if that discussion is to remain accurate and helpful.

Tatum and Muhammad's (2012) review frames the utility of literacy skills for Black men as the development of a tool to "protect themselves" (p. 456) with, rather than a survival tactic, the way Collins (2014) and Aronowitz (1996) describe these tools. The "protection" (p. 456) these students need is against the "young black [sic] male crisis narrative" (p. 456) teacher preparation programs in America, as well as literacy reform efforts in urban schools. Furthermore, Tatum and Muhammad assert that research does not provide any distance between Black males in

varying stages of development, stating, "[t]here is no clear distinction between black [sic] male youth who enter kindergarten or those in high school" (p. 456). However, the authors seem to be more comfortable with a standardized approach to facilitating Black male learning and literacy, stating that Common Core standards can *increase the* affiliation amongst literacy assessment and standards, particularly in the area of English Language Arts.

The salience of Tatum and Muhammad's (2012) discussion is situated in the research agenda and recommendations for successful literacy development in urban schools. They assert that language and literacy development should be viewed as a cultural practice, which feels contrary to the positivist view of Common Core standardization established in the article. Finally, the authors recommend that the only ethical research agenda must include Black males as direct beneficiaries and future research participants. The need for Black male rhetoric to define Black male literacy as their voice is distinctly missing from the literature. Not addressed is where the Black male reader became identified as "struggling," considering the established historical precedence that Black male readership has not always been characterized this way. Further understanding of this might lead to a more fruitful discussion of reform in urban education settings.

More recent considerations of Black male literacy is missing, as found in Collin's (2014) "unplanned" case study on Black male students' experiences in college composition courses. Collin defines literacy for Black male students as a necessity that is "predicated on [the] ability to navigate academic demands" (Collin, 2014, pp. 1-2). For these students, Collin describes that literacy is a manifestation of an *academic self* that evolves through language that is unique to the academic discourse in which Black male students find themselves immersed. This academic discourse is fraught with problems generated by the deficit narrative surrounding these students

as they attempt to discover their "possible selves" in the "wake of prevailing stereotypes" about their "academic underachievement" (Collin, 2014, p. 1). In essence, personal evolution is required for the Black male student to become literate in academia. The implication of such is that Black male literacy in academic contexts is an uphill battle of identity formation. This is supported by Collin's inquiry-based case study of a Black male college students' "need to survive" (Collin, 2014, p. 4) college and how this defines Black male literacy, by Collin's account. Literacy for Black males in academic settings is described as an "asymmetrical power relation...with gatekeepers" (Collin, 2014, p. 2). Black male literacy needs require a *critical lens that is action-oriented to empower* the student to promote what Collin refers to as an *investment* in the student's rights to language and retention (Collin, 2014, p. 2). Only by engaging in conversations surrounding Black literacy can institutions take action to address social justice issues to re-characterize the narrative of Black males' experiences in higher education beyond a deficit mentality (Collin, 2014, pp. 3-4).

With regards to theoretical underpinnings, Collin explains Black male success in education as existing at the intersection of "Black male identity formation" and "language and literacy practices" (Collin, 2014, p. 8). Similarly, Wallace and Bell's (1999) findings echo this, asserting that success for marginalized populations must begin by lessening the "tension that comes with assimilating to mainstream culture" (p. 311). Literacy practices are imperative for student success because they allow students a learning environment to develop language that facilitates their scholarship and articulates the tensions that characterize their struggles. Of course, this reinforces a constructivist approach to education, as well as Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Collin's study's salience is the acknowledgment that Black males are navigating multiple

selves and are, thus, inventing and performing multiple literacies (Collin, 2014, p. 3). This is not unique to Black males, but Collin's case study example exemplifies why Black males' struggle is unique, as Black males are not invited to be critical of their institutions of learning. The implications of these findings suggest that educational settings need to provide what Collin refers to as "spaces for rhetorical action" that both equip the Black male student with the dexterity to be critical and then *sanctions* a multiplicity of language and conversation that can be used to evaluate education settings. Literacy, and Black male literacy, is thus the ability to be a relevant critical conversationalist in designated contexts.

Literacies Enacted

The construction of an individual's literacy skills is inextricably linked to where said literacy is engaged. Access to the utility of literacy in out-of-school settings is the central focus of Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's (2017) ethnographic examination of two 18-year old Black males involved in community projects. Narrative inquiry through the lens of critical literacy documents the way these two Black males shared their racialized experiences in out-of-school settings, simultaneously providing *voice* to the participants in a non-exploitative manner and facilitating students' active participation in the construction of the rhetoric surrounding the cultivation of their literacy skills as Black men outside the classroom. Data triangulation was used via coding of field notes, journal entries, and recording transcription. The purpose of the findings, in the words of one of the two study participants, was to "make sense of who [I] am and what I can use literacy for" (p. 44). The powerful utility of literacy in the community is established as seizing the opportunity to possess agency through literacy. These findings are characterized by the construction of resistance narratives against harmful stereotypes, *making sense* of learning by finding oneself represented in learning opportunities, and the facilitation of

contributing to the community by way of combating larger-scale social inequities that most certainly exist outside of schools.

The significance of Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's (2017) study's discussion rests in the active construction of a counter-narrative of Black males in education with "resilience as resistance" (pp. 39-40). Further, this study is unique in its acknowledgment that literacy and literacy skills do not solely develop in academic contexts and thus should not be confined to academic contexts. The ability to be literate compels an understanding that abstaining from literacy *is*, in fact, a form of literacy. Kirkland (2011) poses the question of how evaluating the dichotomous relationship between ideology and literacy can facilitate an enhanced understanding of Black male literacy in education settings (p. 200). Kirkland's (2011) investigation into the engagement of literacy practice through concepts of identity is a case study of a Black male adolescent who was "disaffected" by the school and existed in education in only a liminal state (pp. 201-202). Kirkland followed the student through his eleventh grade English course and collected data in the form of interviews, field notes, and written artifacts. Initial coding, followed by focused coding, was used to analyze data and assess how the student, who is described as identifying as Black and male, navigated his identity through Homer's *The Iliad* and *Beowulf*. The pedagogical approaches were generalized in the teaching of *Beowulf* and very specific and targeted toward a Black, male audience during *The Iliad* unit. With this in mind, the student obviously preferred *The Iliad* unit to *Beowulf*. Kirkland (2011) attributes this result to the student's ability and opportunity to turn a "lens on the self" (p. 205) and search for his own identity in the text. He states, "[n]ot only did the young [man] understand the texts, [he] used the text to understand [him]self" (p. 205). Kirkland (2011) finds reading to be an "ideological act," using the theoretical underpinnings of Bakhtin's (1978) concept of "ideological becoming" (p.

200). Students who can sense themselves within a text can do so because the very act of deciding to read a text corresponds with the "frame" with which students view themselves (Bakhtin, Liapunov, Holquist, Liapunov, Vadim & Holquist, 1993).

Kirkland's (2011) article's importance is the acknowledgment that the self is not only part of the text in literacy— it is not isolated to *content*. Instead, the self is also and most intricately related to the *process* of literacy and being literate. What a student chooses to engage with and elects to abstain from is part of developing a self and promoting literacy. Kirkland (2011) asserts that reading for Black males "may require bridging ideological distances" (p. 205). In one opinion, this is an inherently extremely problematic statement because all readers have a bridge to build, depending on the text. The tools to build the bridge are just as necessary as the bridge itself. In plain language: the texts we pick to access Black male readers in classrooms are essential, but equally important are the connections we forge with our students to create their own identity.

Theoretical Framework

The "equation" of sociocultural theory encompasses identity, agency, and codes of power (Lewis & Moje, 2003). The discovery of a student's identity should be placed at the forefront of their learning journey. It should be facilitated by pedagogical practices and curricular choices that capitalize upon and support this discovery. However, with increasingly politicized agendas within and surrounding education, student identity has become progressively standardized, especially for historically oppressed and othered populations. Education, once the "great equalizer," is a grand facade of social reproduction. Standardization disconnects students from the tools that could improve their lives by superficially replicating power and privilege asymmetries. This research stands to build a foundation of sociocultural considerations to enact

identity, agency, and empowerment for Black male students. Their identities have been provisioned an ultimatum: assimilate or be characterized as a deficit.

Foundations of Sociocultural Theory

From a theoretical perspective, sociocultural theory is described as part of "human learning." Thus, it can be presumed to be unique to the contemplation, integration, socialization, and adaptations of human learners (Forman & Kraker, 1985). Emerging from psychology, sociocultural theory stands to consider the contributions society makes on individual development. Sociocultural theory considers the nuances between individuals and the culture in which they are living and learning. The implications that a combination informs human intelligence of society and culture find that learning environments--both literally and metaphorically--transcend the constraints of a "traditional classroom" and thus permeate a student's life in all realms: personally, academically, socially, and beyond. As this research establishes, an application of sociocultural theory allows for a perspective on learning that views students as learning in cooperation with their environment and thus the environment becomes part of both a student's ability to learn and the lens by which information is absorbed, and hopefully imbued as learned. The tenets of sociocultural theory facilitate a view of learning that finds a student's sociocultural environment to be a unique and valuable part of their ability to make meaningful connections and applications, apply strategies, and acquire and *utilize* knowledge (Scott & Palincsar, 2013).

Modern social learning theories credit Vygotsky for identifying the role social and interactions have on the development of an individual's higher-order thinking skills, as well as the significance these interactions have in the "dynamic interdependence between individual and social processes in the construction of knowledge" (John-Steinner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192).

Vygotsky found that thinking and learning have social origins; the child does not *learn as they develop*, but rather, *develops as they learn*. Thus, as higher-order learning is accomplished, so are enhanced levels of development, which in turn affects a student's "readiness to learn a new concept" (Miller, 2011, p. 197). As Vygotsky established in his work, "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that can operate only when the child is interacting with people in [their] environment and with [their] peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective also established that individual differences and cross-cultural differences inform learning and development. Thus, it is essential to remember that "ideal thinking and behavior" can and will differ across historical and cultural circumstances. This requires that educational considerations actively involve different developmental routes to any given learning outcome to combat harmful, homogenous generalizations. Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*, or the "...distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving..." is the epicenter of these considerations (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Learning is best accomplished when the emphasis of learning is placed on the process rather than the product (Polly, Allman, Casto, & Norwood, 2017). The idea of instructional *scaffolding*, as related to ZPD, provides tools to help learners complete a task within this ideal zone, tools such as a student's sociocultural environment. Scaffolding asks the facilitator of learning (e.g., a teacher, mentor, coach, or more advanced peer) to provide enough assistance to guide learning, adjusting as needed, and providing opportunities for reflection.

Further, scaffolding provides probes for learning and problem solving that allows the student to actively engage the problem and initiates a path to the autonomous application and learning in the future. This interaction's benefits are multivariate in that it transitions the instructor as a

facilitator, rather than a "fount" of knowledge (Polly, Allman, Casto, & Norwood, 2017). Further, the learner establishes agency within the learning process, especially with periodic reflections, that enables a focus on the process of learning, rather than just the learned product. Finally, the learning environment generated by a scaffolding learning interaction is centralized and, thus, customized and considers the student's learning process's sociocultural influences.

The broader context of human learning that is celebrated by sociocultural theory allows for a more "fluid boundary" between the learner and the social world that surrounds learning (Polly, Allman, Casto, & Norwood, 2017). This is essential because it contends that learning is situated within both a physical and metaphysical environment. Learners are both a product of and an architect of their sociocultural environment. The value of a discussion of sociocultural theory in this research is that it establishes a student's learning environment as both a context and a tool. A student's learning is best contextualized by methods, approaches, and applications centered upon their sociocultural environment. In turn, this allows students to engage in learning as an active inquiry into their environment, both for the sake of their scaffolding and context, but also as the foreground for the application of their learning. Furthermore, it allows the learner to expand upon and even extend their environment.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory transcends content areas, technologies, learning circumstances (i.e., formal classroom learning, casual social interactions, solitary exploration, *et cetera*) and elevates learning beyond generalized approaches to curriculum and pedagogy to focus on the individual. Further, it facilitates an understanding of play in learning because learning is considered experiential, and *enhanced* experience at that. In his 1933 lecture on play, Vygotsky states, "In play a child is always above [their] average behavior; in play it is as though [they] were a head taller than [themselves]. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains

all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior" (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 16). This allows for the consideration that play is one of the most elevated learning processes to promote higher-order skills development. Play allows children to overcome their impulsive, reactive behavior in favor of intentional conduct (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Vygotsky saw play as a "transitional" stage between thinking constrained by context to thinking free of said constraints, and thus agentic. However, play does not develop organically. It, too, is a process that requires scaffolding and facilitation. Therefore, play in learning, and the application of play as an agent of learning is first the instructor's responsibility. As Bodrova and Leong's (2015) interpretation of Vygotsky's considerations of play contends, the idea that children need to be taught to play is a newer advent. Further, as childhood evolves, fewer and fewer children have an opportunity to learn to play from their peers, thus centralizing educators' role in the promotion, quality, and utilization of play for learners (pp. 385-386).

While Vygotsky is regarded as the proverbial father of sociocultural theory, a rounded discussion of learning as a social process should acknowledge the contributions and influences of Dewey's "cultural naturalism" (Alexander, 2014). Cultural naturalism was Dewey's preferred term for *pragmatism*, a philosophical tradition that finds the world to be inseparable from the agency within it; or, in other words, it is the active adaptation of the human mind to function within culture, not just to try and get beyond culture (Hildebrand, 2018). In contrast to Vygotsky, Dewey believed that the individual's means to question through experience was the value of socially interactive learning. While both scholars considered the role of human agency in learning, Dewey's philosophies value the individual's development and their ability to question the social system in which they are a part. A learner must recognize their ability to be a

“viable agent for change” within a social organization (Glassman, 2001, p. 13). Glassman (2001) analyzed the nuanced differences between Vygotsky and Dewey's approaches to education as a social process on three points: (1) the role of social history, (2) the experience of culture, and (3) the role of human inquiry in the educational process. Glassman's analysis contends that Vygotsky believed rational inquiry to be embedded within culture, which is then embedded within social history, a "from the outside in" approach (pp. 3-4). Dewey appreciated human inquiry and its creation of a social tools system, thus valuing the ability to manipulate an individual's social history. Where Vygotsky's work, abbreviated by his short life, contends that there could be several possible connections between development and learning (e.g., independent of each other, learning is development, and that they are "inherently different but related"), Dewey's philosophical considerations find that learning drives development. Despite their differences, Vygotskian and Dewian considerations of education highlight the importance of "everyday activity" in educational processes. The significance of this comparison is to illuminate the role of the social environment in learning as seminal. A student's classroom, whether formally or informally constructed, is a nucleus of social interaction, and it is this social consideration finds learning to be meaningful. Whether as an agent of change as part of a social community (Vygotsky) or an agent enacting change upon a social community (Dewey), both scholars consider the hallmark of sociocultural theory to promote egress and entry from social affiliations to enact identity and affect change.

Applying a Critical Lens

The change promoted by applying a sociocultural lens is enacted, so when a learner views their social environment with a critical perspective. A critical application informs this research of sociocultural theory (Corradetti, n.d.; Horkheimer, 1937/1976; Moje & Lewis, 2007).

Born of the European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School, the distinction between theory--perhaps clarified as *traditional theory*--and critical theory is a presupposition of objectivity: truth versus falsehood. Critical theory, as defined by Horkheimer (1937), rejects the idea that knowledge is embedded within historical and social context: "The facts which our senses present to us are socially performed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ" (Horkheimer (1937) in Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1992, p. 242). Born of the Frankfurt School with a "Marxist twist," critical theory aims to dispel notions that knowledge is impartial. Instead, knowledge can only be obtained from a "societal embedded perspective of interdependent individuals" (Corradetti, n.d.). Critical theory does not consider knowledge to be the finite end-goal. Rather, critical theory characterizes knowledge as a functional necessity for ideological critique and social emancipation. This research's application of critical theory draws upon Horkheimer's ideas of individuals as able to "liberate," "influence," and "create" a world that reflects the actual needs of humans (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246). Due to the broad application of critical theories to match the full scope of human experiences, there are a number of "critical theories" that have been developed; this research focuses on the utility of critical sociocultural theory (Lewis, Moje, & Enciso, 2007) as well as apply critical practices to literacy as an instructional approach.

Critical Theory in Education

Sociocultural theories differ in their pursuits of explanation, change, and action. While these theories have successfully been applied in several micro- and meso-level analysis, few offer large-scale (e.g., macro-level) explanations (Lemke, 2001). Critical sociocultural theories champion macro-level analysis by provisioning conceptual tools to transform society, stamp out inequalities within society, and construct societal change (Gore, 1993; Horkheimer, 1972;

Crossman, 2019). While these various offshoots of critical theory focus on specific aspects of culture, critical theory in education focuses on responses to "real-world circumstances" within learning environments to "shift the purposes, scope, aims, and delivery" of education to enable cultural and social transformation through the growth of individuals (Mellor, 2013). This is accomplished through particular attention to historically oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated populations to disrupt traditional notions of power and the majority.

Critical theories in education acknowledge that oppression is the reality of the twenty-first-century education system; but, require an "emancipatory plan" to enact societal liberation through education. The mechanisms of oppression and the means for emancipation exist in the same apparatuses: pedagogy and curriculum. Thus, educators are at the forefront of both educational oppression and liberation in both the content they incorporate and the methods by which they teach. This also implies that classrooms (either formal or informal) are the context for despotism or democracy. Critical sociocultural perspectives allow an individual to consider their own identity within the broader social structure and history and local context (Tottenham & Petersen, 2014). Thus, teachers are critical to the conversation of reforming education. It is essential that educators who are versed in preparing students to become citizens of the twenty-first-century world engage in critical consciousness to utilize curriculum and pedagogical practices that threaten the oppressive status quo.

Further, as critical theory recognizes the individual's power, students must also be invited into dialogues of criticality with regards to their learning experiences (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010). In recognizing that the perpetuation of the problem and the inception of the solution to education inequities exist within classrooms, it stands to reason that students--as natural occupants of education spaces and classrooms--should be part of the reformation process and

thus invited to push back at societal norms and narratives of oppression. The sociocultural environment of classrooms now takes on an additional role. Not only do sociocultural considerations facilitate learning contexts for students, but they also inform the backdrop for enacting social change.

Critical Literacy

Critical considerations of education can no longer, in good conscience, classify education as Horace Mann's "the great equalizer" (Mann, 1940/2010). Instead, education is plagued by standardization practices, increasingly centralized curricula, and bureaucratization of the profession of teaching. The correct application of critical theory finds education in such a state and contends to enact social mobility through intentional reflection, advocacy, and Freire's *praxis*, or the unification of pedagogical theory and practice (Freire, 1970). Critical sociocultural theory, termed by Lewis, Moje, and Enciso (2007), maintains sociocultural theory's emphasis on an individual's learning as inherently social, but pushes for more direct attention to issues of power, identity, and agency that are central to literacy learning and practice (Lewis, Moje, & Enciso, 2007; Pyscher, Lewis, Stutelberg, 2014). Critical sociocultural approaches expand on sociocultural approaches through the increased emphasis on critical reading and writing practices to help students engage in critical dialogue, contest ideologies, enable action to enact change and transform their sociocultural environment and the world around them (Pyscher, Lewis, Stutelberg, 2014).

Literacy has a long-standing relationship with social emancipation (Freire, 1970; Mayo, 1995; Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Perry, 2012). In keeping with Lewis, Moje, and Enciso's (2007) and Tracey and Morrow's (2006) considerations, the idea of sociocultural theory of literacy--while not a singular entity--deserves singular attention. Thus, this research understands

that there are three distinct sociocultural perspectives on literacy: (1) literacy as social practice, (2) multiliteracies, and (3) critical literacy (Perry, 2012, pp. 50-51). The general premise of sociocultural theories of literacy is concerned with the ways people use literacy in their everyday lives by finding avenues to apply literacy outside the classroom, incorporating students' "out-of-school" lives into literacy practices, and decreasing achievement gaps for communities that practice and enact literacy in ways that differ from the empowered majority (Perry, 2012; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007; Gee, 2000; Lewis, Moje, Enciso, 2007). Sociocultural perspectives on literacy are a unique application of sociocultural theory because they situate literacy as part of an individual's social environment, both as informative of that environment, as a product of that environment, and as a tool for egress and entry from/to environments. Work by Purcell-Gates and Perry (2011) finds that while sociocultural perspectives on literacy do not explain how learners master reading and writing skills, these perspectives do facilitate and understand what types of knowledge are needed for a learner to engage in literacy practices, such as reading and writing. Further, critical sociocultural perspectives on literacy, as Lewis, Moje, and Enciso (2007) find, is meant to "better address issues of power, identity, and agency" (p. 2). Critical literacy perspectives allow for literacy to purport identity and meaning-making of one's context through "the forms that literacy takes" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 337).

A discussion of critical literacy is incomplete without acknowledging the work of Brazilian scholar and humanitarian Paulo Freire, whose philosophy on the socially transformative power of literacy found the individual and the world in which the individual lives to be mutually and reciprocally dependent upon each other. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* recognized literacy as more than just a cognitive skill but a means of power and a connection between a learner and their world. He explains:

To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate these techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads, and to write what one understands; it is to communicate graphically. Acquiring literacy...[is] an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context. (p. 86)

Both Vygotsky's and Freire's philosophical considerations make a critical commentary about the route of learning and the learner's relationship with the *process* (rather than the *product*) of learning. Vygotsky's theories of learning characterize the learning process as "reciprocal and dynamic...a process of mutual and continuous adaptation (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 349). Similarly, Freire's work emphasizes the authenticity of the learning processes to liberate the student into new ways of knowing and acting within and upon their environment. In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire characterized the learning process as not leading to a "rupture" of said process, but rather a, "...further stage of the knowing process. This stage, which is continuity rather than a rupture, happens when ingenious curiosity...becomes capable of self-criticism. In criticizing itself, ingenious curiosity becomes 'epistemological curiosity,'" (Freire, 1998, p. 37). Thus, as part of the same relationship of reciprocity, Vygotsky described that learning should be a consistent and genuine transformative process to achieve autonomy, new ways of knowing, emancipation, and utility. As Vygotsky said, education is not about teaching "a certain quantity of knowledge"; it is about teaching learners to "acquire such knowledge and make use of it" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 339). A critical perspective of literacy enacts Vygotsky's ability to "make use" of knowledge by compelling learners to move beyond passive acceptance of information (RE: Freire's "banking model" of education) to a stage of "epistemological curiosity." This is where learners question texts, consider and challenge power relations in communication, and enact agency through the

creative engagement of and with literacy.

