REFRAMING DISCIPLINE: CASE STUDIES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS IN HIGH-POVERTY SETTINGS

By

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獻給我的母親，感謝您教導我如何成為一個堅毅、謙卑、又有勇氣的人，您給的愛無人能比。

For my mother, who taught me persistence, humility, and courage. I know no greater love than yours.

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Tanya, thank you for being my safe place to laugh and cry, and for shaping me to be the

woman I am today—I love you.

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BLACK

People described as "Black" are identified as Black Americans of African descent and any Black Americans who do not identify as being of African descent, as well as Black Americans who are of Caribbean or Hispanic descent (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). I use this term because students in the study are Black Americans of African descent or of Haitian descent.

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Given that this study is grounded in the constructivist research paradigm and focused on teachers' conceptions about challenging behavior, I will ask the participants to define what it means to them. Therefore, definitions may vary.

EFFECTIVE TEACHER

For the purposes of this study, an effective teacher is defined as one who has been nominated by the principal as obtaining repeated measures of high academic student performance, holding high expectations of students, and demonstrating successful approaches to working with student behavior. In conjunction with nominations, effective teachers have a low number of student office discipline referrals, suggesting that they are teachers who rarely refer students to the office for behavior issues.

HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOL

A school designated as high-poverty is one that receives federal Title I funding to provide students with additional materials and programs. At least 40% of students attending these schools come from low-income families. Low-income is defined by the receipt of free or reduced cost lunch (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html). For this study, a high-poverty school is one in which at least 70% of the students receive free or reduced cost lunch.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

School discipline "addresses schoolwide, classroom, and individual student needs through broad prevention, targeted intervention, and development of self-discipline" (Osher, et al., 2010, p. 48). School discipline is viewed by some education scholars as having two distinct goals: (1) to create and maintain a safe, conducive, and positive learning environment, which often requires schools to address challenging behavior; and (2) to teach and promote self-discipline (Bear, 2008).

URBAN

The word "urban" is a place-based characteristic whereby the essential characteristic is that the area is nonagricultural. Urban pertains to population density, space (land size), population density, and social and economic organization (Weeks, 2010).

WHITE

People identified as "White" are identified as Caucasian and non-Hispanic (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

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Research related to school discipline consistently reveals that students of color are vulnerable to differential and disproportionate rates of punitive school disciplinary sanctions. Studies highlight Black youth in particular, who experience more punitive disciplinary sanctions than any other racial group, ranging from office referrals to more severe punishments such as corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion. These sanctions are typical ways schools respond to challenging behavior, despite the fact that they contribute to lost instructional time, student disengagement, and dropping out of school. Furthermore, racial bias in school discipline is part of a broader discourse concerning institutional racism. Given the concerns related to school discipline, the purpose of the present study is to understand effective teachers' perspectives and practices related to student behavior that they believe violates classroom norms.

Guided by culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) and culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC) frameworks, this research was guided by one main question: How do effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging? Ethnographic research methods included interview and observation data with two effective teachers of Black students during two months of the

2012-2013 school year. Constructivist grounded theory methods were used to develop

in-depth case studies and models that centered on each teacher's sense making and

practice related to what they perceived to be challenging behavior.

Findings revealed that the teachers did not view students' behavior as challenging.

Their interactions with their Black students went beyond behavioral and academic

learning. The teachers held similar commitments to seeing their students become

successful in life and enacted their teaching stances through several principles of

practice. In addition, the teachers created conditions that enabled their Black students

to learn in a culture of success. The findings reveal models of teachers who act with

political clarity to facilitate the development of their students as self-determining and

resilient people. The study adds to the research literature regarding the perspectives

and practices of effective teachers who are committed to educating their students for

their lives in and out of school. In addition, implications for practitioners and researchers

are shared.

CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW

Statement of the Problem

In addition to stark racial disparities in school achievement, research has

consistently revealed that Black, Hispanic, and American Indian youth throughout

schools in the United States are vulnerable to differential and disproportionate rates of

punitive school disciplinary sanctions (Arcia, 2006; Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader &

Markson, 1994; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, &

Peterson, 2000; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). These studies

highlight Black students in particular, who experience more punitive disciplinary

sanctions than any other racial group, ranging from office referrals to more severe

punishments such as suspension and expulsion. Suspension and expulsion are

common disciplinary responses to challenging behavior, despite the fact that they

contribute to lost instructional time, student disengagement, and dropping out of school

(Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

A significant body of literature documents the disproportionate disciplinary

sanctions for Black students. Using public school enrollment data from across the U.S.,

the Children's Defense Fund (1975) first exposed the racial discipline gap, showing that

Black children were two to three times more likely to be suspended than their White

peers[1]. Another report highlighted similar gaps more than 35 years later, indicating that

although Black children make up 17% of the public school population, they represented

roughly 37% of children who were suspended and 38% of all students expelled

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[1] I use the terms "White" and "Black" deliberately, despite their problematic definitions. Refer to the "List of Terms" for these definitions.

(Children's Defense Fund, 2011). Since the organization's initial report, both large and small-scale studies have replicated these findings. For instance, KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provasnik (2007) used nationally representative data and found that about one in five Black students are suspended, compared with fewer than one in 10 White students. Black males, in particular, are at highest risk for overrepresentation in disciplinary sanctions (Gregory, 1995; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Taylor & Foster, 1986). According to a recent summary from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2012), Black students represented 18% of the students in the sample, but they accounted for 35% of students suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of those who were expelled. The literature on the overrepresentation of Black students in punitive school disciplinary sanctions is overwhelmingly consistent.

A smaller and less consistent research base shows disproportionate punitive discipline patterns for Hispanic and American Indian students. Parent surveys revealed that 20% of Hispanic students in grades seven through 12 had been suspended or expelled at least once, a higher rate than for White students (15%) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). In contrast, Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006) analyzed nine years of statewide suspension data and found that Hispanic students had similar to lower odds of being suspended compared with White students. An initial analysis of American Indian students concluded that they were less likely to be suspended than any other racial group except Asians. Their later analysis showed the opposite, as the student-to-suspension ratio for American Indian students was larger than for any racial group except for Black students. Given these

findings, scholarship related to school discipline is needed if schools are to build inclusive communities to close gaps in both discipline and achievement.

Although school discipline is widely viewed as synonymous with harsh and punitive practices, it can be thought of as having two distinct goals: (1) to create and maintain a safe, and positive environment conducive to learning, which often requires teachers and schools to address challenging behavior; and (2) to teach and promote self-discipline (Bear, 2008). The first goal is commonly viewed as immediate (to stop misbehavior or prevent misbehavior from occurring), whereas the second goal refers to the development of self-regulation and autonomy. The goals complement each other in that when schools work to address challenging behavior and promote self-discipline, they are likely to prevent future behavior issues.

Schoolwide approaches to maintain these goals vary. Some schools advocate a proactive approach that fosters self-discipline, teaches students how to successfully participate in the classroom community, and focuses on prevention, so that the need for reactive teacher remediation is less frequent (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). One such widespread approach is Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS), which are schoolwide systems that communicate and teach rules and expected student behaviors to create supportive learning environments (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2004). Social emotional learning (SEL) approaches are also proactive in nature as they emphasize self-regulation, social awareness, and responsible decision making, and they build student-teacher connectedness (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003; Osher et al., 2008). Proactive discipline approaches focus on the prevention of

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challenging behavior; emphasize positive strategies over punitive strategies; recognize the importance of academic and behavioral learning; establish positive relationships with students; and seek involvement from various education stakeholders (Osher et al., 2010).

Too often, schools respond to challenging behavior and school safety with reactive discipline approaches (Arcia, 2006; Osher et al., 2010). Reactive practices are punitive in nature, do not explicitly teach alternative behaviors, and are typically exclusionary (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Zero-tolerance policies are a prime example of reactive discipline practice. Initially designed for serious offenses, zero-tolerance policies have become normative in U.S. schools, resulting in harsh punishment for minor offenses (Skiba, 2000). In Pensacola, FL, for example, a zero-tolerance policy for weapons resulted in a high school girl's 10-day suspension for bringing a nail clipper with an attached nail file. Her principal commented, "Life goes on. You learn from your mistakes. We are recommending expulsion" (Skiba, 2000, p. 4). Critics of zero-tolerance policies argue that they create tunnel vision for teachers and administrators, convert schools into prison-like settings, and may actually discourage people from reporting criminal and illegal offenses for fear of losing relationships or retaliation. The same students are repeatedly punished for zero-tolerance violations, suggesting that the policies are ineffective deterrents (Suarez, 1992). While no evidence shows sustained effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies in reducing infractions, they continue to be prevalent in schools to the detriment of all students, especially Black students, who are most likely to suffer from their negative consequences (Skiba, 2000; Verdugo,

2002). These findings have led researchers to look more deeply into factors that contribute to the discipline gap.