Intersectionality: Critical Multicultural Socio-Perspectives

This research stands to utilize critical sociocultural theory through a multicultural complex by way of an intersectional lens. A multicultural complex is pertinent to considering teaching and learning practices for social equity because such recognizes the intricacies and convolutions represented by the intersections of "identity, privilege, and marginalization" which represent those categories that define communities' "social, historical, and political dimensions" (Peters, 2017; Chun & Singh, 2010; Taylor et al. 2007). This focus acknowledges that singular frameworks are not adequate to capture students' sociocultural learning processes. Peters (2017) utilizes the term "social location" throughout his work to consider multicultural and intersectional approaches to mentoring in education. He refers to "the collective intersectional nature of one's identity" as the single-axis understanding of one's identity does not capitalize upon the "enriched interplay" of a learner's social and political existence in the world. This research recognizes intersectionality as both a trademark strength of critical sociocultural perspectives, but also as an apt application of such. By applying a multicultural lens of intersectionality to the learning process, student learning is better understood and celebrated with that student's sociocultural/"social location" at the forefront of pedagogical and curricular considerations.

Sleeter's (1987, 1988, 1995, 1998, 2010) work on multicultural education has studied the "interlocking structures of race, class, gender, and disability" and how these structures are reflected in the inequities and antidemocratic practices that are present in classrooms (2010). It is essential to highlight that applying a critical and intersectional multicultural lens is not meant to co-opt or appropriate ways of knowing learning, or living that might differ from the societal

"norm." Instead, as Sleeter establishes in *Empowerment through Multicultural Education* (1991), this work is meant to challenge homogeneous ways of knowing and directly challenging hierarchical and inequitable structures of power and oppression to see social change take place within classrooms and beyond. Thus, empowerment and multicultural perspectives are understood in this work to be inextricably linked. A critical intersectional lens, specifically regarding race, such a critical race theory, allows for the advancement of social justice, embraces a diverse life within and about classroom settings, and links learning issues with human rights. Thus, critical intersectionality extends the mission of a sociocultural agenda by providing a framework within which students can begin to envision themselves as individuals who possess the agency to enter and egress from their social environments and advocate for change.

Critical Race Theory

As this research stands to consider and critique connections made to enrich the learning experiences of those students who identify as Black and male in United States' classrooms, an understanding of the applications of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a critical multicultural lens for empowerment, as well as perspective, is necessary. CRT recognizes that machinations within society--specifically political and education systems--function to benefit a white majority (Chandler, 2010; Tottenham & Petersen, 2014). Delgado & Stefancic (1995/2013) established that racial inequalities are among America's "most stubborn and enigmatic" problems. The 1960's Civil Rights Movement seemed to remedy some of the more visible acts of racism against individuals who identify as Black. However, the byproduct of colorblindness has contributed to the systemic and day-to-day racism--perhaps even the "legal segregation"--that is still seen in classrooms. This segregation includes ignoring a student's cultural experiences, disregarding individual and familial histories, homogenizing "social location" and community, and

overlooking the sociocultural influences of one's racial identity (Scruggs, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 1995/2013). The harm of this, according to CRT, is that culture creates a social reality that is self-serving and does not promote genuine change because it is univariate rather than collaborative. CRT examines the social reality that has been established as a result of majority power dynamics and highlights how this disserves minorities and their cultures.

Further, CRT capitalizes upon the principles established by sociocultural scholars (e.g., Vygotsky, Freire) by requiring that CRT scholars, or Criticalists, recognize that true transformation involves an enactment of an individual's agentic identity. This identity can generate change through reciprocity and criticality during the learning process, rather than remaining a victim of the passive bestowal of information. CRT asserts that the majority's transfer of power is nothing more than a maintenance of the status quo. Real equity invites every representative to the proverbial table with equitable access to a seat, an agenda, and a voice.

In a foundational connection between CRT and politics in United States' classrooms, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contend that a multicultural lens does not offer the "radical change" that is necessary to reform the current political order (p. 62). CRT finds its origin in (counter) legal scholarship (e.g., Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado) and critiques the "hegemonic rule of the oppress[ive]" practices in place within politicized systems, such as education (Ladson-Billings, 2010). Demonstrations of multicultural education do not go far enough--such as eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing songs, reading folklore, learning dances, *et cetera*. A genuinely celebratory multicultural sociocultural perspective in the educational process invites reciprocity between the learning process and students. Individuals should be asked to enact their sociocultural identities within their learning process, not as passive recipients of "unified differences" that are superficial and enacted *upon* students, rather than *with* or, ideally, *by*

students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 61).

CRT finds that university classrooms are not inviting students of color to be participative in curricular considerations. Instead, as Ladson-Billings establishes, "so complete is this exclusion that black [sic] students often come to the university in the role of intruders--who have been granted special permission to be there" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). Curriculum inclusion in higher education has been defined as "many cultures" existing together under a crowded umbrella of "difference" or "diversity" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 61). While this contends to be progressive, this research stands to establish that current considerations of curriculum inclusion do not go far enough to truly celebrate individual differences--both celebratory and defeatory. A "unity of difference" contends that all differences are analogous, and thus all identities are akin. While the condition of being human is a deserved universal designation historically denied to many, the twenty-first century understanding of identity must recognize the contentions of resisting education as a political space to build, celebrate, and utilize an individual's sociocultural identity.

Democratic Applications

Understanding that education is inherently political and inherently oppressive requires a discussion of how institutions of education maintain political agendas that repeatedly denigrate and disserve students of color. Stanley Aronowitz's (1980, 1992, 1996, 1997, 2004) critique of education systems provides insight into the ways education has become overly standardized, directly contributing to the ways Black male students are (mis)represented in classrooms. Standardization practices in education pose a bivariate issue for Black identity: those individuals who identify as Black can be forced to conform to the standardized methods of assimilation, disregarding their sociocultural identities where they vary from the social norm; or, they can

align themselves with the deficit mentality--in particular, those with the intersectional identity of Black and male--that continues to view Black males by a gap in achievement). Despite these bleak options, many Black students do not have even the possibility of choice as they are unable to distance themselves from the characterization of Black male students as underperforming academically, exhibiting behavior issues (e.g., suspensions, expulsions, and incarceration), high drop-out rates, and low graduation outcomes (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018). Howard (2013) asserts in his aptly entitled article, "How Does it Feel to Be a Problem? Black Male Students, Schools, and Learning in Enhancing the Knowledge Base to Disrupt Deficit Frameworks" finds that school reform efforts, characterized by standardization in schools, have a "deleterious effect on Black males well into adulthood in ways that do not affect other populations" (p. 55). These effects are such things as chronically high unemployment, over-incarceration, disparate health conditions, lower life expectations than any other racial/ethnic and gender group in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2020/2019). To return to Ladson-Billings (2011) and Critical Race Theory:

We see African American males as "problems" that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in school and the community. We seem to hate their dress, their language, and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots—music, basketball, football, track—we seem less comfortable with them than in places like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. (p. 9)

These "problems" are a byproduct of a politicized agenda within schools meant to serve a white majority rather than create transformative democratic classrooms.

Harkening to Kirkland's (2011) case-study of a Black male adolescent who would only read if he could find himself within the text, education curriculum "[does] not celebrate the idea of *thinking* as a full-time activity and thus, we promote a habit of producing a system of "useless knowledge" (Vygotsky, 1978; Freire, 1970; Aronowitz, 1998, p. 108). Where the narrative of Black males is widespread and increasingly characterized by a deficit mentality (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012), the value of the *process* of learning, rather than arbitrary products--such as standardized test scores--is encouraging and positive, *but only if* traditionally othered populations are invited to join the conversation and assert their sociocultural perspectives. Acknowledging that learning by servicing corporatization and standardization is failing (Aronowitz, 1996), education reform should focus on disrupting the power-relations by being both critical and action-oriented.

The "hidden curriculum" of the present American education system is corporate order and social reproduction. Aronowitz assesses that: (1) too much emphasis exists on basic standardized skills as determined by democratic principles of authority; and, (2) a need for long-term and increasingly concrete payoff. The issue of literacy in education is not one of literacy at all; in fact, it is one of "*functional illiteracy*" from a historical perspective. As part of a political reformation in education, the idea of literacy contends how to use individual literacy as a means for agency and social justice. Specifically referencing Black males, as Tatum (2003, 2012) does, how can a generalized skillset define a consistently pitted population as a counter to the normative standards? Aronowitz states that "the new drive for literacy [finds] theoretical legitimacy in the unity of utterance and thought, a refusal of the ideas of such sociolinguists as William Labov who argued that forms of black [sic] speech could be transcoded into logical thought commensurable in every respect with canonical expression" (Aronowitz, 2004, p. 43).

Individualization, in both ideas and the expression of said ideas, is much more powerful rhetoric and celebrates the student, not the standard.

Aronowitz argues that social class and appreciations of and by various social classes should percolate education curricula. By incorporating a diverse definition of knowledge and learning, we stand a better chance of pursuing what Aronowitz refers to as a "genuine intellectual endeavor" in schooling (Aronowitz, 2004, p. 33). Genuine intellect, and to that end, radical democratization, within schools, should reconsider the "scope" of education, which should extend beyond the classroom as learners are prepared to be global citizens. Education should be founded on the idea of education as educated. Authority should not govern the concept of education the way it regulates schooling. Instead, as Aronowitz asserts, authority should be earned, "not assumed," and the transmission of tradition should be "critical rather than worshipful," reminiscent of Vygotsky's reciprocity and Freire's mentoring (Aronowitz, 2004, p. 32). To subvert the hold of mass knowledge and conformity that promotes inequity and pedals superficial beliefs, such as access to education as a solution for achievement gaps, learners' knowledge should be incorporated into the curriculum as treated critically to engage in a broader system of critique and building of cultural capital.

A politicized consideration of sociocultural identity produces an explanation of "identity" that accounts for the inevitable ebb and flow of interaction, stimuli, relations, environments, *et cetera* that inform identity. The irony in searching for identity is that we look for regulation to control the most free-flowing and indefinable concept within society. With this in mind, it is even inconceivable that we would think of ourselves as a "right" identity because the very idea of being "right" (or, by extension, "better" than others) is contradictory to the exercise of finding identity, which is continuously in motion. Thus, hierarchy is an impossible construct.

As a duplicitous interaction between the learner and their environment, identity is static, radically outdated, and should be reevaluated to fit the twenty-first-century classroom. Instead, a learner's sociocultural identity should be considered a "process" by which a continually changing and evolving set of relations, both institutional (i.e., family, school, friends, law, *et cetera*) and personal (i.e. "others") are interacting (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 95). Regarding marginalized populations, such as Black men, all facets of the narrative surrounding these populations thus become part of identity formation, including historical discrimination, disingenuous transformations, and deficit mentalities.

Conclusion

Critical sociocultural considerations establish a lens by which to consider students' academic experience who identify as Black and male. This perspective is essential to understand that, (1) these students are oppressed and marginalized by the curriculum implementation and pedagogical choices taking place within twenty-first-century classrooms; and, (2) the steps to rectify this oppression must include genuine empowerment of the individual student's identity-building beyond the standardized dichotomy that is available for black males: to assimilate or to conform the deficit narrative the characterizes Black male students. This research intends to assert that the intersectionality of Black male students' sociocultural perspectives should be critically enacted through literacy infused curricular and pedagogical choices to achieve the Black male learner's empowerment by way of enacting his agency. The following chapter describes the rationale and methods by which these theoretical considerations are used to consider data.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The student-athlete who identifies as both Black and male is commodified by institutions of education (Martin, Fasching-Varner, Hartlep, 2017, p. 59). According to the most recently reported data, the most successful college sports (i.e., those that generate the most revenue for college and university campuses) are the men's contact sports of football and basketball. Both sports boast rosters that are comprised of at least 50% Black men (NCAA, 2020a). In the most elite programs, such as those designated Division I schools by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), Black men are found to be overwhelmingly the majority of these rosters. Further, in professional settings, Black men represent the majority of players in the National Football League (NFL) and National Basketball Association (NBA). The NFL drafts more than five times the number of Black male athletes to play professional-level football compared to white male athletes (Garcia & Maxwell, 2019). However, Black male student-athletes are not celebrated for their athletic skills beyond their ability to be productive in athletic contexts. This implies that they are not welcomed to use the skills they cultivate on the field and on the court in classroom and professional settings.

Classrooms are failing Black students, generally. Black students graduate from undergraduate institutions at the lowest rate (less than 40%) compared to any other racial demographic (e.g., white, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or those who identify as two or more races) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Only 40% of Black college students graduate, and only half of those students graduate within four years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The graduation rate for Black male student-athletes follows a similar narrative, despite NCAA reporting. Derrick Jackson reports

that in Power Five Conferences, the majority of institutions see only 50% of their Black male student-athletes across the graduation stage (Jackson, 2017; Harper, 2018). Similarly, the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center reports that Division I programs are the most likely to "demonstrate problematic trends relating to African American male student-athletes" (Brenneman, 2018, para. 7). These inequities are not an accident. Harrison, Comeaux, and Plecha (2006) found that Black male student-athletes are more likely to be recruited from "less prestigious" high school programs, which correlates with a lack of preparation for college-level academic work and decreases the likelihood of academic success (e.g. graduation) (Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006, p. 3).

According to the most recent data from the NCAA, NBA, and NFL, professional realms are not welcoming the Black male athlete, either. Despite Black male's reported rate of success in draft settings, the odds are slim. Only 255 players (of the 16,346 eligible players) were drafted to play football in 2019; this is a less than two percent likelihood (NCAA, 2020b). Similarly, the NBA drafted only 52 of 4,181 eligible players (equating to a one percent likelihood) (NCAA, 2020b). Of the remaining eligible players, it appears only white men are welcomed into leadership, coaching, and administrative roles. Coaches and athletic administrators are mostly white, with less than 25% of executives, managing directors, coaches, assistant coaches, administrators, or even graduate students across the entire 1,200 schools in the NCAA system identifying as Black (Martin, Fasching-Varner, Hartlep, 2017). The commodification of Black men exists only into the proverbial *end-zone*, at which point their skills, voices, and identities appear to no longer have any significance.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a commodity as either that which is a "raw material" that possesses the value of "use" or "useful qualities" ("Commodity," 2020). Black

men are the essence of successful sports in the twenty-first century. However, it is not a far reach to follow Hawkins's (2010) analogy to a "prison industrial complex," or Starkey's (2014) labor-market cartel comparison:

The NCAA concocted the term "student-athlete" and wrapped this new phrase in a self-serving mythology that holds that college athletes who profit from the talent are distracted from what should be their first priority: getting a quality education. Many onlookers therefore accept the NCAA's...rules as proper. Paternalism toward "student-athletes," that allows this labor-market cartel to remain. (para. 5).

These men are learning and cultivating a skill, enacting it successfully, and, in the process, earning billions of dollars for institutes of higher education and their various stakeholders, in addition to generating an environment on college campuses that recruits, retains, and invests fellow students and alumni. But, these same men are not invited to call upon these skills into other settings, implying either a lack of value of these skills or a lack of value for the Black male voice and experience. This oppression by omission is made evident by classroom curriculum and pedagogy that does not enact the Black male perspective. The sociocultural perspectives and athletic identities of Black men are being disregarded and, even, disparaged as irrelevant, and one cannot help but notice the vast inequities in such a system.

This research stands to assess what, if any, sociocultural considerations are made on behalf of Black male identity through the utility of critical literacy assignments in courses that see a high rate of failure by Black male student-athletes. As posed by Rifenburg (2018), the issue of Black student-athlete knowledge is not a query of "if," but of "how" (p. 7). What can--and, *should*--educators be doing to better support Black male student-athlete identity development, learning, and success based on what they already know? It is the responsibility of

every critical pedagogue, according to Kincheloe's (2005) work, to transform relations of power, which are inherently and overly oppressive. Drawing upon Brazilian scholar and humanitarian, Paulo Freire (1970), literacy is the best lens by which to view problem-posing in education and to, most significantly, enact solutions as literacy leads to critical consciousness. This process involves the uncovering of reality and striving for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention to allow students to develop an autonomous ability to improve their lives (Freire, 1970, Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). The value of applying critical literacy to the sociocultural perspectives of Black male student-athletes is that it tasks students with developing a critical literacy lens by which *they* draw upon the realities of *their* life situations. The result of the development of this lens is that it allows for education settings to better celebrate individuals. A framework of critical sociocultural theory, by way of critical literacy, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory, will structure this exploration into the types of literacy oriented assignments being administered in classes that see a high rate of failure by Black male student-athletes. This research aims to see if the literacy assignments taking place in these courses, (1) are critical and, therefore, do not suppose neutrality; (2) are personalized or allow for personalization; (3) are welcoming of diverse ways of knowing; (4) are comprised of dialogic opportunities/methods to welcome questions; and (5) intentionally centralize the students' social location (Vasquez, 2010; NCTE, 2019; Peters, 2017).

Rationale for Methods

Just as no one singular explanation can account for how societies work, organizations operate or explain individuals, singular approaches to teaching and learning stand to overlook individuals by imposing a hierarchy or privilege (Reeves, Albert, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). Thus, qualitative research methods are the most appropriate modes of inquiry for this research because

such allows for a complex combination of conceptual understanding in the human condition that is learning and identity within learning. As assessed by Jones (1995) in his description of qualitative research, methods of research that are qualitative in nature allow for “interpretive” and “naturalistic” approaches to subjects (p. 2). This study utilizes a qualitative approach to research as it values the naturalistic settings in which phenomena occur in order to value such in their specific contexts and settings (Hoepfl, 1997; Patton, 1990). Specifically for research conducted in and on behalf of the field of education, qualitative methods allow for the identification of variables that might later be tested because, as they currently stand, quantitative and testable measures cannot adequately describe the situation (Hoepfl, 1997). A number of features define and characterize the value of a qualitative approach, according to precedence (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Eisner, 1991):

- (1) Qualitative research attempts to observe, describe, and interpret settings as they are, maintaining “empathic neutrality” (Patton, 1990, p. 55).
- (2) The researcher is the “human instrument” of data collection (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 49).
- (3) Qualitative researchers use inductive analysis techniques (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 49).
- (4) Qualitative research values a descriptive report that values the “presence of voice” within the text (Eisner, 1991, p. 36).
- (5) Qualitative research has an interpretive character, aimed at discovering the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them, and the interpretations of those meanings by the researcher (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 49).
- (6) Qualitative researchers pay attention to the idiosyncratic as well as the pervasive, seeking the uniqueness of each case (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 49).

(7) Qualitative research has an emergent (as opposed to predetermined) design, and researchers focus on this emerging process as well as the outcomes or product of the research (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 49).

As emphasized by Patton (1990), qualitative research is a multilayered experience between the researcher, the reader, and the appositeness of the subject matter. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state: “If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it” (p. 12). This research stands to analyze curriculum utilized in 100- and 200-level undergraduate courses at a minority serving institutions through a qualitative approach because such facilitates an understanding of the state of curriculum in these classrooms as it is: (1) created by faculty and, (2) experienced by students.

Course syllabuses, assignment descriptions and instructions, reading lists, *et cetera* are artifacts that characterize the relationship between the faculty members of higher education classrooms and their students. Qualitative research acknowledges that the products within and of specific environments are “inseparable” from the social worlds in which they are a part of, respond to, or are informed by (Saldana & Omasta, 2017, p. 63). These symbols are representative of the inter-relational nature of student and instructor relationships in these courses. As established by Saldana and Omasta (2017), symbols connote values, attitudes, and beliefs (p. 64). As oppression has been predetermined to exist in educational settings, these symbols--representative of the values, attitudes, and beliefs--are passed from the instructor to the student, following the presupposed hierarchical structure. Rubin and Rubin (2012) discuss that values’ systems are not fixed and are influenced by the people with whom they interact (p. 132). Further, values are not intrinsic to artifacts; they are “human endowed” (Saldana & Omasta, 2017, p. 65). Thus, this research stands to interpret what values for sociocultural perspectives

are passed from instructors to students through assignments. These assignments stand as the "endowed" symbols of classroom rhetoric and represent the values of instructors. Students are affected by these symbols. This research considers how these artifacts value critical literacy, sociocultural perspectives, and individual social locations, as well as student voice, in particular the Black male voice.

Study Design

The value of this study for the field of teaching and learning is to comment on the (supposedly) reciprocal and critical dialogue that should be taking place within classrooms to bring the Black male voice to the forefront. According to Freire (1970), both students and teachers are part of the learning process. The teacher should uncover the world and invite students to see themselves situated within that world. Traditional literacy-oriented assignments--such as reading, writing, and speaking--should invite students to see the world beyond "static reality," and, instead, as "reality in process" (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Currently, the state of Black male student-athlete success is static. A high rate of failure in 100 and 200 level university courses, followed by the national dropout of 50% of our students, is indicative of oppression within classrooms that do not invite the Black male students to the forefront. Reading, writing, and speaking assignments are the units for analysis in this research because these personify a student's opportunity to learn through the examination of materials (Foly, 2007). According to Dougherty (2012), assignments hold the potential to make teaching and learning relevant. Quoting Richard Elmore's advice, Dougherty assesses that the quality of the task assigned indicates a student's ability to perform new skills. Drawing on Giroux (1998), this research finds that the skill any student should constantly be learning is that of a critically thinking citizen who can "take their place in the conduct of democratic life" (Giroux, 1998 in Carlson & Apple, 2008).

Black male student-athletes are not being prepared for citizenship in a socially just world. Thus, it is time to look at the state of said preparation.

Research Questions

To address the gaps in literature surrounding the sociocultural perspectives and pedagogical practices that are enacted by critical literacy assignments, this research puts forward the need to investigate the type, quantity, and quality of assignments being administered in those university classes that see a high rate of Black male failing grades and class failures. The overarching consideration for this study is to examine if sociocultural considerations are being made to promote and cultivate Black male identities to meet the "educational debt" being incurred by a lack of equitable literacy practices in our higher education classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The collected data in this study is in response to the following specific points of inquiry:

1. What types of assignments characterize the literacy oriented (i.e., reading, writing, and oral) work being assigned in 100 and 200 level general education courses that have a below-average success rate by Black male student-athletes?
2. How are assignments in 100 and 200 level courses that have a below-average success rate by Black male student-athletes inviting critical sociocultural perspectives of individual students?
3. What shifts are required in the literacy oriented (i.e. reading, writing, and oral) assignments in 100 and 200 level general education courses to better address social justice for Black male student-athletes' critical perspectives?

Participants

Certainly, student-athletes are recognized as a specific and particular population as there are several hallmark factors that distinguish a student-athletes' role on campuses when compared to their non-student-athlete counterparts (Hyatt, 2003; Kennedy, 2007; Amundsen et al., 2008). Three of these factors include vast and extended time commitments (Meyer, 1990; Parham, 1993); lenient and alternative admission criteria than can lead to a lack of academic preparation (Adler & Adler, 1991; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora & Terenzini, 1995; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Sellers, 1992; Shulman & Bowen, 2001); as well as labeling and stereotypes (Hyatt, 2003; Collin, 2014; Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017). Interestingly, of the stigmas applied to student-athletes, some of the most damaging take place within classrooms by faculty and staff. Faculty and staff have been found to feel more favorably towards those students who are not involved with athletics (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995; Amundsen et al., 2008). However, the strength of athletic identity does not supersede a student's individuality. In fact, despite the strength of a student's athletic identity (Beron & Piquero, 2016; Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014; Huang, Chou, & Hung, 2016; Kimball, 2007), it is important to note that addressing a student for their "student-athlete" identity circumnavigates accessing the larger issue at hand: the sociocultural sensitivity to an individual student's voice. Such is supported in Amundsen et al. 's (2008), which sought to investigate whether classes dedicated entirely to student-athletes lead to increased academic success and retention in first-year student-athletes. The results found that student-athletes participating in first-year experience courses designed for "the general student body" were not significantly from those who participated in a first-year experience course designed exclusively for student-athletes (p. 63). Further, no statistical significance was found in student-athlete dropout for Black student-athletes or female

student-athletes across either course. However, white males in low-profile sports enrolled in the general population course returned for their sophomore year at a rate of only 40% (compared to 89% in the all-athlete section of the course) (pp. 64-65). Thus, athletic identity has been found to make a difference in white male athletes' classroom status but does not have the same impact on Black males. However, as established, university classrooms still see a high rate of dropout and a lack of graduation success from Black male students, in particular those Black male students who are also athletes. This implies that athletic identity and a sense of belonging to an athletic community does not affect Black male student-athletes the same way it has been found to affect white male student-athletes with regards to classroom success.

Pedagogical Practices in Context

Every student should feel worthy of learning in classroom settings. Lugo and Hawisher (2003) uncovered an interesting nuance about literacy instruction using writing assignments, accounting that those instructors who teach writing, and/or rely upon writing-intensive assessment practices, certify "which students are acceptable to the academy" (Lugo & Hawisher, 2003; Mack & Zebroski, 1991). Formal literacy assignments are part of Vygotsky's oppressive cycle and Freire's banking model because of the very nature of appropriation that takes place. Students are asked to replicate a form of discourse they can "be made aware" of but "cannot control" (Mack & Zebroski, 156). Not only does this commodify students, but it creates an oppressive hierarchy: which students can conform to the academic discourse and who cannot (Martin, Fasching-Varner, Hartlep, 2017, p. 59). However, yet again, attention to the Black male learner continues to commodify him as a generalization. Lugo and Hawisher go so far as to assess that Black students prefer and "respond as well, if not better" to those assertive teaching practices that involve primitive, dehumanized approaches to instruction, such as "continuous

questioning, finger snaps, [and] hand claps" (Lugo & Hawisher, 2003, p. 279). This is qualified as only logical, according to Lugo & Hawisher, because "what the Negro does best is to follow others' orders (p. 280). This misquoted line from Woodson's (1933) "The Mis-Education of the Negro," yet again, finds Black men to be the product of a generalization that seeks to not only demean Black men into a homogenous way of knowing and learning but removes the power and agency from the Black male's learning process.

While Lugo and Hawisher's qualification of what is a Black male learner is inherently problematic, they do unpack an important problem that a critical pedagogy approach to learning could address: who best identifies with students and in what ways? Through an application of critical sociocultural theory, the discussion of how students learn best can be extended into both micro (classroom) and macro (campus) realms. Critical sociocultural theories champion macro-level analysis by provisioning conceptual tools to transform society, stamp out inequalities within society, and construct societal change (Gore, 1993; Horkheimer, 1972; Crossman, 2019). Thus, it is worth exploring the consideration that pedagogy is not isolated to individual instructors, or within micro-realms. Instruction is also conducted through broader networks, even at the institutional level (e.g. macro-realms). The context cultivated on college campuses makes a significant difference in students' success. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority serving institutions in the United States exemplify such by promoting a much higher rate of minority student success. Students of color who graduate from minority serving institutions are more likely to pursue graduate or professional schooling than those students of color who graduate from predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Commodore & Gasman, 2014). Further, the National Science Foundation reports that more than 30% of Black students receiving their Ph.D. in a STEM field received a bachelor's degree from a

minority serving institution (National Science Foundation, 2020). If literacy instruction indicates which “students are acceptable to the academy,” then it follows that the academy dictates the literacy instruction taking place within its classrooms. This understanding then leads to this research’s considerations of what different types of institutions are teaching today’s students.

It goes without saying that the issue of Black student success should be a concern of *every* educator. Bluntly: the work set to be accomplished by this research will not be done by simply designating Black students into those classrooms led exclusively by Black instructors. In fact, such a suggestion is not only fraught with racist overtones, but it views Black students as different only because they are Black, which is the antithesis of this research’s efforts. It oversimplifies that the Black student’s needs adhere only to considerations of their race. As an example, Lugo and Hawisher’s study (2003) asserts that any instructor who hopes to become familiar with Black culture should familiarize themselves with hip-hop, as hip-hop culture is one of the cultural identity markers that Black students “follow and embrace” in their study’s findings (p. 282). Taking steps to be familiar with a student’s social situation, such as an affinity for hip-hop music, bridges a gap between teacher and student that “shared ethnic identity” cannot always overcome (p. 283). Where Lugo and Hawisher attribute this step as a way for teachers to be more in step with Black culture, this researcher places such a step in line with being in stride with *student-oriented* culture.

Black students in twenty-first century classrooms exemplify that definitions of celebratory differences amongst students have not been extended to include the Black voice and conscious efforts to create space for such are long overdue. Certainly, every student deserves a mentor who looks like, talks like, lives like, and fosters them in a way in which they identify and understand. The fact that Black students, in particular Black male students, are falling behind

academic “standards,” makes it glaringly obvious that education’s pedagogical and curricular practices are not yet taking Black student needs into account. And, it is lazy to solve this problem by hoping the Black teaching force can pick up the slack and fill these gaps. The realities of education in the twenty-first century are that more than 80% of the teaching force is white (Moss, 2016). Yet another byproduct of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was the forced demotion or resignation of the United States’ Black teaching force. Thus, the reality is that a “shared ethnic identity” will not characterize even half of all student-teacher relationships in the United States. Student-focused considerations must look to embrace the student’s social situation within and beyond the classroom.

Black male student-athletes demonstrate the value of embracing an individual’s social situation. If an athlete is injured, his practice routines, game participation, weight-lifting, training, and treatment regimens are all adjusted to compensate for the injury. He is not immediately removed from the team if he is hurt; instead, an effort is made to improve him through appropriate adjustments that allow him to capitalize on his skills of the moment. Despite the injury, he is still a member of the team and will still “dress out” in uniform come game time. In classrooms, the “injury” is, perhaps, a lack of adequate preparation in reading. Where is the customized plan that adjusts in all realms? What practices are in place at the classroom level to even identify such an “injury”? And, notice that notions of race have no bearing on the healing of an achilles tendon. Instead, the recovery process is based on the severity of the injury, present range-of-motion, or relevant medical history, because every injury is unique to every body. Like treating an injury, being student-focused requires insight into the bodies within the room.

This analogy is not meant to imply that Black male students, or student-athletes in general, or any student is not eligible to receive learning accommodations and support through

campus offices of education accessibility. In fact, it is a well-documented issue that Black students are overrepresented in special education settings and are overly--and often--inaccurately--classified as learning with disabilities (Gordon, 2017; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2017; Yull, 2015). However, minority students are less likely to receive specialized and specific accommodations when compared to their white counterparts. One study found that Black students, “are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be labeled as intellectually disabled or emotionally disturbed” (Yull, 2015, p. 384). Instead of receiving individualized attention, students of color are found to be generalized as “problematic” due to the implicit bias of educators’ perceptions. The same behavior exhibited by both a white student and student of color was found to be interpreted as “violent” when exhibited by a student of color (Yull, 2015, p. 380). That is to say: the standards for measuring educational accommodations, while prevalent, are white and and not translating effectively to measure the specific needs of other students who do not identify as the sociocultural norm.

Knowing hip-hop music is not a “Black” thing; it exemplifies a step to consider student’s identities beyond the classroom. Where studies such as Lugo and Hawisher’s may stumble upon sociocultural considerations that enact social justice for Black men, they continue to place the actions of classroom pedagogy upon Black men, rather than alongside. Focusing on classroom rhetoric and instructional strategies has seen long-standing examination. What requires nuanced attention is how the pedagogy and curriculum of learning rhetoric are handed to and manipulated by students in their various social situations.

Kynard and Eddy (2009) also considered how student success in teaching and learning is unique in minority serving institutions when compared to predominantly white institutions. According to Kynard and Eddy, minority serving institutions, such as HBCUs, have created a

“critical space in which the cultural identities of black [sic] college students have pedagogical consequences inside the arenas of racial inequality in the United States” (pp. 24-25). The success and historical positionality of HBCUs certainly deserves acknowledgment. It is well-documented that HBCUs have made radical strides towards expanding definitions of diversity, as well as promoting the success and brilliance of Black scholars (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Drawing upon Ladson-Billings' concept of the "educational debt" that exists in schools, rather than an "achievement gap," Kynard and Eddy (2009) establish that, “HBCUs’ calculated conscious charge for ameliorating the education debt by committing to the way black [sic] students represents unique literacy politics” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 4; Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 26). That is to say, HBCUs hold a special place in education as promoting social justice across many definitions of diversity. HBCUs can be heralded as some of the most welcoming of diversity beyond just the Black community. As Kynard and Eddy account, "the radical work of HBCUs is not limited to black [sic] students and black [sic] faculty...a crucial dynamic of this work is coalition-building" (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 28).

The three hallmarks of the coalition-building being done at minority serving institutions involve: (1) acknowledging--as also established by Freire (1970)--the effects of racism and white supremacy on college and university campuses and within individuals; (2) undoing the toxic effects of this racism and oppression through intense critical mentoring; and, (3) working in tandem with other oppressed groups to achieve democratic alternatives (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, pp. 36-37). Drawing upon the success that is implemented in those educational settings that successfully support Black scholarly achievement, PWIs and other institutions who are looking to promote the academic advancement of Black male students should look to engage in coalition building, especially the idea of critical mentoring. Thus, critical pedagogy should be

implemented to transform the oppressive disregard for Black male sociocultural perspectives in all classrooms. Critical pedagogies work to both use and problematize a “social vision” of the classroom and, thus, the world at large (Gore, 1993, p. 4). Minority serving institutions, such as HBCUs, are not only the site of success for Black scholars, but also champions students of diversity by any number of definitions. This ideology is missing from classroom considerations for Black male student-athletes. The task is not to designate Black learners as inherently special, nor is it to generalize these students as standardized or one-size-fits-all. Instead, it is to force a movement of pedagogical and curricular decision making that engages individual students in critical dialogues about their particular social locations. Every classroom needs to build a coalition with its students. This research stands to access the steps towards coalition building that are in place within minority serving institution classrooms in order to critically evaluate their sociocultural effectiveness for conjecture at PWIs. Further, a critical approach to evaluating minority serving institutions coalition building--who are more effectively supporting the learning of students of color--will allow for an understanding of what adjustments are needed to better support Black male student-athletes.

Classroom and Learning Contexts

If this research contends that athletic skills are part of a Black male student-athletes' sociocultural lens, and these skills that are utilized in athletic contexts require technique and expertise as they are learned skills, it follows that athletic contexts are learning environments. Logan, Gildersleeve, Porenga, & Frank (2015) examine what learning opportunities exist within athletic learning spaces. Drawing upon sociocultural theorists and perspectives, Moje and Lewis (2016) establish that learning occurs within discourse communities, or communities where “groups of people...share ways of knowing, thinking, behaving, acting, and communicating” (p.

16). Further, Wenger and Snyder (2000) find that learning is an interplay between “social competence” that has been established by communities in time; thus, “knowing...is a matter of displaying competences defined in social communities” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 226).

Black male student-athletes are some of the most successful athletes in college sports. However, as established in Amundsen et al. (2008), Black males succeed at the same rate, whether they are with cohorts of athletes or non-athletes in their classes. Thus, as established by Logan, Gildersleeve, Portenga, & Frank (2015) the difference between utilizing and learning within designated spaces for Black male student-athletes centers upon the instructor or mentor, and how said instructor--as discussed in Lugo and Hawisher (2003)--prepares these students to learn with specific curricular and pedagogical considerations.

Smith & Mahiri (2002) exam what reflexive pedagogical practices can do to transform learning in higher education to capitalize on their experiences as student-athletes to facilitate a utility of student-athlete experiences in the learning process. They find that reflexive pedagogical practices--or, "engaging while educating"-- can help student-athletes navigate the divide between being a student and an athlete (Smith & Mahiri, 2002, p. 2). They also find that being a Black male student-athlete was a different experience than being a white or female athlete (p. 2). However, the research says that empowering any one group does not supersede the need to see that the power structure of athletics is inherently problematic for all athletes. Thus, this research focuses on the necessity to use reflexive pedagogies to not “erode identities” in classrooms (p. 25). They assert that the public identity of student-athletes as athletes perpetuates an “anti-intellectual” view of the student-athlete (p. 28). This is seen, according to Smith and Mahiri, as early as the recruitment process for student-athletes. For many student-athletes, academics are not a consideration in the recruiting process, even at prominent

institutions. Smith and Mahiri recount that in the signing of one male basketball player, the “rigors of a [University of California at Berkeley] education” were not part of the recruiting conversations at all. This implies that there is an underlying assumption that “athletic ability” is the predominant, if not sole, reason a student was accepted into a university program. Smith and Mahiri state, “many student-athletes question whether they can compete academically, feeling that they are less prepared, less qualified, and less deserving than the general student body” (p. 31). This implies student-athletes are entering academic spaces and feeling incompatible, either due to their strong sense of identity as an athlete, or their low opinion of themselves as students. The problem is that student-athletes are asked to choose, as their identities are inextricably linked.

The data that informs this research amplifies the voices of faculty at a minority-serving institution who design, mold, and teach 100- and 200-level courses, and those active-roster student-athletes who identify as both Black and male, and are enrolled in classes at the same minority serving institution. In congruence, these voices speak to the state of critical and diverse sociocultural perspectives within higher education classrooms. This is accomplished by a critical examination of classroom literacy requirements as representative of the relationship between faculty and students, particularly Black male student-athletes. This research aims to examine how literacy-oriented practices in classrooms (i.e., course assignments, course documents, reading requirements, texts, *et cetera*) invite critical sociocultural perspectives from a diverse student population. This informs an overarching goal of advocating those practices already in place and offering concrete and practical alternatives where necessary in order to better promote social justice in classrooms for today's Black male students. This chapter will delineate the analysis of artifacts collected from faculty who taught 100- and 200-level courses at a minority-

serving institution during the 2019-2020 academic year, using a critical lens and application of discourse analysis. In addition to the critical and theoretical consideration of these artifacts, this research is grateful for the critique and analysis offered by and in the voices of student-athletes themselves, who identify as Black and male.

It is important to note and emphasize that this research, as is recommended in all research endeavors, is informed and analyzed through complex theoretical frameworks and according to the most applicable scholarship. While attention to such adds to the rigor, reliability, and validity of the study, it does little to address the significance and credence of this work as authentic. As discussed in Chapter Four, the underlying motivation of this work is to utilize the research platform to promote the voices and agency of a historically (and contemporary) resilient population. Therefore, the most essential analysis reported in this research has been done by and through the voices of those Black male student-athletes who agreed to elevate this work's value by lending their perspectives and experiences.

This chapter is organized according to the three-part framework that defines "coalition-building," according to Kynard and Eddy (2009), which celebrates the pedagogical and curricular practices within minority-serving institutions. Knowing that this research is actively looking to purport ways to atone for the "educational debt" that has been incurred by generations of blatant, and often violent, discriminatory practices, it is essential to refrain from concentrating exclusively on the elucidation of a deficit narrative (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 4). Much more emphasis should be placed on celebrating moments of success in today's classroom and offering practical alternatives that allow Black male sociocultural identities to be welcomed in classrooms and celebrated and utilized. The three tenants of coalition building, according to Kynard and Eddy (2009) are:

1. Acknowledging the effects of racism and white supremacy on college and university campuses and within individuals
 2. Undoing the toxic effects of racism and oppression through intense critical mentoring
 3. Working in tandem with other oppressed groups to achieve democratic alternatives
- (pp. 36-37)

Figure 1 describes the components of coalition building; it visually represents how each tenant is not only unique in its implementation of socioculturally conscious pedagogy but progressive in its enactment of the amalgamation of diverse critical sociocultural perspectives across classroom pedagogies and curricula.

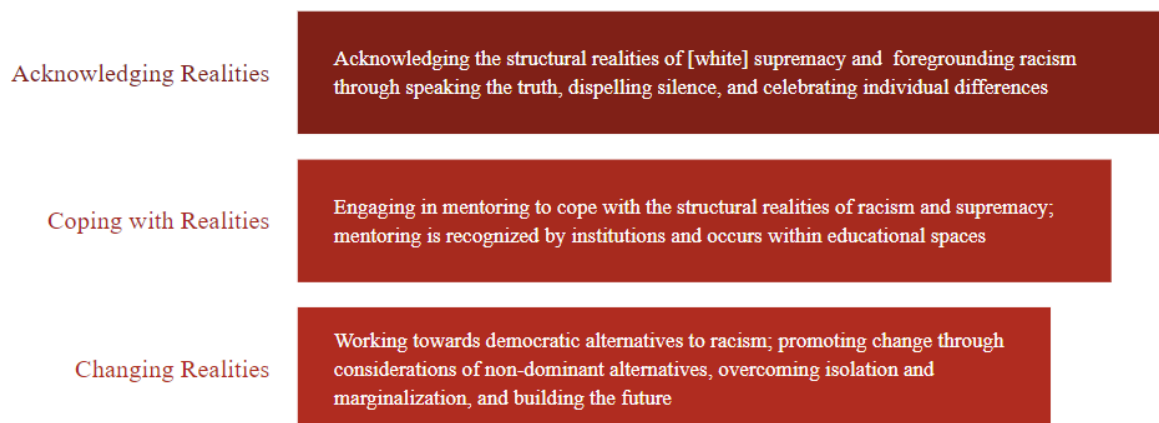


Figure 1. Summary of Coalition Building Framework

In addition to addressing how the artifacts in these courses are enacting "coalition building" between faculty and students through critical literacy, these tenants are also evaluated for how each stage is resisting grand-standing. Color-conscious pedagogy that is truly working to build a coalition in a teaching and learning environment is not only seeking to explain a

phenomenon. Instead, such is working as exemplative of a "pedagogical responsibility" of using students' deployment of their literacy skills by expanding upon the very definitions of what is literacy, language, and writing in the classroom (Kynard & Eddy, 2009). Therefore, each stage of coalition building is evaluated for its resistance to putting diverse and critical sociocultural perspectives on display as only unique and isolated (see Figure 2).