Researchers have uncovered teacher stereotyping and differential treatment of students as explanations for racial disproportionality in discipline (e.g. Bowditch, 1993; Ferguson, 2000; Skiba, et al., 2000; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). In their large-scale study, Skiba and colleagues (2000) explored disciplinary records of more than 11,000 students in 19 middle schools and found that Black students were subject to a higher number of office referrals from their teachers, and they were referred for more subjectively defined behaviors such as "disrespect" and "excessive noise." Their findings also revealed that Black students were disciplined more severely than their White counterparts for less serious infractions. Ferguson's (2000) ethnographic study on school discipline in one elementary school revealed that teachers drew on stereotypes and fear, which fueled their interpretations of Black students' language and expressions as defiant or disruptive. When teachers who operate within dominant cultural norms single out children of color for violations of the dominant culture's implicit classroom codes (Ferguson, 2000; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), their expectations for behavior may influence whether students are selected for discipline in the first place.

Negative, implicit teacher beliefs, biases, and expectations may contribute to the over-sanctioning of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian children. Some research efforts have been made to understand how education stakeholders work to reduce the discipline gap. Freiberg and Lapointe (2006) examined 40 school-based programs aimed at reducing behavior problems in schools. Twenty-nine of the programs served

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low-income, urban[2] students of color and showed some evidence of success in ameliorating problems related to discipline and/or increasing students' skills for responsible decision making. Similarities across successful school programs included moving beyond punitive discipline to promote student learning and self-regulation, and caring relationships between teachers and students.

At the classroom level, studies affirm that teachers differ from one another in their ability to elicit cooperation and defuse behavior issues before they escalate, even with their most challenging students. Research has found that the combination of teacher structure and support leads to increases in achievement, particularly for students from high-poverty backgrounds (Gregory & Weinstein, 2004). In a later study, Gregory and Weinstein (2008) revealed that an authoritative teaching style, characterized by both care and high expectations, predicted student trust in teacher authority for persistently disciplined students. Chapter 2 delves further into this literature.

Research has also revealed that Black and Hispanic children view teacher-student relationships as the most important dimension of school climate (Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996). Moreover, we can infer from the aforementioned studies that teachers' views of student behavior, often guided by dominant White cultural norms, influence when, if, and how teachers take punitive disciplinary action. When teachers interpret student behaviors through dominant sociocultural norms, what is viewed as culturally normal to the student of color may be inappropriate to the White teacher (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). This

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[2] The term "urban" is troublesome because it is too often understood to be synonymous with Black and Latino people, and those living in poverty. Refer to the "List of Terms" for the definition used for the present study.

issue, in conjunction with the teacher's position of power can contribute to perceiving a student as a behavior problem. That is, what is perceived to be challenging behavior by the teacher is subject to interpretation, and is inextricably linked to teachers' perspectives about and responses to challenging behavior.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The overrepresentation of students of color in punitive school disciplinary actions has significant implications for academic performance. Perhaps one of the most consistent findings in quantitative research is a strong positive relationship between time spent engaged in academic learning and student achievement (Brophy, 1988a; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). The accumulation of missed instructional time from punitive disciplinary sanctions exacerbates a trajectory of academic failure and thwarts a caring learning community. An escalation of rule breaking ensues, where the same students are repeatedly disciplined. The cyclical nature of this phenomenon engenders negative trajectories in both social and academic development, as persistently disciplined students become less invested in school rules and disengaged from learning because they feel disconnected from the very institutions that are responsible for bolstering their academic and social success.