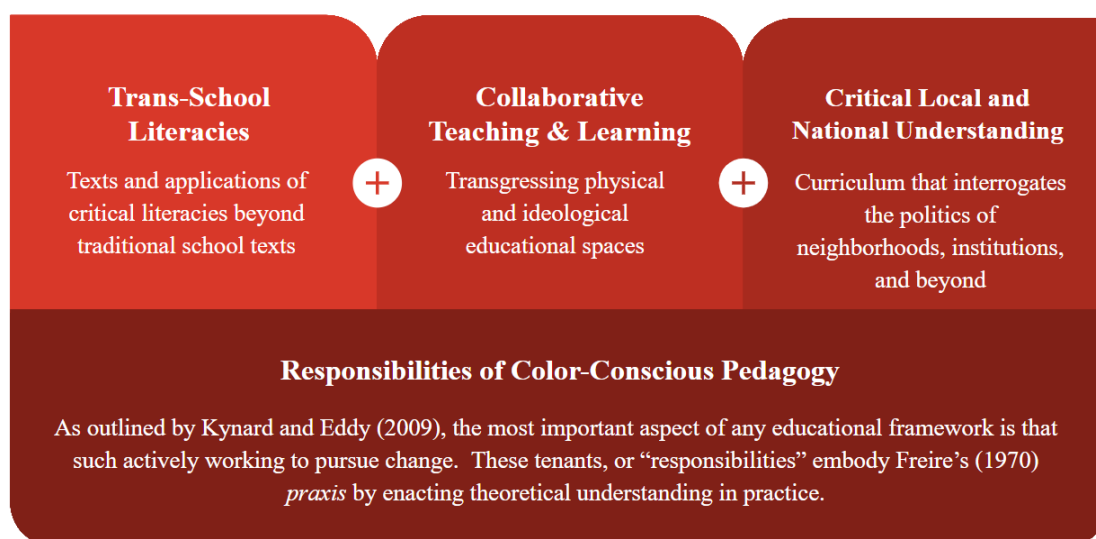


Figure 2. Summary of Pedagogical Responsibilities as Part of the Coalition Building Framework

Classrooms that invite "out of school literacies" to evaluate mainstream, canonical texts are only teaching students to transform their sociocultural perspectives into an "acceptable" mold. Further, classrooms that invite isolated incidents of diversity as detached from the primary curriculum--rather than infusing diversity throughout as common practice--are only widening the divide between sociocultural perspectives and are, as Kynard and Eddy (2009) explain, creating "hostage negotiation" situations for those students who are regularly having to fight to enact their social situations (Kynard & Eddy, 2009). The "pedagogical responsibilities" of instruction that actively promote coalition building are defined as (1) the implementation of trans-school

literacies, (2) the utilization of collaborative-community teaching and learning, and (3) the promotion of critical local and national understandings. Figure 3 represents the apportionment of each responsibility as it corresponds with the tenants of coalition building.

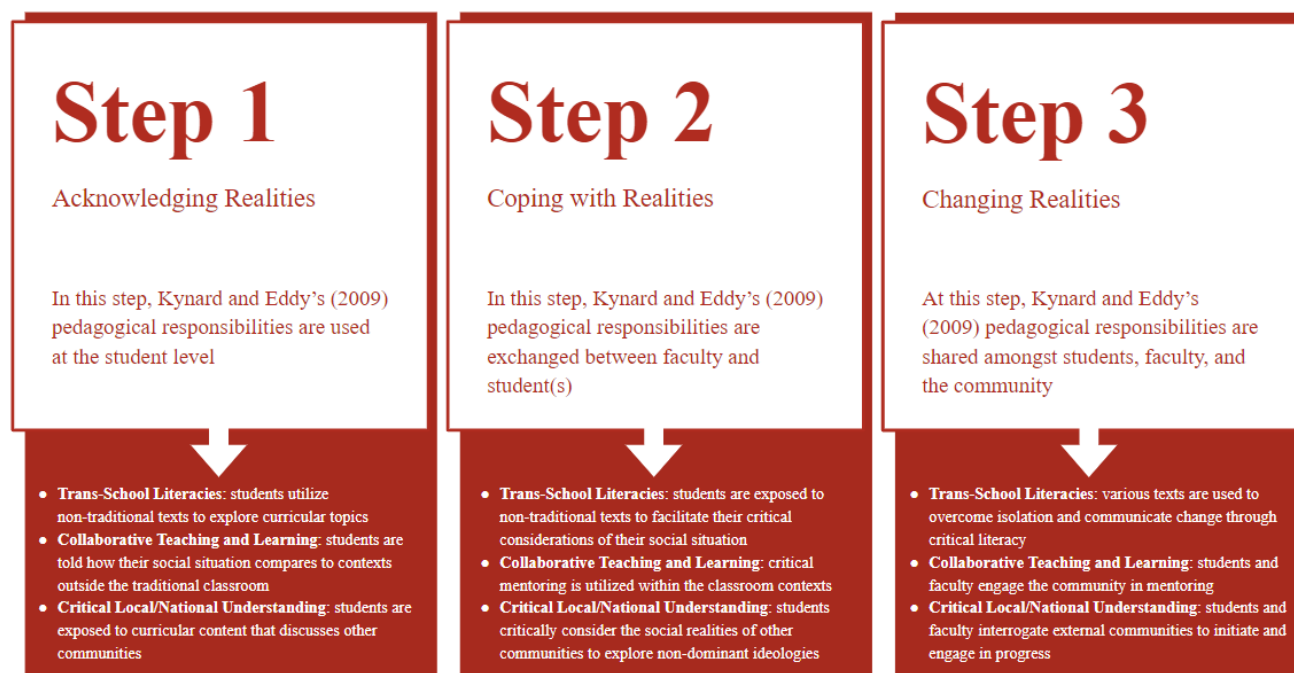


Figure 3. Adapted Analytical Framework

Context and Data Collection

The context of this research is a minority-serving institution of higher education in the Southeastern United States with a Division I-level athletic program. Minority serving institutions are well-regarded for their better promotion and cultivation of minority student success when compared to predominantly white institutions (Commodore & Gasman, 2014). Further, Division I athletic programs are considered the most competitive athletic divisions and conferences in the United States. Therefore, this research is particularly interested in assessing what faculty are doing to promote students' social situations in their classrooms at these

institutions, mainly because they exemplify the best combination of factors for Black male student-athlete success. Due to the ongoing global pandemic and crisis caused by the prevalence of the novel coronavirus in 2020, this study relied entirely upon electronic records and communication, rather than observational data. However, this health-driven mandate lends itself to the study's emphasis on literacy practices as a primary and significant indicator of the rhetorical situation and critical discourse community that characterizes relationships between students and faculty (Fairclough, 1995; Lugo & Hawisher, 2003).

Artifacts

As this research study seeks to understand how and what literacy assignments promote the critical sociocultural perspectives in Black male student-athletes, it is important to consider the same items students have access to as they also assess and evaluate such. This research considers the written documents and resources available to students in classroom contexts to be: assignment descriptions, reading lists--including, but not limited to, textbooks, research articles, fiction/non-fiction literature, current event/news outlets, videos, multimedia *et cetera*--, syllabuses and scheduling documents, lists of course supplies and/or tools, email communication, and online classroom platforms (i.e., Google Classroom, Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, Sakai, D2L, *et cetera*). It is appropriate to consider the state of this relationship as characterized by these literacy-oriented artifacts through an aggregate assemblage of course documents and course subjects/content areas, much in the same way a student experiences their academic coursework. For this research, it was important to cast a wide net for the artifacts that might inform any final results and implications, especially during the COVID-19 shut-down that forced students of every age and level to incorporate learning from home and supplied artifacts from their teachers, rather than in-person interactions. However, of those potential artifacts, the most

essential are course assignment descriptions and course syllabuses, as each is commonplace--if not required--in college/university classrooms across the United States and thus serve as an appropriate point of universality.

The institution that serves as the site for this research requires that every faculty member distribute a written course syllabus to each student that mandates several requirements (see Table 1). These requirements include logistic information, such as the course meeting dates, times, location, and the course description, professor, and objectives. In addition to these items, every faculty is required to include the university grading scale and six university policies, including standards for dismissing students who display prohibited acts of behavior, cultural diversity, academic integrity, special accommodations for learning, official communication policies, and the institution's registrar's policies on enrollment and withdrawal.

Table 1: University dictated faculty syllabuses guidelines and requirements

Section Title	Requisite Policies
Faculty Information	Contact Information Contact Policy About the Faculty/Personal Details Teaching Assistant Information
Student Resources	Distance/Online Learning Technical Support Purdue OWL
Course Readings	Required Materials Optional Materials
Course Description	University Catalog Course Description Faculty Course Description Prerequisites
Course Objectives and Expectations	
Evaluation Methods and Grading Criteria	
Course Outline and Schedule	
Student Responsibilities	
Course Policies	Attendance and Participation Make-Up Work
University Policies	Standards for Classroom Behavior Academic Integrity Accommodations and Accessibility Email Policy Enrollment and Withdrawal
Student Acknowledgment	Signed Syllabus Agreement

The language for these university policies is predetermined and comprises 508 words in total. It is interesting to note that the most attention is paid to standards for classroom behavior (e.g., more than 150 words), while the shortest section is that of cultural diversity, which is described in less than 50 words. Syllabuses, as evaluated in Liao's (2015) assessment of power dynamics dictated to Asian students through course syllabuses in American higher education classroom,

are: (1) rarely *critically* evaluated in research but are indicative of the authority instructors hold over students; and, (2) the role of faculty as "course managers" is overwhelming over-represented in course syllabuses documents (compared to the other positions evaluated, including "mentors," "facilitators," and "members of their institutions") (Liao, 2015, pp. 20-21). While syllabuses are, certainly, meant to delineate the way a course is managed and administered by the designated faculty, inflated power dynamics overemphasize the rules to be followed as they are dictated by faculty and deemphasize--if not entirely ignore--any collaboration with students, nonetheless the social situations of a diverse student population. It follows that an examination of syllabuses and corresponding documents (i.e., assignment descriptions) should be critically examined for how faculty's written communication with students, particularly within those that describe literacy-oriented tasks, is welcoming or devaluing of students' social situations.

Participant Data: Faculty

The process of collecting data began by contacting faculty from across the university who taught 100- and/or 200-level courses during the 2019-2020 academic year. A list-serv was created by the researcher by searching the university's Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and Summer 2020 academic course schedules. Of the eight academic colleges on campus, 50 departments offer courses at the 100/200 level, classifying such as "general studies." These courses may require a prerequisite course before entry, but many are considered introductory and fulfill the university-wide graduation requirements for all undergraduate degree-seeking students. In short: these are the courses meant to serve every student on campus. A total of 1,606 100- and 200-level courses were taught during the 2019-2020 academic year, taught by 1,117 faculty (including full professors, adjunct professors, graduate assistants, and teaching assistants). The instructors' university email addresses are listed alongside each course they teach in the online edition of the

university schedule; these email addresses were compiled into a listserv. The letter sent to each instructor, according to Internal Review Board approval, asked for voluntary contributions to this research in the form of course documents and literacy-oriented assignment descriptions from their 100 and/or 200 courses (see Appendix A). Faculty were directed to a Qualtrics link to add screenshots or copy-and-pasted excerpts of their course documents. All email communication was blinded to recipients, and any necessary steps to ensure anonymity was observed. The data collection period for faculty was set at one month; an initial email was sent, follow-up email sent after two weeks.

Of the 1,117 emails sent to faculty, 159 corresponding replies (14.23% response rate). It is significant to note that even though all faculty participants were invited to submit their documents through the Qualtrics link to ensure anonymity, 90% of respondents (i.e., over 100) elected to reply to the researcher directly. Further, all faculty were invited to anonymize their documents by removing their name, the name of their course, the course section, and any other information they wished to omit--as such personal data is not relevant to this study--the overwhelming majority of respondents elected to submit documentation unedited/in its entirety.

Of the 159 responses, 79 were omitted; reasons for exclusion included technical failure with the attachments or access to the provided materials (12 in total); sections that held no formal assignments, such as performance-based courses or recitations (20 in total); or, duplicate courses taught across multiple semesters (74 in total). The final sample included 53 sections of 32 different courses taught by 29 instructors. The anonymized course topics are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: 100- and 200-level course subjects represented by data

College	Course Subject
College of Business	Accounting Personal Finance
College of Arts	English History Psychology Sociology
College of Science	Oceanography Meteorology Calculus
College of Education	Academic Success University Seminar
College of Engineering	Mechanical Engineering Engineering Technology
College of Health Sciences	Human Biology Career Preparation
College of Continuing Education	--
College of Graduate Studies	--
College of Honors Studies	--

The documents contributed by faculty participants that inform this study are wide and varied in both content and medium, corresponding with the respondents' forthcomingness and generosity. This research is informed by a total of 51 syllabuses and more than 80 assignment descriptions and/or prompts. Other artifacts include course lecture presentations (PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi, Canva), view-only access to course learning modules from online learning platforms, Dropbox and Zip files of course lecture notes, exam study guides, exams, and links to various articles for supplemental reading.

Participant Data: Student Experts

This work endeavors to assess how higher education classrooms engage the critical sociocultural perspectives of Black male student-athletes through literacy-oriented assignments and artifacts. While this is a noble pursuit by the researcher and the scholarship that supports this work, the most important assessment should come from Black male student-athletes' voices. Their perspective is not only the most authentic, but any research efforts that claim to be in support and in *authentic* allyship should also be in federation with the voice said effort asserts to speak alongside, *not instead of*. The history of silencing Black voices--especially Black male voices--is a long and loud one and coming to a courageous head amidst the intensification of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Unfortunately, this practice of discrimination is too notably present on predominantly white institutions' campuses. Scholars and educators must contribute to the paradigm shift of validating and welcoming the Black male voice. This is best done, according to Pelzer (2016), by creating authentic spaces and environments where Black men are "supported to be their authentic selves" (Pelzer, 2016, p. 22). This research seeks to contribute to the landscape that should have always been inclusive of Black male social situations by providing a platform for these individuals to be responded to and respected.

This research is informed by the voices of four student-athletes who identify as Black and male and are enrolled at the aforementioned minority-serving institution. After a round of pilot testing in two 100-level undergraduate courses, a survey was distributed via email to Black male student-athletes through the athletic academic center, asking for voluntary and anonymous contributions to this research. A Qualtrics survey link was distributed to students via email, containing three demographic questions and 12 questions prompting their response to two assignment descriptions. These assignment descriptions were informed by and based upon the artifacts contributed by faculty participants. Two assignments were selected--one from an arts/humanities syllabus and one from an engineering/science syllabus--and described in brief for the students, just as they might be in a classroom setting. The students were then asked to respond to five closed-ended and one open-ended question regarding their thoughts on each assignment. The full survey can be reviewed in Appendix B.

To protect the student participants' anonymity, the researcher is not aware of how many students received the link, but four surveys were returned, completed. These four surveys serve as representative of the Black male student-athlete voice as critical of his academic experience in 100- and 200-level courses while engaging in literacy-oriented assignments. The survey questions asked each to evaluate the assignments based on questions modeled after Kynard and Eddy's (2009) description of coalition building. The following chapter describes the researcher's position in relation to this work. The methods discussed in Chapter Three are back by scholarly considerations and research. The method of analysis that is not consider is the "right" to make commentary on behalf of any individual, especially without making the careful cultural considerations of who's knowledge is privileged. Chapter Four speaks to the authenticity and

solidarity that is the context of this research, allowing for confidence in the analysis and implications discussed in chapters Five and Six.

CHAPTER IV
RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The reasonable man [or woman] adapts himself [or herself] to the world; the unreasonable one persists to adapt the world to himself [or herself]. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man [or woman].

- George Bernard Shaw (1903)

The efforts and work that is this research stand in solidarity, allyship, and in disruption of the life experienced by Black men in America in the twenty-first century. The researcher makes no claims that their life is in any way comparable or even in empathy to the life of a Black man because this researcher identifies as neither Black nor male and therefore makes no assertions to understand the life of an individual who identifies as such. As Milner (2007) points out, there are dangers--seen and unforeseen--that can emerge when researchers do not pay careful attention to "their own and others' racialized and cultural systems of coming to know, knowing, and experiencing the world" (Milner, 2007, p. 388). To combat these dangers, this researcher recognizes and engages in "paying attention" to the four tenets of positionality framework as outlined by Milner: researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaging in reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system (pp. 394-395). This chapter stands as assurance that the researcher, (1) respects the voices of the Black students who are being advocated on behalf of and alongside, and, (2) continues to listen--as a teacher and educator, a peer, a friend, and a fan--as an intentional and active audience to the voices and message of the Black male cultural position in America.

By addressing my personal exploration and connection to this work, I do not want to "break" the fourth wall of research. I wish to join together the walls in a logical way that delineates my investment in the issues surrounding the enactment of racial equity in classrooms. Research, like literacy, represents a shared space between multiple entities. Black masculine

literacies are characterized by the way Black male students bridge their "fringe world" with that which is considered "mainstream," research is a bridge between researchers and participants (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). In bridging the space between two entities, a new space is created. In this new space, I hope to align myself with the promotion of Black male voices as part of curricular and pedagogical practices in twenty-first century classrooms. Acknowledging that research is both *process* and *product*, I count myself as part of the process and thus position myself as both the bridge between spaces and part of the newly created space. Thus, I wish to establish my positionality in relation to this research. I want to acknowledge that I have long abandoned the "the cloak of objectivity" that social scientists attempt to establish, especially in qualitative research endeavors (Hamby, 2018). I am aware that my role in this research can and does affect the outcome. However, through transparency, I hope to humbly position myself as an ally of an outcome that provides equity and democratic social justice on behalf of, alongside, and by this population. I do not presume to experience the circumstances that apply to Black men, as I am neither Black nor identify as male. Nor do I pretend that my inferences, theoretical applications, or any amount of scholarly reading can endow me with the right to speak on behalf of the men, students, mentors, friends, family, and others that I represent through this work. Therefore, I acknowledge my position as a collaborator and ally and as a platform. I am the microphone, not the voice.

Researching the Self

Educator and scholar of color David Kirkland (2011) likens books in a classroom to clothes on the reading student. He accounts a conversation with one of the young men in his classroom during a Language Arts activity, describing the student's visible frustrations: "Black boys wear books like clothes," [the student] explained...and Beowulf must not have fit

him because he was not wearing it” (p. 199).

Lensed through an overarching framework of critical socio-cultural theory, my philosophy of education is a blend of creativity, critical literacy, and adaptability in order to advocate for the culturally sustaining literacy practices within academic, local, and global communities that will better respond to and recognize the need to promote democratic partnerships between students and the world they exist in beyond my classroom. As Kaestle (1991) states, "Literacy is discriminatory with regard to both access and content" (p. 30). Further, he warns, "Problems of discrimination are not resolved just because access is achieved; there is a cultural price tag to literacy. Thus, whether literacy is liberating or constraining depends on whether it is used as an instrument of conformity or creativity" (Kaestle et al., 1991, p. 30). My approach to teaching is based on advocating for this liberation through a personalized and creative utility of critical literacy. I believe, as Friere and Macedo (1987) professed, that "educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their reality as a basis for literacy (p. 151). The twenty-first century learner can no longer afford the "cultural price tag" of deficit narratives, generalizations, and culturally insensitive curricular and pedagogical approaches. Instead, educators need to take on advocating for the outfitting of students in an educational experience that will serve them to be learners in today's global context.

Researching the Self in Relation to Others

My formative years in teaching were spent in urban, unaccredited school districts in the Southeast United States. I was exposed to the same damaging statistics many preservice teachers are supplied regarding racial demographics and socioeconomic status and the supposedly corresponding behaviors, outcomes, and success rates. However, I submit in rebuttal that

when every student is of color, and every household represented falls below the poverty line, and all students are receiving free and reduced benefits, where then should we look for deficits? When these "standbys" are eliminated, do I then begin to look for the students who wear white after Labor Day? Or, don mismatched socks? Or are Sooner fans? Identifying deficits in classrooms based on appearance or financial status becomes just this absurd. Our academic discourse cannot continue to focus on an approach that promotes the generalization of children and privileges a truth that is not, and cannot, be universal. As both a practitioner and researcher, the context for my approach to classroom teaching is to reframe educating as a relationship of equitable accountability. I do not focus upon a student's contrariety so much as I strive to advocate for such.

My education preparation has been informed and inspired by Paris and Winn's (2014) philosophy to "humanize qualitative research." This approach to framing education philosophies and research warns vehemently against the practice of "stockpiling examples" without making a commitment to addressing the wrongs of social justice (p. 177). The danger of single and isolated stories is that they do not allow space for the individual and, further, it reinforces the present dynamics of power as immovable. A humanized approach to educating and teaching reminds us that it is not enough to recognize the problematic nature of education; we must remember the students who become the collateral damage of utilizing a deficit mentality. The balance of this humanized approach is teaching students to critique the injustice around them without reinforcing a lens that sees them as only culturally and/or socially handicapped.

While varied, my teaching experiences have been unified by these approaches of creativity, critique, and customization. I have taught grades kindergarten through twelfth grade

and served as faculty for undergraduate and graduate students at several higher education institutions while a doctoral candidate. In all of these diverse settings, I have found the need for a better and enhanced understanding of the twenty-first century student and learner, and a need to make sure classrooms are prepared to acknowledge that these two roles are not being equally promoted or accommodated. More than ever, globality is within reach of today's students. The state of today's students and the requirements of today's learners are not yet well merged. My philosophy of critical literacy education enacts equivocal critique and celebration of the differences that grace our world, as they might be the very cure we need.

It was the job of the many educators I have had the privilege to learn under, with, and to teach me about my own "box." My job is to help build my students' boxes, without making any assumptions about the necessities of size, shape, or contents. Further, it is the individuality of my students' boxes—past, current, future, and by-proxy—on which I stake the importance of advocating for the enactment of identity in the process of learning. One size cannot fit all, and I strive that every student during my practice be equipped with the tools to find both what fits and what they feel comfortable wearing in today's world.

Engaging in Reflection

Given (2008) accounts that positionality is a "negotiation" between the parts of a story that are told and those details that are not included. Further, positionality requires that researchers name their experiences and give insight into point-of-view in order to provide the "benefit" of their experience (p. 2). Drawing upon Brainer's (2019) ethnographic deep-dive into Taiwanese queer culture, I want to acknowledge that my positionality is mostly cautionary if fraught with errors and the "benefit" of my experience. Brainer recounts, "my lack of knowledge leading me to ask the wrong questions was a limitation" when describing her research (p. 13). If

I have learned anything, it is how much I do not know, and I would characterize my position as uncertain and thus searching. As England (1994) establishes, I know that research is a "shared space" between entities. I want to put forth that, while I can acknowledge the literal reality of this, I am still struggling with it in practice. "Self-scrutiny...or the continual mode of self-analysis" and the ongoing dialogue of criticality that I have with my position as a white woman working with and for Black men is one of tenuous ambiguity (Callaway, 1992). What shared space am I creating with Black men if I am already in that space? Moreover, how presumptive of me to welcome a Black man into space I already occupy as an educated and privileged part of the heteronormative definition. To that end, am I not supposing an ideal that I value as the "space" for the Black male voice? If I am perfectly honest, many of the men with whom I have worked--including Kalif, who's life, story, experiences, and friendship started this work many years ago--have expressed an apathetic-at-best desire for academic success and credence. Instead, they would rather make it to "The League" to play their sport professionally. Am I not just perpetuating my privilege by advocating for their success in classrooms, whether they want to be there or not? The point about my positionality that bothers me the most is that I want to be sure I am genuinely creating shared space for myself and the individuals I am advocating for in my work and efforts. However, shared implies joint and equal ownership as well as participation, and, at the moment, I am concerned I host the platform and the world has just arbitrarily privileged me with the ability to extend an invitation. I want to know: what does truly shared and democratic space look like between myself and Black male student-athletes?

Shifting from the Self to the System

Through a post-structural lens, I find some comfort in Krsteva's (1966) idea of the "instability of meaning" and a liberal application of the idea of "intertextuality." I do not know

what the "shared space" between Kalif and me should look like in an entirely equitable and just world because such is in route, and not yet delivered. However, I hope my unreasonable pursuit of that equitable world means I am part of the initiative that is driving the right direction. At the present moment, the space appears to be--like intertextuality--an "absorption and transformation of one another" (Kristeva, 1966, p. 37). Classrooms should invest in the idea of being "intertextual" the same way literature and literacy understands such. Bloome (1993) describes intertextuality as not given, but socially constructed way by which students understand literacy. He states, "As people act and react to each other, they use language and other semiotic systems to make meaning, to constitute social relationships, and to take social action...in order for intertextuality to be established, it must be recognized, acknowledge, and have social significance" (Bloome, 1993, p. 305). Classrooms require this same precedence. Rather than presuming that students are socially situated *en masse*, pedagogy and curriculum should employ this same understanding of intertextuality where background precedence is less significant when compared with the unique perspectives that are current. Considerations of how to build and guide an equitable pedagogical approach are just as complicated as considering various texts: both consider agency, location, communication, and interpretation, as well as the consequence of doing such. However, as Bloome (1993) discusses, intertextuality is socially constructed, just as classroom pedagogy should be. Where intertextuality describes the way various texts speak as part of a "literacy event," conscious and responsible pedagogy should incorporate—in order to better understand—the various voices of each student to inform the learning event. This is the way that space for the social situation of each student in the room can be accounted for and respected.

As with Kalif, and so many of the other incredible students I have worked with, and for, I have done teaching and learning in equal measure. I appreciate their patience to teach me through conversations that are not standardized or mitigated by references; they teach me through their lived experiences. I hope the transformative praxis between our collaborations provides a firmer footing for advocacy by dispelling the deficit narrative that currently surrounds Black learners. I hope *my* lived experience becomes more authentic by enacting my research, so I feel less fraudulent in my efforts. I close with the acknowledgment that my position is an uncomfortable one; but, I am glad to be uncomfortable in my advocacy for change than my apathy for complacency. I look forward to my unreasonable pursuit to make the world adapt to new standards; all progress, after all, depends on it.

The following chapters—Five and Six—discuss the analysis and implications of the data in this study. The analysis processes and considerations made regarding this data, and on behalf of the Black male student-athletes for whom this work advocates, are made through a culturally conscious lens. The coalition building framework in this research is not just a framework for analysis; it is also a method. Thus, this research hopes to be acknowledging the same pedagogical responsibilities and the building of federation that informs the analysis found in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

This research employs a critical discourse analysis methodological approach (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2003; Wodak & Reisigl, 2003), informed by a theoretical framework that combines the sociocultural considerations of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 2005), Black masculinity (Bell, 2017), and critical literacy (Freire, 1970; Mayo, 1995; Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Perry, 2012). Predetermined codes informed the analysis process before the beginning of the study to customize the theoretical framework with the study's overarching purpose. There are no studies that presently discuss the literacy practices and enactments of Black male student-athletes' critical sociocultural perspectives in university classrooms. However, enacting critical sociocultural perspectives is accomplished through Kynard and Eddy's (2009) coalition framework. Thus, the coding for the analysis of faculty data contributions (syllabuses, assignment descriptions, *et cetera*) was informed by the steps of generating color-conscious pedagogy. Predetermined coding processes, also understood as *a Priori* codes, are developed before examining the current data and drawn from the literature, as is the case in this research (Saldana, 2013; Sang & Sitko, 2014). During the first round of coding, the *a Priori* codes were also versus coded, using an inverse coding schema to highlight any direct contradictions to the coalition building framework (Saldana, 2013).

After this initial phase of coding, the second level of coding--axial coding--was employed to refine and align themes. This allows for "relationships" to develop amongst codes to support evidence-based conclusions (Strauss, 1998, p. 109). In this research, the axial codes seek to combine the "coalition building framework" with the determined "pedagogical responsibilities of instruction" to assess the relationship between the stages of coalition building with the enactment

of responsible instruction. This assesses where and what factors fall on the continuum of inviting critical discourse and sociocultural considerations in pedagogy. Further, such relationships dispose of the need for a deficit mentality when instructing Black male students by creating a continuum of progressive action. What is needed beyond rumination in defalcation is a realistic perspective of the degree to which pedagogical and curricular choices are acknowledging, inviting, and utilizing Black male social-situations, followed by promoting progressive action to continue to increase the platform and appreciation of critical, diverse voices. The researcher independently coded the selected faculty artifacts using the *a Priori* coding scheme. During the axial coding phase, interrater-reliability was established in collaboration with two doctoral-level research colleagues. Nvivo, an electronic qualitative analysis tool, was also used to centralize and analyze the vast number of artifacts shared by faculty participants. The collaborative coding and Nvivo program implementation emphasize the codes, coding schema, thematic relationships, and thus conclusions, by employing Krippendorff's "replicability across coders" (Krippendorff, 2003). Generalizability and perfect validity are not the hallmarks of qualitative research; however, qualitative data is regarded for its overlapping sources of data and analysis methods to dissect recurring phenomena (McDonald, Schoenebeck, & Forte, 2019). This study employs a number of methods of analysis in order to stand as reliable and applicable. The most compelling and convincing analysis is conducted by and in the voice of Black male student-athletes. The following results of this study combine the final thematic codes that emerged from a critical discourse analysis of faculty data, with the voices of students' interpretations of how literacy assignments regard Black male student-athletes' social situation.

Findings and Results: Faculty Data

This study's results are divided according to the framework established by Kynard and Eddy's (2009) coalition building: acknowledging realities, coping with realities, and changing realities. Each of these tenants was versus coded to capture any direct contradictions, namely: disputing realities, forced acceptance of a limited reality, and maintaining realities. These *a Priori* codes were applied to course syllabuses, assignment descriptions, and other course documents such as reading assignments, exam preparation documents, lecture notes, and course goals and objectives. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is concerned with how social power is distributed through language (Fairclough, 1992, 1998; Van Dijk, 2003). Specifically, this research is concerned, as Fairclough establishes, with how language "produc(es)" "maint(ains)" and "change(s)" the social relations of power through "increased consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others" (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 1, 3). This particular critical discourse analysis is not concerned with the nuances of linguistic structures--though such is attuned to--but, rather, is invested in considering how language facilitates an uncovering the challenges faced by a particular population (e.g., Black male student-athletes) in a particular setting (e.g., higher education classrooms) through a critical lens (e.g., critical sociocultural and literacy). The first reported results detail the general findings across the faculty contributed data artifacts. The second section of the results discusses how artifacts fell into the *a Priori* codes and their corresponding versus codes. Third, the results from the *a Priori* codes are examined as they relate to the three tenets of responsible instruction to establish a continuum of action taking place--or needed to take place--in classrooms. Finally, the results from the analysis conducted by the student-athlete contributors are represented and described.

General Findings Across Classroom Artifacts

Of the nearly 160 different faculty-contributed artifacts analyzed, the most common word distribution is summarized in the word cloud in Figure 4. A word-distribution analysis found the top five most frequently used word phrases across all artifacts were (when controlled for articles and prepositions): "required participation" (cited 573 times), "graded" (cited 404 times), "work" (cited 334 times), "student is/are required" (cited 268 times), and "this course" (cited 261 times). It is interesting to note that these phrases do cite student-centered requirements (i.e., participation, tasks/assignments, and grades), but it is also important to note that all remind the student that they are passive recipients of the course, the instructor, and the institution/university. When coded for tone, Nvivo noted that, of 1,370 passages, 983 represent "neutral" language, and a further 51 passages represent "mixed" language. Of the 336 remaining passages, 186 were coded as "negative," and 150 were coded as "positive," allowing for the conclusion that most of the language in course documents is neutral, but the overtly negative language is more prevalent than overtly positive language. An example of such is found in the way language represents the requirements of two separate projects. One syllabus described a heavily weighted project required in an introductory business course with the following negatively coded language:

"the student has to complete no less than 10 claims to pass the assignment."

In contrast, a project detailed in an accounting course described the requirements of an equally-weight project with positively coded language, stating:

"the student will be presented with 6 opportunities to complete for full credit."

according to the university course description, enrollment and withdrawal procedures, email/official communication, *et cetera*. Another common theme was the detailed attention pertaining to academic integrity. However, a disparity exists regarding what is considered and valued as constituting "integrity" in classrooms. Of the 51 syllabus artifacts analyzed, only five mentioned that class discussions should remain respectful: three of these five stances relate to respectful language and specifically mention foul language; one described the necessity of respect for the course schedule and corresponding deadlines; and, the final instance compelled respect for the university's plagiarism policy. Only one syllabus (from a history course) mentioned the term "diversity" as a central theme of the course, explaining that a multiplicity of "engagements" between cultures and regions facilitated the transformation of American history and that such diversity has produced conflict and accommodation over who has, and has had, access to American privilege. The term "race" is mentioned only two times across the 51 syllabus documents, referencing a lack of tolerance for discrimination based on a number of criteria, including race. While these queries are in no way meant to stand as comprehensive summaries of faculty intent, it is worth noting that course policies are overwhelmingly lacking in the contractual assurance that student diversity--specifically with regards to race and/or other elements of diversity--are prevalently part of the classroom expectations or rhetoric regarding what it means to be a principled student.

Much more apparent than respect for any sociocultural differences is the requirement that all students respect policies regarding academic appropriation and intellectual property. Twenty-seven different artifacts mentioned that plagiarism "would not be tolerated" and classified such as "unacceptable," a form of "dishonesty" and "disrespect," as well as "highly risky," detailing at length the consequences of plagiarism which include, but are not limited to: losing the respect of

peers, faculty, and family; ruining one's reputation; and, costing a professional career. Further, 25 of the 27 artifacts defined plagiarism in detail, citing numerous examples, definitions, and official policy regarding the nature of plagiarism, disallowing for any confusion regarding the various types of plagiarism, and seeking help to avoid such. In one instance, 529 words were dedicated to a description, explanation, resources for support, and examples of plagiarism and its prevention. Within this same artifact, only 107 words were used to describe respectful conduct and respect for diverse backgrounds, opinions and views, and experiences amongst students.

For comparison between these two forms of academic integrity: there are no resources listed for students to pursue support if discrimination occurs or avenues for support are listed if they feel alienated or would like support to overcome such. However, there are no less than eight examples and related resources suggested for combating plagiarism. In another course syllabus, academic integrity is exclusively limited to compliance with plagiarism and "classroom disruption" policies, making no mention of sociocultural factors and their place within classroom and course context(s). Another course syllabus dedicated more than 200 words, emphasized with bolded, underlined, and italicized text formatting demarcations, to cell phone usage, including the requirement that "ABSOLUTELY NO TEXTING" take place, but made no mention of classroom culture and sociocultural factors. The term "classroom etiquette" was used in five different course syllabuses, and all pertained to cell phones and the usage of technology. No artifacts mentioned classroom etiquette regarding civility and/or respect for diversity and situated sociocultural differences present in today's classrooms. In 24 syllabuses, consideration for others and respect for diversity is not mentioned at all.

Specific regard for athletics. Of the 51 syllabuses evaluated, only one course syllabus made mention of student-athletes. In this instance, the language used to address student-athletes

was abrasive, and the tone drastically maligned with the rest of the document:

An athlete in any class must be more responsible for informing instructors of events.

Travel schedules (NOT practice schedules) must provide a copy of travel schedule within the first week of class [sic].

While not every class may have student-athletes enrolled, the reality is that an average of 10% of the average freshman class is comprised of student-athletes (NCAA, 2020). As discussed, this percentage dwindles in subsequent classifications (i.e., sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students). The most considerable number of student-athletes enrolled in classes are in 100- and 200-level sections. These are students experiencing a diverse college experience that university administration and faculty are well aware of each academic year. Therefore, it is shocking to note that faculty are aware that 10% of the students enrolling in their introductory courses are student-athletes, but only so few incorporate student-athletes into their course policies. This begs what other diverse student experiences are present that faculty are not aware, and how such are being equally overlooked?

Communication techniques. There is an interesting and widespread emphasis on communication standards regarding how students are expected to communicate with the instructor, especially via email, but minimal regard for the way students should expect to be communicated with by their instructors. There are 12 instances where faculty direct students to "not" send emails for certain criteria (i.e., late work after the deadline, extra credit, missed classes, questions about grades). An additional 41 mentions the necessity of only using the university's email system for "academic and official communication" and when/how to email faculty. Two syllabuses detailed that questions pertinent to class assignments, lecture material, or general course concerns should "only" communicate with the faculty member via email, rather

than in-person or office hours. Fourteen instances detail specific requirements for how to email faculty, including a required greeting, the inclusion of the student's full name and course number, and some terms/phrases not to use, including: "bro," "what's up," foul language, and any address of the professor without a proper title (i.e. "Dr." or "Professor"). One course syllabus stated that emails that did not include the student's name and the course number in the prescribed format "exactly" would be "deleted without opening." Finally, more than 20 syllabuses compel students to check their email at least "once per day." However, nearly as many (18 in total) enforce that students' email communication will only be checked and addressed by faculty during weekdays and "regular business hours."

Evaluation. 51 of 51 syllabuses included a copy, or a reference, to the university grading scale; additionally, more than half (greater than 40) assignment descriptions included a rubric and grading criterion so students can see how their performance would be assessed. However, and in contrast, very little (if any) description is present across any course syllabuses or assignment descriptions of how students can evaluate the grading they receive or the course in general. There are numerous instances where the instructor even imposes limitations on student expectations (receiving feedback, helping with problems, communication days/times, location of office hours and meetings). There are only seven mentions of how a student can request a follow-up consultation about their grades and/or feedback on an assignment, and they are all exclusively found in English course syllabuses. However, even these syllabuses do not provide students with resources, instructions, or policies to evaluate their professor or the course. Only one syllabus from a history course provides insight into what expectations students should have of their instructor. The following is a paraphrased (for anonymity) summary of the student expectations for faculty from that syllabus:

“It is expected that the instructor will adhere to the syllabus, respond to emails, report grades in a timely manner, and assist when confusion occurs regarding the syllabus.”

It is important to note that these expectations are dictated to the students and do not--presumably--consider any input from the students. Because of the nature of this study's focus, it is also important to note that these expectations do not include any assurances for the protection, respect, or inclusion of sociocultural differences.

Types of assignments. A vast disparity appears to exist in what requirements are expected and valued according to the collected assignment description artifacts. When filtered for literacy-oriented assignments (i.e., those that concentrate and/or emphasize reading, writing, speaking, and/or communicating), numerous public-speaking or formal presentations, assignments were analyzed and evaluated for this research--either in a group or individual formats. In one course, class presentations were used as an opportunity to "report out" on their findings and explorations of various course topics as they related to personal experiences. In many instances, this is not unique; faculty compelled that presentation topics be as "personal" in nature (17 instances). One such assignment description emphasized that students should choose a personal experience to discuss; beyond this, the assignment description provided very few limitations regarding the prohibited subject matter. The language states that topics that are "personal" in nature tend to yield a more thorough explanation and may even yield "opportunities for self-discovery." However, students were required to reference the textbook's consideration and potential evaluation of their topic *after* selecting their personal experience. The description states (edited for anonymity):

“consider what [X] author might say about your experience and support your assessment according to [X] criteria. How well does your experience fit in the [specified] categories?”

While connecting the topic to the course content is not an inappropriate request of students, it feels like a particularly relevant point--the assignment is misleading and not accommodating student differences. The options seem to be that, (1) either personal topics must conform to the specifications of the textbook, or should be excluded, or (2) that personal topics might be poorly regarded by the assessment criteria, leaving the student open to a discriminatory account of their personal experience. Again, this has the potential for being a reasonable academic task.

Nevertheless, the structure of the document and the language enforces a social power dynamic upon the students. If the textbook is the official and respected filter for "acceptable" topics and ideas, students should be directed to consult the textbook *first* and use these criteria to search their sociocultural considerations for well-suited topics and ideas. Instead, the language asks students to evaluate how their personal experiences measure up to the "approved," and more knowledgeable text to assess the validity of their experiences; there is an important difference in these two processes. Further, as this particular assignment requires a presentation and, thus, class-wide sharing, students are then compelled to publicly display how and in what ways their personal experiences conform to the course. The consequences of such include that students whose social situations are different are not afforded the same opportunity for "personal exploration" that is marketed by the assignment description. If there is an attempt to merge personal experiences into mainstream content, students run the risk of failing the assignment if merging does not work. Further still, students with diverse social situations may find themselves unnecessarily judged as an outlier.

The step to present publicly or to "report out" is, in one opinion, a passive-aggressive way to ensure that topics--especially personal topics--fit within an acceptable "norm" to prevent embarrassment. More than one-fourth of literacy-assignments from the faculty contributed data

that require a public presentation component. For Black male students, these assignments have been found to support the deficit narrative that characterizes their academic achievement (Collin, 2014). Black male college students' "need to survive" characterizes their academic experiences, and any change will only be generated by a "lessening" of the tension that comes with trying to conform to "mainstream culture" (Collins, 2014, p. 8; Wallace & Bell, 1999, p. 311).

Assignments such as these are characteristic of generalizing student experiences and are not genuinely welcoming all sociocultural considerations.

Further, it is most evident that assignments such as these are not welcoming student critique. The language states explicitly "how well" does a student's personal experience "fit" within and against specified criteria. Further, students are asked to assess their experience from the voice of a regarded expert. There is no option in the assignment description for students to agree or disagree with this assessment. The values promoted by these types of assignment descriptions, as with the aforementioned language in the syllabus documents, are that of conformity and not welcoming diverse perspectives or approaches. While these documents are only one account of the assignment and further options may be offered in-class discussion, or upon further probing of the instructor, this static document stands as the official communication of expectations between the faculty member and the student. Moreover, it does not appear to allow any additional flexibility or invitation for diversification as it stands. If these assignments are one of the ways the student-faculty relationship is indicated judged, it can be concluded that such is narrow, rigid, and unaccommodating.

Findings Related to Coalition Building

The framework established in Kynard and Eddy's (2009) study is aptly applied to this study because of the dual focus on action-oriented steps and a conscious effort to communicate

solidarity and allyship to, and wish, students. As supported by Holmes (2006), teachers can communicate their desire to understand racial consciousness to their students by designing assignments that explore the historical and contemporary struggles blacks [sic] face to characterize their discursive practices (Holmes, 2006, p. 304). What Kynard and Eddy refer to as “pedagogical rigor” employs critical challenging and engagement alongside students, rather than “intermittent, safe excursions” the edge of “white comfort zones” (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 34). The results discussed explain in what ways the faculty data collected for this study are working to build coalitions with students, especially Black male student-athletes.

Step 1: Acknowledging realities. The framework that informs this first *a Priori* code is defined in the literature as, "foregrounding the effects of structural racism and white supremacy on university structures, funding, groups, and individuals" (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 35). The code applied to this tenant was shortened to reflect, "Acknowledging Realities" created by racism, white supremacy, and white privilege (refer to Figure 1). Beyond isolated moments of discrimination or equity, the first stage of building coalitions with students of color demands that systemic acknowledgments be made, silence be dispelled, and individual differences be welcomed, despite any tension created by such. Of the three stages, this stage was most prevalent amongst faculty contributed data. Twenty-one course assignments were found to promote students speaking their truth about the realities of their social situations. One such assignment asked students to acknowledge how institutionalized systems--such as education, healthcare, housing, judiciary--create roadblocks based on social factors of the student's personal life. The paraphrased assignment (for anonymity) reads:

“Research how your long-term goals may be derailed by institutionalized land-mines. What can you do to protect yourself?”

Another assignment asked students to write a letter to the university president, explaining why annually increased tuition rates at public institutions of higher education is an inherently discriminatory act. The faculty member welcomed that students customize this letter to explore how their rights can, and should, be better advocated. Where social sciences lend themselves to such personal explorations, hard sciences do not do so as obviously. However, several science and engineering faculty were found to be inviting their students to acknowledge their truth through literacy assignments. Once biology course instructions to find a biologist--or a scientist in their chosen future-career--that "looks like them," and research the life, education, and experiences of that individual. They are invited to do personal research in the community throughout the research process. There is also a particular emphasis on acknowledging what sociocultural factors were challenging for their selected candidate to overcome: race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, housing, familial dynamics, language, *et cetera*. An engineering seminar course offered much the same assignment, but the course featured speakers of diverse backgrounds and career paths to give students a starting point and increased access to diverse research opportunities.

Without a doubt, English courses and writing prompts saw the most incidents of speaking, exploring, and advocating for students' truths and experiences. There were 11 paper prompts coded as such. While there were many successful incidents of written literacy assignments advocating for students' acknowledgment of the realities of the world in which they live, only two courses required reading assignments that did so. A communication course required an article entitled, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" as part of the reading list. The article lists no less than 26 ways the white privilege is prevalent in the day-to-day running of society, such as the ability to purchase "flesh-colored" bandages to

inconspicuously hide an injury, or the rarity (if ever) that a white individual might be asked to speak on behalf of their race. In an English course, there was a month-long unit dedicated to reading "diverse perspectives." While this acknowledges and features authors of various sociocultural positions and backgrounds--such as LGBTQIA+ authors, Native American authors, Black authors, women authors, Jewish authors, Asian American authors, *et cetera*), the isolation of diversity to a month-long unit appears to continue to segregate diverse authors and reading experience as different and detached.

In the name of authentic allyship, the project seeks to conduct meaningful research while simultaneously *enacting* change through this research. Thus, this study also considered ways that the realities of systemic injustice were present in the faculty contributed artifacts to offer improvements. In order to remain in compliance with Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines, these assignments cannot be replicated. However, five hallmarks of assignments and policies that directly contradict the coalition building tenant of "acknowledging realities" are listed here:

- Numerous writing prompts compelled that students' responses should explain how they "agree" with the reading/dialogue/speaker, rather than allowing them to respond authentically. Also, if such prompts do invite students to disagree, in more than one instance, the "disagreement" response required more work (i.e., word count, citations, explanation, connections, and critical thinking applications) than an "agreement" oriented response.
- Several contemporary sociocultural topics--such as racism, sexism, mental health--are only framed from a historical lens in written and research assignments, rather than from a contemporary standpoint. Assignments prompting research into these topics were found to use past-tense verbs, implying and compelling that students should explore the

historical contexts, rather than updated and relevant applications.

- If assignments require research, they are limited in the sources students can utilize, such as the course textbook or reading assignments.
- Diverse sociocultural situations are too often "othered" in and isolated rather than regularly integrated, such as a reading unit dedicated to Black authors, rather than featuring Black authors amongst a multitude of perspectives through reading assignments.
- The final product requirements for assignments received much more emphasis than the learning process. This has been found in another discourse study of academic language (Liao, 2015) and is replicated here. However, this study's nuanced approach is incorporating--namely, examining coalition building for Black male student-athletes-- finds that a lack of emphasis on the *process* of engaging in an exploratory literacy assignment compels the student to find and report a predetermined answer. While assignments do not explicitly state what students' findings or opinions should be in these literacy assignments, they are often worded to agree or fit into a predetermined mold. Language such as, "how does your [experience] match..." or "in what ways do you identify with the [example/account provided]," does invite critical perspectives of topics, conversations, or narratives.

Step 2: Coping with realities. The next tenant of coalition building is to take steps to cope with reality through mentorship. Kyndard and Eddy's (2009) account describes this step as: "striving to undo the toxic effects of racism on individual students through critical mentoring" (p. 36). This step is exemplified by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as these institutions regard mentoring students to be a campus-wide initiative. In contrast, critical

mentoring on predominantly white campuses is defined as an "act of survival" by small cohorts (p. 36). The university that serves as the context for the research--a designated minority-serving institution--provides evidence that mentoring is taking place in classrooms through the employment of literacy-based assignments. However, the predominance of mentoring is taking place between students encourages students to seek mentorship outside of the classroom. Across the 53 courses evaluated, six courses required some peer review version amongst students or groups of students.

In five English courses, workshopping--or, as explained, peer review in small groups of four/five students--was required as part of every paper assignment. These workshopping sessions were meant to "support peers through the writing process," and offer feedback related to both the content and topics discussed. One of the three English courses even dedicated an entire class period to teaching students how to be effective, "*critical*," and productive reviewers to their peers. There was also a day dedicated to "how to respond" to feedback from peers. This type of reciprocal mentorship is of particular note and was only seen in one course. Further incidents of peer review were found in one public speaking course, but this peer review was not meant for students to exchange with each other. Rather, it was described as an "evaluation," as each student was required to critique the public speaking (i.e., product) of their peers. There was limited to no evidence that peer collaboration was meant to be supportive throughout learning, so much as it was meant to improve an isolated final product. Thus, where efforts to mentor appear to be budding in these courses, they are not yet fully taking place in a way that established the coalition tenant of providing critical mentorship.

There is little evidence that mentorship is being cultivated within classrooms directly by faculty. Referring to the course syllabuses' evaluation, there were 12 instances where students

were given a list of topics to "not" contact faculty about through email and no instances that welcome discussion via email. Office hours are listed on 38 of 51 collected syllabuses; however, two syllabuses instructed students to use email exclusively, instead of office hours. Students were directed to post any course questions to a class-wide community forum through the online classroom platform in one such syllabus. It is most interesting to note that the humanities and social science classes are the most resistant to offering additional course assistance through office hours, while science and engineering courses encouraged students to seek help with the course content via office hours. While most syllabuses did include office hours, only six syllabuses explained what and how office hours were to be used. In four courses--all science or engineering--the faculty member explained that the course did not lend itself to getting behind and that any confusion or additionally required help should be pursued through an office hours appointment. In the other two courses, one biology and one environmental science, students were directed to make an appointment via email or an online platform if they were going to miss a class meeting or major assignment to pursue an acceptable alternative. The language used to describe such in one syllabus is paraphrased to state:

“you are welcome to attend office hours, but please put your question in writing prior to the meeting by sending me an email. If you do come to my office hours, please come with an explicit question that demonstrates that you have tried to solve the problem you are inquiring after on your own.”

While these six courses are to be commended for providing some context for the utility of one-on-one help by the instructor, the "mentorship" appearing to be proffered is that of tutoring, not mentoring. Even the documents that appear to promote--rather than just post--office hours do not seem to welcome this as a readily accessible resource. The social power dynamics reinforced

by having to qualify for an office hours appointment in writing create the allusion that students' needs and/or questions must be worthy of making such an appointment. The phrase "by appointment only" appears 20 times across the 38 syllabuses that mention office hours. The provision of tutoring and extra academic help does not satisfy the critical mentorship that indicates helping students cope with the realities of their social situations in education settings. Further, it is essential to note that no syllabuses mention that office hours are a safe place for reporting, confronting, or coping with discrimination of any sort, nonetheless racial discrimination.

Critical mentorship is coded according to evidence of mentoring within classrooms, the affirmation of diverse choices, and/or various options for success. There is more evidence for the versus code of forcing groups of students to cope with reality in isolation or without mentorship at all. There are no mentions of avenues for students to pursue mentoring, either within classrooms, with their instructions, or across campus in most course documents. There are nine mentions of pursuing the campus Office of Student Success, but all nine of these instances are for documenting an extended absence from class attendance. There are also no mentions of providing students with the opportunity to pursue alternative classroom success options if they find themselves struggling, either personally or academically. A finite number of course assignments or assignment requirements, prescribed and dictated to students by the faculty member in each artifact, and completion of these assignments are required to pass the course. A total of 26 syllabuses require signatures that acknowledge and agree to these requirements. The only exception to the listed course assignments occurred in an English syllabus where it is explained that students who feel they face "barriers" to learning throughout/during the assignments provisioned in the course should seek testing through the

university's Office of Student Success to see if they require learning accommodations. There are no mentions of negotiations for grading or welcoming student contributions to course assignments, class topics, or course design. The absence of such is not surprising, but these are options to welcome the critical mentorship between faculty and students that is presently missing in this analysis.

It is within reason to assume that some one-on-one discussions and collaborations may be taking place within classroom discussion and are simply not present in the faculty artifacts serving as the data for this study. However, the language in several course documents creates doubt that classroom discussion provides mentorship, as test preparation seems to take precedence. Almost all courses require a final exam according to the list of assignments included in the course syllabus; the exception to this are three English courses that require the completion of a writing portfolio. This implies that students will be tested, at least once a semester, on the content delivered in class, by the readings, and based on completed assignments. The terms "test" and "quiz" appear in 48 of 51 course syllabuses. In one syllabus, the language describing testable content is paraphrased as stating:

“Anything I DISCUSS [sic] is testable--therefore it is not necessarily in the PowerPoints or the reading.”

In this example, the emphasis on "I DISCUSS," in all-caps, centralizes that discussions are not truly discussions or correspondences between the faculty and students. Instead, they appear to be monologues that should be treated as fact and memorized to be accurately recalled later.

Furthermore, that later point in time is an assessment that could affect students' grades.

It is plausible to consider that the prompts and assignments coded as allowing students to acknowledge realities (i.e., the first tenant of coalition building) might be considered cathartic

and thus facilitate an opportunity to cope with realities (i.e., the second tenant of coalition building). However, the hallmark of this second tenant is mentorship. While allowing students to discuss their personal experiences with race, or instances of discrimination, might be provisioned by the open-ended nature of prompts that welcome students to use and critique their own experiences, this does not promote mentorship through an expert's guidance. As the coalition framework states, most faculty must learn how to participate and promote this type of work in their classrooms as mentorship has been absent. However, the implementation of such is vital to undoing the effects of racism as individuals as they endeavor to enter and participate in a larger society and, hopefully, societal change.

Step 3: Changing realities. The final step in Kynard and Eddy's (2009) coalition building is characterized by facilitating students' ability to change or change their realities. The framework characterizes this step as "undoing internalized racism" by actively working to engage and promote "democratic alternatives to white supremacy" (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 37). More than the preceding steps, this step is meant to meaningfully address the isolation of combating racism by allowing students to engage in more considerable efforts that enact social justice. Of the course documents analyzed for this research, there were no instances of large-scale efforts, even on a classroom level, that address or enact social change. Several course units were dedicated to researching large-scale racism; however, these units were mostly deficit-oriented and more concerned with promoting the despair of being a Black or Brown body in the United States. A criminal justice syllabus discussed Black rates of incarceration and even provided readings and a YouTube video that illuminated the disproportionate rate at which Black men are incarcerated compared to any other racial demographic. However, the discussion questions that correspond with the article only ask students to summarize "the main point" of the

article, rather than engage critically or offer any solutions to such.

Enacting "changing realities" within higher education classrooms should allow students to develop and promote narratives that may be subversive to the dominant viewpoint, or even the viewpoint of course materials. It is important to note that none of the course materials proffered as data for this research promotes racist thinking or overtly discriminatory viewpoints. However, the trademark significance of coalition building is not celebrating non-racism within classrooms. Instead, it is about actively promoting anti-racist actions and condemning racism as it exists within classrooms, on campuses, within academic disciplines, and beyond. The absence of evidence supporting that "changing realities" occurs in classrooms means that the opportunity to take more active steps towards promoting change is present and necessary. The versus coding of working towards democratic alternatives to racism is perpetuating the status-quo as it stands. It is evident that the minority-serving institution that serves as the context for this research is not promoting racism, as far as this evaluation is able to determine. However, as literacy assignment prompts and singular units focused on reading/writing about diversity have been determined as a result of this research, recommendations for incorporating more collective action are made in Chapter Six.

There were four significant instances of contradictory evidence related to changing realities. The first is that several syllabuses resisted that students work in groups, consider themselves groups, or even identify as part of their groups within classrooms. Student-athletes are a particularly relevant example. As mentioned earlier, student-athletes are only addressed in one syllabus, and particularly harmful language. Student-athletes dictated to provide official copies of athletic schedules if they must miss class. It is important to note that the professor describes class attendance in very positive language within the same syllabus, promoting the

value of attending classes. Additionally, the professor acknowledges that some events do "understandably" preclude students from attending all scheduled class meetings and that such should be discussed privately and discreetly with the professor. However, the policy directed at student-athletes not only contains clerical and grammatical errors but is described in bolded typeface and does not include any mention of discretion or privacy.

The notion of student groups or group collaboration is largely absent from the faculty data, except for this isolated mention of student-athletes. In fact, the term "individual" is mentioned 28 times across the analyzed course documents. The contexts for the usage of such are mostly negative, or punitive, condemning students who work with peers/partners on any class assignments. In one syllabus, the language regarding assessment practices reminds students that they receive "individual grades," and thus should not rely upon any other student in the course besides themselves. Other instances describe that assignments should be "submitted by individual students," alone, and that all work should be done "individually."

The second mention of contradictory evidence related to changing realities is the vehemence with which faculty seem dedicated to maintaining a culture of compliance, and the notably absent dedication to cultivating sociocultural diversity and/or individuality. There are a number of instances where faculty bold, underlined, or highlighted text in bright colors to provide increased emphasis. However, all nine instances of such exclusively related to either cheating or the use of technology. Under the subheading of "Student Responsibilities," an accounting syllabus describes no less than five different types of cheating infractions in detail, stating that such "corrupt" the educational process. The document then proceeds to condemn, in bolded and red lettering, that any cheating "will not be tolerated." Notably, this same syllabus makes no mention of equitable conduct, respect for peers, or a welcome statement of inclusion;

but, more than 200 words are dedicated to defining cheating practices, and these are the only listed responsibilities of students. Another syllabus describes seven "Classroom Behavior Standards," including two red and bolded items, describing (1) a ban on all cell phone usage, and (2) a ban on any computers or electronic devices. The other five "Classroom Standards" are related to attendance, classroom supplies (i.e., paper and pen), no extraneous chatting, and not leaving trash behind in the classroom. As in previous examples, this emphasis is not accompanied by any mention of policies to ensure social equity or to provide resources for students to pursue mentorship or support regarding such issues.

A third example of contradictory evidence comes in the form of the prompt for a writing assignment from a sociology course. The assignment asked students to consider the significance of a political topic that has or is currently receiving professional debate. Suggested topics include race/racism. Outside research and reading are encouraged on the "general consensus" surrounding the selected topic, and students are encouraged to explore various points of view to gain a "better understanding" of the nuances of the issue. However, where students are encouraged to consider their own thoughts on the subject, they are directed to write their opinions according to what they can source from "scholarly and academic sources." The language states that the subject matter should be based on "learned academic opinions," only. While scholarly research and the ability to locate credible sources is an invaluable skill in the information age, the pairing of student's developing their personal opinion, only so long as it is based upon academic scholarship, contradicts the hope that students are encouraged to be critical of the world around them and institutional policies. It might be better to direct students to *complement* their personal opinions and experiences with reputable sources, rather than exclusively academic. Further, it feels inherently problematic to market "race/racism" as a

debatable political topic. This implies "pros" and "cons" to race/racism, which is not the equitable social justice approach that openly welcomes perspectives, such as that of Black men, in academic settings. Finally, where academic opinions have their place, and the high standards for research that characterize academic scholarship are respectable and important, it seems ambiguous, bordering on obtuse, that academic scholarship is exclusively the best and only way to encourage students to learn and discuss issues surrounding sociocultural factors. Academic research is challenging to read, and it would be important for any such course that requires academic reading to help students learn how to search and understand academic research texts. This particular syllabus and course schedule do not state that there is a learning module dedicated to doing such; but, this is not to say it did not happen in class discussions. However, it is worth noting that teaching students how to read academic texts in 100- and 200- level courses should be a more regular curricular practice. Further, academic texts are written predominantly by white academics. The 2019 statistics released by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 76% of academics identify as white; only 6% of academics identify as Black, and only 3% identify as Hispanic. Therefore, the likelihood that a student will come across research regarding race that has been written by a scholar of color and informed by the authentic experience of a Black or Brown body is contrary to reason.

The fourth finding that stands as contradictory to changing realities by creating active and large-scale alternatives to racism was found in a biology assignment that marginalizes diversity and minimizes differences as happenstance. The assignment asked students to consider a famous biologist for a bibliographic research paper. Students were directed to choose biologists that were not "mainstream" or popular options (perhaps those covered by the textbook) and to seek out instead individuals that were, as the text describes, "odds to the field." The language here

intentionally others biologists who identify as what can only be assumed to be, white and male. The term "odddity," contrives images of something that does not belong, and is, frankly, irregular. The language is not overtly discriminatory or negative; and, the assignment appears to be pushing students to see individuals of various sociocultural aspects as biologists. However, the language and description of such a task, rather than diversifying and broadening the definition of whom students might consider to be a potential biologist, narrows and isolates the definition into those that "are" biologists and those who are "odddities" within such a career.

To summarize the results regarding coalition building based on the literacy-oriented artifacts and class documents that comprise the faculty contributed data, this research finds that minority-serving institutions are well adept at facilitating students' acknowledgement of realities regarding racism their personal sociocultural experiences. Several assignments invite students to enact critical perspectives by breaking the silence surrounding their authentic perspectives and opinions, and individual differences are welcome. There is less evidence that critical mentoring is taking place within classrooms, or that faculty are welcoming students' involvement in the development of pedagogy or curriculum. Students are welcomed to office hours, but they are told that their concerns must be approved to be considered valid or worthy of faculty attention. Further, access to faculty is limited by hierarchical language and written communication that implies faculty superiority (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). There is also a prominent absence of resources and acknowledgments shared with students regarding acknowledging and supporting students' different social situations. Much more emphasis is placed on conforming to the rules of what is acceptable--and mostly, passive--compliance with bodily classroom behaviors. And, this classroom behavior is largely concerned with silenced cell phones and closed laptops, rather than respect for diversity and/or the promotion of equity and social justice. Finally, further work

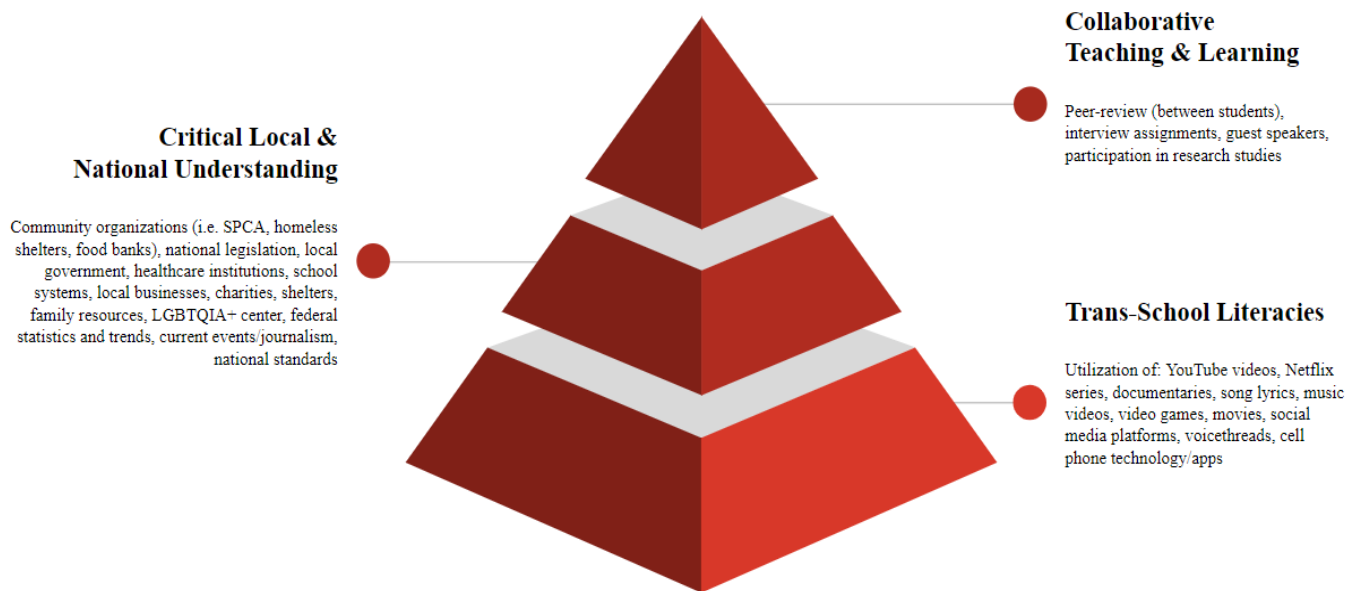
might be encouraged in implementing democratic changes within classrooms to achieve said equity and social justice within classrooms and across the university campus. While there is no evidence supporting overt discrimination, there is little encouragement that students consider "non-dominant" ideas or overcome the isolation that can result from a student's particular social situation. Where HBCUs are heralded for encouraging historically resilient populations to engage in building large-scale change, this research finds that students are welcome to their individual opinions, exclusively, and respected for their differences without any subsequent action. Building individuals is the first step; subsequent work is required to engage in building productive and progressive coalitions.

Findings Related to Pedagogical Responsibilities

In addition to the steps of coalition building, Kynard and Eddy (2009) outline three active, *working* tenants of what is termed "color conscious pedagogy" (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 38). These "responsibilities," owed to students by faculty who intend to be authentically color-conscious in the design and implementation of their classrooms, include

1. The implementation of trans-school literacies
2. The utilization of collaborative-community teaching and learning
3. The promotion of critical local and national understandings (p. 37).

Once faculty data was analyzed using the coalition building *a Priori* schema in order to assess the state of coalition building with Black male students, an additional round of coding was completed in order to assess how these "pedagogical responsibilities" are being implemented. The purpose of such is to see how the stages of coalition building correspond with the active implementation of these responsibilities, as part of an effort to provide practical advice to welcome all students' social situations, but especially Black male student-athletes, into higher



education classrooms. Figure 5 summarizes these findings according to coding prevalence.

Figure 5. Utilized Pedagogical Responsibilities in Faculty Data

As shown, there are a number of strategies being utilized to incorporate trans-school literacies in classrooms across disciplines. As defined by Kynard and Eddy's (2009) study, trans-school literacies are those that resist students' using their alternative discourse--or, perhaps, their "out of school" literacies--to produce mainstream and dominant-group-accepted texts (pp. 38-39). Further, trans-school literacies celebrate that diversity is not put on display as "othered" or a "once-a-semester-special-topics-assignment" (pp. 38-39). Specifically, this action values incorporating literacy in diverse and unique ways that allow students to capitalize on their social situations and personal discourse communities. History classes, especially, exemplified this by incorporating several a number of videos and multimedia mediums (i.e., YouTube, Netflix, music videos, video games, *et cetera*) that allow students to relate their social context and "out of

school" literacies within classrooms. English assignments were found to use movies and audiobooks, as well as current events and social media, for both reading and writing assignments. The reading list in one criminal justice class was exclusively Netflix movies, with a different movie designated as "assigned reading" each week and consequently acting as the basis for discussion and reflection. Science classes also incorporated online subscriptions to multimedia and websites meant to "complement" the text reading assignments. An oceanography classroom encouraged students to download an iOS or Android application onto their cell phones to watch the natural habitats of species from around the world in real-time. These diverse mediums capitalize on the technology literacy that defines the information age while allowing students to capitalize on their discourse communities and skills. There are no direct emphases on race through featured speakers, creators, inventors, or representatives of color. However, the opportunity to pursue technology as a common literacy-oriented space outside the classroom does extend the possibility for exposure to diversity.

The second active responsibility of color-conscious pedagogy is to seek ways that teaching and learning can be genuinely collaborative within communities, rather than just arbitrarily discussing community needs. This involves transgressing the traditional boundaries and spaces of institutional spaces, both for students in their thinking and active situations and opportunities for their learning. As shown in Figure 5, several courses involve community-based projects. The business college courses represented in this research best exemplify this by requiring that each student participates in at least one community initiative to create a business plan to increase the funding and support of that initiative. The students are invited to log a certain number of hours to genuinely join and, thus, understand their selected cause in order to offer an authentic perspective. An English assignment details a five-page written essay

requirement where students are to interview a leader in their community, including but not limited to leaders in local government, healthcare, church/religion, social justice, and/or education. The assignment asks students to critique the leadership critically for both strengths and opportunities for improvement and conclude with how they can support or change the leadership they evaluated. Similarly, a religious study course asks students to attend a religious service and/or meeting with a leader of the Islamic or Jewish faith. They are asked to consider how to advocate for the appreciation of either community based on their experience. These literacy-based assignments ask students to create a metaphorical space where, through reading, writing, and communicating, to blur the lines of learning and exploration beyond classroom jurisdictions.

Finally, the third construct in enacting color-conscious and responsible pedagogy is to invite students to engage in critical considerations of their institutions. This is further specified by allowing students to utilize their experiential knowledge as situated within local, national, and global narratives and social situations. The university that serves as the context for this study is actively looking to facilitate students' understanding of their social situations related to other populations within local, national, and global communities. The greatest representation is at the national level. Sociology, psychology, English, history, criminal justice, business, and communication classes all provided evidence of using current events at the local and national levels to inform writing assignments. A sociology class writing assignment directed students to pick a national problem they related to from at least three news outlets and suggest problem-solving solutions or modifications to current solutions. The language of the assignment description is paraphrased to state:

“make it your own; imagine you were personally involved in either the situation, or the

leadership designing the situation. How would this change your approach?"

A public speaking course asked students to research the housing and cost-of-living situation in the local area and prepare a 10-minute speech that could be delivered to the city council to report the actual state of affairs and discuss how any discovered inequities could be solved. A written assignment in an art history course asked students to note places that local art is featured publicly in their city/hometown and comment on how said art is, or is not, representative of the surrounding community. Finally, an American history course asked students to research the evolution of state legislation on civil rights in five different states, comparing and contrasting progress or regression in equitable practices and social justice, and compelling students to make suggestions for improvements in each location. These assignments exemplify and facilitate students' imaginings of their lives as active political-intellectual citizens beyond and outside of traditional classroom settings.

Findings and Results: Student Data as Analysis

As discussed, the Black male student-athletes who completed the survey elevate this research by lending their authentic perspective and experience to the interpretations of how literacy-oriented assignments and course documents promote coalition building between students and faculty in 100- and 200-level courses. Figures 6 and 7 summarize the findings from the four student analyses that contribute to the assessment of higher education curriculum and pedagogy. After evaluating two assignment descriptions from the faculty data, student experts rated their inclination of agreement with a number of statements by selecting "yes," "no," or "maybe." These statements queried how well the student experts felt the assignment accomplished the steps towards coalition building. As shown, all four student participants--henceforth referred to as "student experts"--identify as Black, male, and a current student-athlete.

		YES	MAYBE	NO
1	Does this assignment invited you to think about/make use of your lived experiences ?	✓✓✓✓		
2	Does this assignment invite you to think about/make use of your personal identity ?	✓✓✓	✓	
3	Does this assignment invite you to acknowledge problems around you?	✓✓✓✓		
4	Does this assignment invite you to be part of a mentor/mentee relationship with the instructor?	✓		✓✓✓
5	Does this assignment help you solve any problems with which you are dealing?	✓✓✓✓		

Figure 6. Student Numerical Data from Assessment of Assignment 1

The first assignment comes from a humanities course and is highly regarded by this study as inviting coalition building according to the first stage of "acknowledging realities," and the third responsibility for enacting color-conscious pedagogy through "generating local and national understanding." Students were asked to interview a member of a local institution within their community. They were then asked to complete a written reflection that critiques the leadership critically for both strengths and opportunities for improvement and concludes with supporting or changing the leadership they evaluated.

According to this study, the second assignment is well-intentioned but falls short of enacting active execution of the coalition building steps, specifically that of "coping with realities." However, the assignment does incorporate the tenant of utilizing trans-school

literacies adhering to color-conscious responsible pedagogy. This assignment comes from a science course where students were asked to locate a scientist to conduct cursory biographic research. Students were directed to choose biologists that were not "mainstream" or popular options (perhaps those covered by the textbook or discussed in class) and to instead seek out individuals that were, as the text describes, "oddy to the field." Students were then asked to create a social media profile of that scientist, detailing their life, education, and status updates with any sociocultural factors or relevant social situations. As discussed, the language used in this assignment description is problematic because it marginalizes diversity and implies that scientists who are not, presumably, white and male--or, "mainstream"--are odd, irregular, and even less attainable.

As shown, the first assignment prompted all four students to think about their lived experiences. Three of the four believed that the assignment invited their personal identity, while the one responded "maybe." All four believed the assignment invited them to acknowledge problems in the world around them and invited them to consider problems in the world around them. However, only one of the four believed that the assignment invited them to engage with the instructor as a mentor; the other three experts responded that "no," the assignment did not facilitate a mentor/mentee relationship with the instructor. Two of the student experts responded to the open-ended question that asked for their thoughts on the assignment. One stated that:

"I would like doin this assignment as long as it's not too long to write cuz it lets me go back home and think about my neighborhood and what I can do to to help my people back home [sic]"

The second student expert echoed these sentiments, stating:

"This would be cool because I want to go back to my neighborhood and clean up the crime and shit so its not like what I grew up doing."

The second assignment's student expert evaluation found it to be less favorably ranked when compared to the first assignment.

		YES	MAYBE	NO
1	Does this assignment invited you to think about/make use of your lived experiences ?	✓	✓✓✓	
2	Does this assignment invite you to think about/make use of your personal identity ?	✓✓✓✓		
3	Does this assignment invite you to acknowledge problems around you?	✓✓	✓✓	
4	Does this assignment invite you to be part of a mentor/mentee relationship with the instructor?			✓✓✓✓
5	Does this assignment help you solve any problems with which you are dealing?	✓	✓✓✓	

Figure 7. Student Numerical Data from Assessment of Assignment 2

One of the four believed that the assignment invited them to consider their lived experiences and background, while the other three ranked this as "maybe." All four ranked the question that asked if the assignment invited them to think about their personal identity as "no." Two of the student experts voted that the assignment invited them to acknowledge problems in the world around them, while the other two ranked this as "maybe." All four students voted "no" when asked if the assignment invited them to engage with the instructor as a mentor. Finally, three of the four responded "maybe" when asked if the assignment helped them deal with problems they were realistically facing in the world around them, while the remaining one expert responded,

"yes." Three qualitative responses were submitted as part of the evaluation of the second assignment. The first response stated:

"I dun care if a scientist looks like me when I'm playing ball [sic]"

Another response added:

"Not being disrespectful but I don't get the point of this assignment because i don't know any scientists who look like I do and it would be hard to find one so and who tf uses facebook [sic]"

A third response concluded that the assignment was off-putting, stating:

"This wack [sic]"

The student expert evaluations of the two assignments mirror the assessments of this research but enhance the validity and conclusions offered in the discussion and implications of these results.

It is important to note that there was a majority consensus on nine of the ten close-ended questions, and a split response on the remaining one (Question 3, assignment 2). The tone and candor of the qualitative responses are also in agreement across the student experts, and in concert with the researcher. Of particular note is the flippancy with which the second assignment was evaluated. The first and second responses seem to disregard it entirely as pointless. Specifically, the second response--which almost offers deference by beginning, "not being disrespectful"--bases his flippancy on such a task's impossibility and the outdated technology medium of the social media platform. Relatedly, the first response even disregards the assignment as not meaningful to his goals. Both seem to regard the assignment as out-of-touch and unrelated to his goals. The third response seems irritated by the assignment with the condemnatory description of "wack."

The final chapter of this study discusses the significance of these findings as they offer practical and authentic recommendations to enact genuine support and change for the historically

resilient Black male population. Additionally, acknowledgments of this study's limitations are proffered to facilitate more robust iterations of this work. Further, recommendations are suggested to continue this work as part of an ongoing effort of solidarity and allyship to promote Black male voices and support Black male students' social situations.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter in this research begins by overviewing the study design, including the purpose and context, guiding research questions, a brief overview of both the theoretical framework and methodological approach. A summary of the findings, according to the researcher and the student experts, follows, explaining the most salient themes discovered and conferred between the researcher's analysis and the student experts' analysis. The implications of this research are then presented alongside recommendations for utilizing the coalition building framework, as it has been applied in the context of this research, as a continuum for promoting authentic change in classrooms for Black male student-athletes. In addition to the theoretical reflections of coalition building, practical considerations are discussed to make useful recommendations for immediate implementation and as an authentic effort towards meaningful change for Black male student-athletes. In addition to such, recommendations for the continuation of this research are presented as education continues to evolve to better meet students on a level playing field.

Overview of the Study Design

The Black male student-athlete represents one of the most successful and profitable aspects of college and university life. The combined sports of men's football and men's basketball generate as much--or more--revenue for college and university campuses than student tuition. According to USA Today, the average revenue generated by tuition at a public university with a Division I sports program is about USD 200 million per academic year. The same university is expected to make nearly USD 180 million from the men's football and men's basketball programs, alone. These athletic programs' success is carried in the hands and atop the shoulder pads of Black male student-athletes. In the most elite athletic programs--those

classified as Division I--more than 50% of the men's football and men's basketball rosters are comprised of students who identify as Black and male (NCAA, 2020a). However, although the incredible addition Black male student-athletes are to college campuses, they are not valued enough within classroom settings. Black men are the least likely student demographic to graduate from undergraduate degree programs, at an average rate of just below 40%. Only about half of Black male student-athletes ever reach the graduation stage (Jackson, 2017). In short: institutions of higher education are not doing enough to value the experiences, social-situations, social and academic needs of the Black male student-athlete within twenty-first century classrooms. This research stands to assess how literacy, both used as a communication technique and as a means of expression and means by which students can enact their identities, is being and can be used better to acknowledge the sociocultural needs of Black male student-athletes.

The literature supports that student-athletes are a specific and particular population on college campuses. The literature also recognizes that student-athletes comprise a recognizable percentage of the students who populate 100- and 200-level courses. However, of the research that speaks to the experience of being a student-athlete enrolled in institutions of higher education, none directly addresses practical applications of literacy to better meet the sociocultural needs of these students by acknowledging their social situations. As found in Amundsen et al. (2008) and Lugo and Hawisher (2003), Black male student-athletes are not struggling in classes because they "overly" identify as athletes. The opposite has been found to be true; Black male student-athletes do not drop out of classes at a higher rate than their white male student-athlete counterparts because classrooms are not outfitted to look like locker rooms and professors assign quizzes instead of push-ups. Black male student-athletes' graduation rates have not been found to improve if athletic-identities are catered to (Amundsen et al., 2008).

Thus, the logical next step is to acknowledge that it is not student-athletes that are being failed in classrooms: it is Black men. The emphasis on student-athletes in this study is to isolate a potential sociocultural factor that educators are--or, at least, should be--aware is present in their classrooms. Nearly 10% of the freshman population on a public university campus is student-athletes. However, despite being aware of this fact, Black male student-athletes are still not seeing comparable success in classroom contexts. Thus, these students stand as the "flag on the play" for current classroom pedagogical and curricular choices. These students are known to be enrolled in undergraduate courses, but their sociocultural factors are not being acknowledged to a degree that is supportive, nonetheless effective. Thus, this research endeavors to assess how literacy practices and critical literacy assignments--as exemplary of enacting individuals' agentive identities--welcome the Black male student-athlete sociocultural identities into classroom contexts.

The theoretical underpinnings of this work are informed by a critical theory approach, as understood through the works of Marxism, Bourdieu (1975), and Freire (1970). Critical theory enables a practical bridge between theory and practice to enrich theoretical considerations in practical contexts. Critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Chandler, 2010; Tottenham & Petersen, 2014), and as well as applications of critical literacy (Lewis, Moje, & Enciso, 2007; Pyscher, Lewis, & Stutelberg, 2014), and Black masculine literacies (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Bell, 2017) inform a bricolage approach (Kincheloe, 2001). This allows for the consideration of how elements, such as language, subject, and themes, work together to impart meaning. Similarly, the research methods in this study are qualitative to capture the complex combination of conceptual understandings in the human process of learning and identity building. A critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2003; Wodak & Reisigl,

2003) methodological approach examines the critical discourse of sociocultural considerations in the language used to communicate with students in higher education classrooms. As critical discourse analysis (CDA) is concerned with how social power is distributed through language, such an approach allows this study to carefully examine in what ways language and literacy are helping Black male student-athletes "fill the space" between dominant ideologies and their personal sociocultural factors and social situations. The following research questions serve as a guide for the design, implementation, and analysis of this study's data:

3. What types of assignments characterize the literacy-oriented (i.e., reading, writing, and oral) work assigned in 100 and 200 level general education courses with a below-average success rate by Black male student-athletes?
4. How are assignments in 100 and 200 level courses with a below-average success rate by Black male student-athletes inviting critical sociocultural perspectives of individual students?
5. What shifts are required in literacy-oriented (i.e., reading, writing, and oral) assignments in 100 and 200 general education courses to better address social justice for Black male student-athletes' critical perspectives?

Implication of Results

The context of this study is a minority-serving institution in the southeastern United States. Faculty who taught 100- and/or 200-level courses during fall 2019, spring 2020, or summer 2020 academic semesters were emailed and asked to voluntarily and anonymously contribute the written artifacts they use in their courses to a Qualtrics survey link (such as course syllabuses, course assignments/assignment descriptions, reading requirements, assigned texts, exams, lectures, *et cetera*). A total of 1,117 emails were sent to faculty who met the inclusion

criteria of (1) having taught a 100- or 200-level course during the 2019-2020 academic year, and (2) having taught courses that contained formal assignments (i.e., performance-based courses or recitations). The response rate for returned artifacts from faculty was 14.23%, with a final dataset of 53 sections of 32 different courses taught by 29 instructors.

This research is also informed by the voices of four student-athletes who identify as Black and male and are enrolled at the aforementioned minority-serving institution. After a round of pilot testing in two 100-level undergraduate courses, a letter was distributed via email to Black male student-athletes through the athletic academic center, asking for voluntary and anonymous contributions to this research. A Qualtrics survey link was distributed to students via email, containing three demographic questions and 12 questions prompting their response to two assignment descriptions. These assignment descriptions were informed by and based upon the artifacts contributed by faculty participants.

The results of this study were constructed after two rounds of qualitative coding. The initial round of coding was done using an *a Priori* coding schema based on Kynard and Eddy's (2009) premise of coalition building within classrooms. Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) are highly regarded for their conscious discourse of emancipating their students from miseducation and racist exploits by building coalitions with and alongside students to facilitate critical and active work for democratic alternatives to white supremacy. The three steps of coalition building are summarized as: (1) acknowledging racists realities; (2) facilitating coping with racism and white supremacy through critical mentoring; and (3) change racist realities by enacting democratic alternatives. The faculty data of assignment descriptions, course documents, lecture notes, reading assignments, and the like were coded according to the three

steps in coalition building. These documents were also coded using a versus coding schema to identify any direct contractions to the coalition building framework.

After this initial round of coding, an additional round of axial coding was conducted to allow themes between the *a Priori* codes and the versus codes to align and form relationships (Strauss, 1998). The axial coding phase involved combining the thematic results of the coalition building framework with Kynard and Eddy's recommendations for pedagogical responsibilities of instruction. These responsibilities include:

1. The incorporation of trans-school literacies
2. Collaborative teaching and learning that extends beyond the walls of traditional classroom spaces
3. contextualizing learning through critical interrogation of local, national, and global circumstances.

In addition to the analysis conducted by the researcher, this study is evaluated by the assessments and contributions of Black male student-athletes. A Qualtrics survey link was distributed to Black male student-athletes through the athletic academic center, and four voluntarily completed surveys were anonymously returned. The surveys asked students to evaluate two assignment descriptions from the faculty data using much the same coalition building framework utilized by the researcher. The Black male student-athletes--referred to in this research as student experts--rated their inclination of agreement with five close-ended statements by selecting, "yes," "no," or "maybe." These statements queried how well the student experts felt the assignment accomplished the steps towards coalition building. As shown, all four student participants--henceforth referred to as "student experts"--identify as Black, male, and a current student-athlete.

Generally speaking, the results of this study found that faculty teaching 100- and 200-level courses tend to overvalue a top-heavy power-dynamic through literacy, rather than enacting students' power through literacy. The language across contributed documents--which totaled 51 syllabuses and more than 80 assignment descriptions, as well as access to course lecture notes, exams and exam study guides, online course platforms, and course readings--was dictating, dogmatic, and characterized by negative language, rather than positive and affirming language. The most commonly occurring phrases across all 150(+) documents were "required participation," followed closely by "graded," with more than 400 mentions of each. There were almost 2,000 mentions of faculty requirements and expectations of students, but only one syllabus mentioned the expectations students should have of their faculty/faculty members. Further, no syllabuses, course documents, or assignments instructed students on how to be constructively critical of their course or course instructor. However, all syllabuses included the grading criteria by which students are critiqued, and more than half the assignment descriptions included a rubric and/or grading criterion. The implications are that students should assume they are being evaluated at every stage of the course by their faculty. In contrast, faculty are not subjected to the same ongoing critical cycle of evaluation. While students do have the opportunity to review their faculty and course experience at the end of each academic term through formal course evaluations, there is no evidence that students are instructed how to engage in such an evaluation. Further, student evaluations of faculty are more formatively driven, where student assessments are summative in nature.

Results also indicated that the values imparted to students from faculty, based upon a critical discourse analysis of the language and social-power dynamics conveyed through literacy assignments and written course documents, are much more concerned with foul language, the

appropriate way to construct an email, and plagiarism. In the more than 150 documents evaluated, the term "diversity" (and its related synonyms) was only mentioned in one syllabus and, thus, only addressed as one, isolated classroom policy. Other syllabuses noted, generally, that "respect" should be applied to students and staff. However, these policies receive drastically less attention than other policies, such as how to email faculty according to their requirements and expectations. In one such instance, the word count describing the types of cheating infractions that are intolerable according to the faculty member totaled more than 200 words. In this same syllabus, less than 40 words were used to describe the necessity for classroom respect. As noted, while these documents may not be comprehensive accounts of faculty's views or expectations for their classes and students, such does indicate that written assurance of sociocultural considerations and equity for all backgrounds and students does not merit the same space or written attention that other, more obviously emphasized course policies (e.g., cheating, tardiness, absenteeism, *et cetera*) receive.

The findings related to Kynard and Eddy's (2009) coalition framework found that faculty are actively incorporating ways to support students' acknowledgment of racism's realities. Further, faculty are promoting assignments that encourage students to incorporate their sociocultural factors alongside dominant ideology. Several assignment descriptions were found to welcome students' critique and critical assessment of the realities of their personal, social situations. The most widespread and prevalent examples of this practice were found in English courses. However, several disciplines, including engineering, biology, business, sociology, and criminal justice, provided critical literacy platforms for students to enact and critically consider their realities. There were five thematic occurrences found to contradict coalition building at this stage directly, including:

1. Compelling that students agree with reading assignments, rather than allowing them to respond authentically
2. Only framing sociocultural topics--such as racism, sexism, gender, mental health--through a historical lens, rather than allowing for contemporary critiques
3. The types of sources students are allowed to use as data are almost exclusively predetermined by faculty or arbitrarily described as "academic sources from the library"
4. Diversity is still othered and isolated, rather than regularly integrated into pedagogy and curriculum, with several designated "diversity" units
5. There is an over-emphasis of the learned product, rather than the learning process

The second step of coalition building--striving to undo the effects of racism and teaching students to cope with their realities through critical mentoring--was not found to be as enacted in classroom pedagogy as the first step. Several course assignments allowed students to engage in a peer-to-peer mentorship relationship. However, these types of mentorships were mostly dedicated to helping students cope with understanding course content, rather than offering support for the social situations in which fellow students find themselves. Three English courses were found to require peer-review and trained students on how to offer effective and critical reviews. One English course even dedicated instructional time (according to the course schedule) to teaching students to respond to their reviews, providing the only evidence of reciprocal critical dialogue amongst the faculty data. These three English courses also required students to attend a one-on-one conference with the faculty member once per semester, but this is described as a chance to "review grades" or is driven by needs to review the course content. A similar pattern is echoed in the office hours policies that are included in course syllabuses. There is little evidence from course documents and assignments that mentorship is offered by faculty to

help students cope with their realities or situate themselves socioculturally within their classrooms. Many faculty required that students submit requests for office hours in writing, before receiving an appointment date and time with the instructor. Other professors preferred that office hours meetings be conducted through email, exclusively. More evidence is present in the faculty data that professors prefer to outsource mentoring or, more likely, do not know where to outsource mentoring and, thus, do not include policies or resources that facilitate such. There are nine vague mentions of pursuing the resources available through the campus Office of Student success; but, it is important to note that all nine of these mentions were about securing approved documentation for extended absences. While the assignments that enact the first stage of coalition building are progressive and positive, this second step--mentoring students to cope with realities--is being largely ignored by faculty. The implications present after analyzing the faculty data of course documents and assignments indicate that students are welcome to acknowledge the reality of their social situations, but they must cope alone.

Finally, the third stage of coalition building in Kynard and Eddy's (2009) framework is enacting change to pursue democratic alternatives to discriminatory practices. Again, this stage found faculty providing opportunities for *students* to pursue involvement in community action, perhaps through the completion of a project or an extra credit opportunity. However, students who did engage in these curricular suggestions did so alone and as isolated individuals. There is little evidence suggesting students even engage in coalition building with each other, as group projects were few and far between. Here is an obvious opportunity to point out that student-athlete culture does not transcend into the classroom, as students are not encouraged--or even allowed--to work in small groups or teams. Twenty-eight mentions of the term "individual" across the 51 collected course syllabuses and even explicit language found that stated students

should only work through the course content "as individuals." Thus, there is not even an emphasis on the product of group work, or coalition building, in this stage, nonetheless the process of doing so. Instead of welcoming diverse perspectives and allowing students to situate themselves within the course content, there is a universal theme across all collected faculty data that the only acceptable coalition of students is an obedient one. There were no opportunities found where students could contribute to the course content or design. Instead, students are compelled into passivity and blind obedience--or, they risk their grades--without say so. In several instances, students were required to sign a written agreement indicating their compliance with all course policies. No such contract is offered to students on behalf of faculty. Again, to reiterate this point of inquiry, students are not welcome or taught to critique or evaluate their faculty in any submitted course documents. This includes grades, policies, curriculum, course readings, assignments, *et cetera*. One faculty member dispelled any notion of students providing feedback on their ability to learn the content based on the enacted course by stating students who experience any "barriers to learning" should be "tested" to see if they require learning accommodations. This research does not degenerate the pursuit and utility of learning accommodations at all. However, this research does object to the fact that students are being told they should adjust the way they learn, rather than faculty being compelled to adjust their curriculum and/or pedagogy, even by small degrees. This supports the finding that students are isolated beings rather than respected individuals with mutual social-power in education settings.

The most central results of this study come from the voices of the student-expert analyses of two assignment descriptions. As reported, the first assignment description was rated highly according to the coalition framework. At the same time, the second was regarded as less effective in enacting authentic coalition building between faculty and students. The student data

supports these conclusions, and thus corroborates and substantiates the findings of this study. Four self-identified and professed Black male student-athletes rated their inclination of agreement with a number of statements by selecting "yes," "no," or "maybe." These statements queried how well the student experts felt the assignment accomplished the steps towards coalition building. The student-athletes also found the first assignment to incorporate their social situations more authentically as they engaged with the assignment, and even agreed that the assignment allowed them to solve problems in the world around them. In contrast, they unanimously found that the second assignment did not invite their personal identities. Three of the four ranked the second assignment as only potentially allowing them to deal with solving real-world problems. There was consensus amongst the four, and with the researcher's findings, that neither assignment allowed the students to engage in the critical mentoring relationship with the professor the assignment(s).

This research stands as a unique theoretical application of critical literacy to determine how Black male student-athletes experience higher education curriculum and pedagogy as they seek to enact their sociocultural identities and utilize their particular social situations. Critical literacy is used as data and data analysis in this study, affirming that space for both teaching *and* learning is accomplished through reading, writing, and communicating. However, with this conclusion comes the realization that the level of critical analysis applied in this study and the method by which such analysis was conducted--namely, by both educators and students--should be applied to all course documents governing college courses. Pedagogy extends beyond the lecture content. This research affirms that the next steps in promoting equitable, democratic, and social justice on university campuses in 2020 are to build meaningful relationships in all educational spaces. Critical literacy facilitates a check-and-balance process that this is being

done: faculty should be critically literate in the implementation of their teaching. Students should be critically literate in their reception of such. A cycle of criticality must occur--especially in the decision-making process governing curricular and pedagogical choices. University faculty are experts in their content areas and are regarded for their nuanced appreciation for even the finer points of their subjects. This research finds that the dichotomous roles between faculty and students are unnecessarily hierarchical, with a dictative and autocratic discourse characterizing the language found in the written documents that serve as the indicator of faculty-student relations. Considering the lack of success for certain student demographics--specifically, Black men and Black male student-athletes--this research asserts that the problem in classrooms is not related to content. Instead, the problem is the misappropriation of expertise. This research wonders: at what point are students considered experts in their own learning? Furthermore, if there are objections to considering students as "experts," then what is being done to ensure that students are being taught how to be better learners, rather than just better at English or mathematics? The power dynamic being asserted over students in this research overemphasizes behaviors that are inconsequential to citizenship. That is not to discount the merits of advising students to minimize the distraction of their phones or to attend all course meetings. However, again, this is overemphasized. There were no instructions listed in the course documents how, or what, students should do if they find themselves experiencing dominant ideology in an insurgent, disparate way. Again, the only recommendation for students who find themselves struggling with the prescribed way to learn was to have themselves tested. Students are not being invited to be agentive in classroom learning. There is evidence that students are encouraged to do some self-exploration and be authentic in their self-talk through their literacy assignment. Thus, the next steps must be to engage in the second and third steps in coalition building, which is the

fostering of better working relationships between faculty and students as equally contributing partners in education spaces.

Based on the reported results from both the researcher and the student-experts, the most noteworthy implication, and thus the most significant recommendation, involves addressing the lack of faculty involvement in enacting critical sociocultural identities of Black male student-athletes. There are ample examples of the ways faculty are designing progressive and socially-just assignments. However, the presented pedagogy and curriculum--assessed through the analysis of faculty's course documents--does not match these assignments. Faculty are teaching from outside the doors of their classrooms without crossing the threshold to join students inside. The coalition building framework that informs this work is a continuum of steps towards socially just and democratically conscious teaching. It is evident that 100- and 200- level general education courses could stand to increase the opportunities with which students and their unique social situations are incorporated into the widespread pedagogical and curricular choices taking place within classrooms. The imposing language used in governing course documents, the isolated units on diversity, the marginalization of differences, the emphasis on individual explorations, and the lack of critical mentorship stand alongside assignments that invite students to reflect critically upon their own sociocultural backgrounds. This implies that it is acceptable for students to be critically literate in their own lives as isolated individuals, but such is not valued within educational spaces. The next steps are to ensure the intentional value and utility of individuals' sociocultural factors and social situations to inform instructors' teaching, not just the learning done by students.

Another significant implication of this research is the absence of inviting students to use their criticality beyond the classroom. Assignments that allow students to explore their thoughts

and realities are praised, replicated, and continued. However, there is a lack of usability that characterizes these explorations. While they are completed in a sharable medium (such examples included social media accounts, responses to discussion questions, written essays, presentations, speeches, *et cetera*), there was no mention or encouragement to share the results of these discoveries. Secondly, an over-emphasis on assessment (as indicated by the prevalence of the words "required" and "graded" across faculty data) is not conducive to experimental exploration that might encourage students to push against dominant ideology. As discussed in Kirkland and Jackson (2009), Black male literacy is at the crossroads of mainstream expectations and a "fringe world" (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). If grades are dictated to students, and assessment practices do not invite student input, without any effort to mentor students struggling, then it is no wonder so many Black male students drown in the waters between their social (fringe) location and the mainstream "ideal." This also further reinforces the necessity of emphasizing *how* students should learn as part of critical considerations of pedagogy and curriculum, and how imperative critical mentoring from faculty is to help students traverse the waters surrounding their "fringe" locations. This could be facilitated by respecting students as expert learners and incorporating their input into curricular and pedagogical decisions, establishing an authentic coalition meant to push back and eradicate discriminatory practices before they even take place.

To echo back to one of the written instances that were found to contradict coalition building, too often, faculty are more invested in the learning product than the learning process when incorporating sociocultural influences into pedagogy. Several course calendars dedicated isolated units or lessons to diversification--such as "women scientists" or "Black authors." However, gathering evidence for a project did not often--if ever--include steps asking them to

intentionally and habitually incorporate the ideology of diverse scholars, thinkers, or context. Most assignments directed students to use exclusively "academic" and "peer-reviewed" sources from the university's online database. As previously mentioned, this only further marginalizes Brown and Black scholars' contributions, as they only comprise 6% of the academic researching and publishing force in the United States' higher education system. The process of learning, specifically diverse learning, is disproportionately attuned to in course documents at the most crucial introductory levels (i.e., 100- and 200-level courses) compared to blind obedience to arbitrary policies and assessment practices.

Implications for Black Male Student-Athletes

This study's results have further implications for Black male student-athletes, as they represent a *known* and *recognized* group of individuals who are continually being left in isolation. If this group of students is being disregarded in curriculum and pedagogy, the crisis for unknown and unrecognized groups of individuals in "fringe" social locations is both daunting and disheartening. A number of the conclusions from this study could be addressed to better meet this particular group of students. Further, they represent a group of students who are part of a coalition as part of their respective teams and could be consulted as experts in group work and collaboration. It is exciting to see so much evidence of trans-school literacies, such as social media, streaming services, music, video games, virtual immersion/reality, *et cetera*. Missing from this list of trans-school literacies is the incorporation of physical literacies. While traditional understandings of physical literacies involve bodily movement and exercise, a more figurative application might be utilized to see the value of allowing students to act out their knowledge, rather than sitting through static assessments, to diversify classroom learning. An important analogy to draw between classroom and sports contexts is how student-athletes

prepare for assessments, or games: through simulation. Practices are not only theoretical: they are practical. All the activities done in practice are meant to capitalize upon and enhance physical conditions and training; classroom assessments would benefit from this approach. Lectures, quiet sitting, and isolated learning endeavors are not propitious to a real-life utility of content beyond the classroom. As with athletic training and conditioning, lectures, course readings, and direct instruction are absolutely necessary--especially with advanced learning. However, condemnation and treatment of students who are weak learners through the rhetoric found in the analyzed course documents are ill-suited to success. This study recommends that students be welcome to practice their learning. This compels a number of implementations from the coalition building framework, including mentorship, active pursuits of democratic goals for equity, as well as the pedagogical responsibilities of collaborative teaching and learning, and critical understanding and involvement in communities.

The finding that faculty are an element of coalition building that requires further work and progress stands true and imperative for Black male student-athletes success. A hallmark of coaching is collaborative teaching and learning practices, which is something missing from the course design in several examples from this study. As discussed in Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), enacting socially conscious and critical pedagogy is limited if such is isolated to individuals (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 70). It is recommended that educators embrace that which they preach: "if educators read the world of their students, they would find countless vehicles for moving forward with a critically pedagogical agenda" (p. 70). In Duncan-Andrade and Morrell's account, coaches invited students to contribute as active parts of the planning and building of the coaching regime, resulting in investment and increased confidence within the student and respect for overlooked values and contributions on the part of the coaches.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell found a direct correlation between students' self-respect and their self-realization. As found in Freire's (1970) teachings, *praxis* is the intersection of theoretical considerations and active implementation; the most successful utility of *praxis* cultivation is the repetition of this theorizing and applying cycle. Here, again, is a relevant opportunity to incorporate sports pedagogy within classrooms. In addition to allowing students to act on, or utilize, their acquired knowledge as the basis for assessment, it might also be prudent to reverse current classroom practices and utilize assessments as the basis for learning, in addition to using learning as the basis for assessments. Student-athletes engage in watching back recordings of their practices and game performances to improve upon in subsequent performances. The same should be applied as a differentiated learning practice. Where tests and quizzes certainly have their place in learning environments, the lack of student incorporation on graded assessments is problematic and contradicts the coalition building framework. Students should be engaged in assessing their own performances, alongside instructors. Harkening to the adage of "no I in team," there should be no mention of isolation in classroom coalitions. This includes isolating students from faculty as disparate entities in the building and enactment of curriculum and pedagogy.

These implications are confirmed and authenticated by the analysis conducted by the student experts. The results from the four surveys completed by student-athletes indicated agreement with and confirmed the evaluation conducted by the researcher. Further, the student experts' qualitative responses provide insight into the way Black male student-athletes appreciate assignments that are contextualized to incorporate their social situation. Further, those assignments that marginalize the social situations of these student-experts were condemned and disregarded. Most significantly, all four student-experts analyzed that neither assignment created

a mentor/mentee relationship with faculty. As this has been appraised as a missing factor of coalition building--which has been successfully enacted in other minority-serving educational settings--another recommendation of this research is that faculty emphasize their role as critical mentors alongside and with their students.

Limitations

This research is chiefly limited by the mandated distance between the analysis and live classroom contexts. Due to the safety limitations in place because of the novel Coronavirus pandemic, all data had to be collected and accepted electronically and without additional context (i.e., conversations with faculty and/or students; classroom observations, *et cetera*). The requirement for electronic communication also may have limited the responses and contributions of faculty. Further, this appraisal is limited by its unitary setting and broad scope. This study's results are not meant to be generalized to every minority-serving institution, or universally applied to predominantly white institutions. However, the steps to replicate such an assessment would be useful in purporting how and in what ways coalition building is taking place and can be improved upon. This minority-serving institution saw limited evidence of the second and third stages of coalition building. Rather than demoralizing the efforts taking place, the utility of the coalition building framework allows universities to see their progress on a forward-moving continuum. This study aims to provide a realistic assessment of where pedagogical and curricular implementations are inviting diverse perspectives through critical literacy and recommend increased and progressive action. These results may not specifically apply to other institutions, the goals and process can be assumed to be both generalizable and replicable.

As is characteristic of qualitative research, self-reported data of any kind is subject to individual biases and perceptions. Where this is not a limiting factor of the content of the

provided faculty, it is a factor when considering what faculty data was shared with the researcher and this project. Immense gratitude is offered to the faculty who so quickly and generously volunteered their unedited and abundant course materials to authentically inform this research. Their candor and evident ardor to engage in processes that promote social justice in their classrooms and across their campus are evident. As is also characteristic of qualitative research and coded analysis, the perceptions of the researcher are also a potential limitation and bias, though every measure was observed to remain fair and accurate in the interpretation of this data. However, as acknowledged by Lewis and Moje (2003), employing critical literacy and sociocultural theories is a process of discovery involving identity, agency, and the dynamics of social power. Like the students advocated for in this work, this researcher is also informed by identity, agency, and influences of power. Therefore, this work hopes to have authentically simulated the necessity of inviting students and their social situations into the design of higher education courses and curriculum.

The research also acknowledges that this study is limited by the researcher's sociocultural factors and social situation. As an individual who identifies as neither Black nor male, it is essential to acknowledge that this work does not intend to speak for Black male students or student-athletes. It also does mean to generalize this population by representing these students as an amorphous group. Rather, this research endeavors to support Black men within classroom contexts by inviting and advocating for their personal sociocultural factors and amplifying the need for their contribution to progress education. Therefore, this study is grateful for the contributions of the four student-experts who contributed their time and analysis to this study. It is elevated by their voices. Future iterations and continuations of this work should hope to

incorporate additional contributions from Black male student-athletes and student experts to enact coalitions of scholarship that are genuinely inclusive, democratic, and representative.

Further Research

This research is but a hash in a football field of yard markers. Considering the outlined limitations of this study, recommendations for future research include contextual examinations of specific classroom pedagogy compared to the critical analysis of classroom documents and literacy-based assignments. Additionally, interview and observation data should be incorporated to bolster and more accurately represent faculty and students' intentions. Experimental research that enacts coalition building should be conducted to see how incorporating the three steps in classroom pedagogy and curriculum impacts student learning outcomes and achievements. Relatedly, coalition building should be applied to predominantly white institutions to continue the spread and enactment of progressive and responsible pedagogical practices. The most essential next step in this research is concentrating and incorporating many more and intentional student impressions and critical analysis of their curriculum. Future research should continue to employ critical frameworks to consciously monitor the dynamics of social power for inequities or disproportionate allocations. A more equitable approach to teaching and course design is needed alongside exploratory learning. In short: respect for student knowledge should continue to be evaluated. The general and campus-wide nature of this study provides a cursory overview of 100- and 200-level courses. Follow-up efforts should concentrate on specific departments and colleges to gain a more nuanced understanding of how social-power dynamics and sociocultural considerations can be specified according to the variety of courses and special emphases across college campuses. Finally, the most important recommendation is that this research continues to

be implemented to incessantly monitor and work to improve classroom dynamics for socially just and democratic learning opportunities.

Conclusion

This study seeks to consider how critical literacy is being utilized to develop the curriculum and pedagogy that characterizes the classrooms of Black male student-athletes in higher education.

The purpose of such is to encourage a realistic account of where democratic education is and what efforts can be done through critical sociocultural considerations to better meet these students' needs. Black male student-athletes represent a demographic of students with a sociocultural factor and discourse community in common: athletics. Where athletehood is not obvious based on the student, faculty can assume that their 100- and 200-level courses are populated by student-athletes. If curriculum and pedagogy is not capitalizing on the needs of these students and, as a result, is failing these students, it stands to reason that other groups of students whose sociocultural factors are not known to faculty are also being overlooked.

Therefore, the recommendation of this research is that faculty and institutions of education make conscious efforts to build coalitions with their student body. This can be accomplished--based on Kynard and Eddy's (2009) framework for building coalitions through color-conscious and responsible pedagogy--by more intentionally involving students in the planning, enactment, and revision of curriculum and pedagogy. More useful assessments, the establishment of mentorship, as well as diverse learning opportunities, and forums for ongoing criticality and critical conversations are ways to end the degradation of students in education dynamics and enact the agency of all students' sociocultural factors and social situations.

In sports, no one praises the coach for incredible play calling or a well-designed tactical offense without recognizing the student-athlete's equally essential role. Faculty are not meant to

be yet another oppressive advisory for students of color to navigate. It is time that faculty and students stand in partnership at the 50-yard line of a level playing field as members of the same team.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER TO FACULTY

Email Communication to Participants for Morris' Study _ IRB Approval
 "Meet Me at the 50":

A critical discourse analysis of how higher education curriculum is meeting the needs of Black, male student-athletes

1 June 2020

RE: Dissertation Research into Curriculum and Pedagogy in 100- and 200-level Courses

Good morning, Professor:

My name is Julia Morris and I am a doctoral candidate within the Darden College of Education & Professional Studies here at Old Dominion University. I am in the final stages of my degree, now completing my dissertation work in critical literacy focused on social justice. I hope this email finds you doing well amidst all of the changes we have experienced as an academic community!

As a professor of a 100- and/or 200-level course at Old Dominion University during the 2019-2020 academic school year, your participation is vital in a study that addresses the state and type of assignments being provisioned to undergraduate students. *I am asking if you would mind contributing to my research by volunteering any of your course assignments/assignment descriptions, course reading list, or course syllabuses.* In an effort to be as respectful of your time as possible, there are two options to share this information:

- (1) please feel free to reply to this email (or to email me at jdmorris@odu.edu) with any attachments;
- (2) or, the Qualtrics link provides a place for copy-and-pasted text(s).

Either option is/will remain *entirely* anonymous to this research (please see below for further details) and should take less than a minute of your valuable time. My study is a discourse analysis of course assignment descriptions, reading lists, syllabuses, project instructions, *et cetera*, and any/all contributions are so valuable and appreciated.

Your participation is--of course--entirely voluntary and anonymous and the information you share cannot nor will it ever be traced back to you. All course, subject, and instructor information will be removed. The study is a qualitative, critical discourse analysis of the type of assignments students engage with during their freshman and sophomore years in order to determine how they see their identities forming within and during these assignments. My data is the instructions for assignments (e.g. assignment descriptions) and is not tied to you or your course in any way. I am interested in how students interpret themselves as they interpret your assignments.

Thank you, very much, in advance for agreeing to participate in this research endeavor and facilitating this work that stands to understand, celebrate, and continue to support progressive pedagogy and curriculum that meets the needs of our extraordinary student population. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me (Julia Morris) via phone, at (704) 490-2068, or via email, at jdmorris@odu.edu.

APPENDIX B: STUDENT SURVEY

Demographic Questions:

1. Do you identify as Black?
2. Do you identify as male?
3. Are you currently a student-athlete?

Assignment Description 1:

“Thinking about your hometown, where you grew up, and your neighborhood/the street you grew up on: who are the leaders in your town? The mayor? Police officials? Are they teachers and principals? Church leaders? City council members? Is it a member of your family? Generate a list of 10 questions and interview this person about the type of leader they are, their goals for your city/neighborhood/area. Ask what change they hope to see and for whom. Then, write up your reaction to their answers. Do you agree or disagree with their type of leadership? Explain why. If you were in the same position, what would you do and what type of change would you pursue?”

1. Does this assignment allow you to use your own *background experiences* as part of the learning process?
2. Does this assignment help you make sense of your *personal identity*?
3. Does this assignment allow you to *acknowledge problems* in the world around you?
4. Does this assignment allow you to engage with your instructor as part of a *mentor/mentee relationship*?
5. Does this assignment help you solve any *problems you are/would be realistically dealing with* in the world around you?

Assignment Description 2:

“You will research the life of a scientist that looks like you. Consider your personal demographic: age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, student status, etc.. You should do research to find a scientist that is not a typical choice. Dig deep and pick an oddity to field! You will then create a Facebook page that includes the scientists: age, origin, education, job, contribution to the field of science. You should update the profile with pictures and captions and life events that are significant based on your research. All sources must be cited and included in an APA style reference page.”

1. Does this assignment allow you to use your own *background experiences* as part of the learning process?
2. Does this assignment help you make sense of your *personal identity*?
3. Does this assignment allow you to *acknowledge problems* in the world around you?
4. Does this assignment allow you to engage with your instructor as part of a *mentor/mentee relationship*?
5. Does this assignment help you solve any *problems you are/would be realistically dealing with* in the world around you?

VITA

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