Research on the perspectives and practices of effective teachers related to school discipline will be informative for all education stakeholders attempting to reduce the discipline gap. Currently, a number of studies focus almost exclusively on school discipline at the secondary level (e.g. Arcia, 2006; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2009; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). As revealing as they are, these studies overlook a significant aspect of school discipline in that they do not examine the ways in which teachers respond to student behavior during the elementary grades. The identification

of a student as a behavior problem is "a process … that often traces back to children's earliest experiences at school" (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001, p. 763). Moreover, the dearth of literature on effective teachers' interactions with their Black students related to student discipline is alarming. Qualitative research on the topic too often emphasizes portraits of ineffective practice (e.g., Bowditch, 1993; Ferguson 2000; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Insights into effective teachers' practice will provide portraits of how teachers work to transform challenging behavior and create environments of success for their Black students.

Scholars have called for investigation of issues related to school discipline, using observational studies of classroom interactions and teacher interviews (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Although students of color experience overrepresentation in punitive school discipline, I focus the study on Black students for two reasons. One, Black children are sanctioned more frequently and severely than any other racial group. Two, they are a racial group that has historically been oppressed in the U.S, denied equitable opportunities in a society that claims it is a democracy. The purpose of the present study is to understand effective teachers' perspectives and practices related to student behavior that they believe violates classroom norms in one high-poverty elementary school[3]. Specifically, the study will use ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews and observations to answer the following research question: How do effective teachers think about and work to transform student behavior they view as challenging?

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[3] The term "high-poverty school" is commonly used in the literature to describe schools with students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. My use of the term is informed by the students' economic backgrounds. Cultural wealth and expertise are abundant in these schools. Refer to the "List of Terms" for an expansive definition.

Significance

This dissertation study is significant for several reasons. The research findings are clear that most disciplinary referrals originate in the classroom and the referrals are disproportionally given to Black students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings will add to the scant research on how effective teachers in urban schools view and work to transform challenging behavior in elementary classrooms. While the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all classroom settings, they may help confirm principles and practices emanating from proactive frameworks. This study has significance for teachers in particular, as they consistently cite discipline issues as a leading cause of stress and burnout (Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005). Both novice and veteran teachers recognize that the way teachers and schools address challenging behavior has important implications for the institution's views, expectations, and attitudes toward children and learning (Ayers, 2004). Examining effective teachers' perspectives about student behavior is important because they can help us understand how to narrow the discipline gap. Given that racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline is on the rise (Wallace et al., 2008), empirical research on effective teachers' perspectives about and approaches to challenging student behavior is timely and necessary.

Furthermore, racial bias in punitive school discipline is part of a broader discourse concerning the presence of institutional racism; that is, any system of institutionalized policies and practices that provide unearned advantages and disadvantages based on race (Tatum, 1997). Studies confirm that punitive school discipline increases high school dropout rates and delayed graduations (Bowditch, 1993; Hondo, Gardiner, & Sapien, 2008; Raffaele Mendez, 2003), and researchers argue that children of color are

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not dropping out of school. Rather, they are "pushed out" through the presence of a school-to-prison pipeline that criminalizes them—Black males in particular—and sets them up for incarceration (Ferguson 2000; Wald & Losen, 2006). Systemic inequities in the U.S. have manifested themselves in a variety of ways, for example, racial profiling and restrictive housing contracts for Black people. In schools, practices such as academic tracking, unequal funding, and the overrepresentation of Black children in punitive discipline contribute to the maintenance of structural racial inequality and social reproduction. While largely obscure to the public, the over-sanctioning of Black children in punitive discipline is fueling the school-to-prison pipeline by interpreting their behavior as inappropriate or deviant. Understanding how effective teachers think about and work to transform challenging behavior is necessary then to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. The study focuses on Black students because of the historical subjugation they have experienced in the U.S, which is significant for a nation that prides itself on democratic principles and equality for all. Yet, reports continue to document the large disparities in Black students' academic achievement, school dropout rate, and enrollment in higher education (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). This dissertation study aims to reveal how effective teachers view and work with challenging behavior to support Black students' positive experiences in school. These insights are likely to enable educators to approach challenging student behavior in more informed and intentional ways.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of this dissertation introduced an overview and significance of the problem. Chapter 2 synthesizes the relevant scholarly literature that situates the study. The methodology of the study is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In that chapter, the

research perspective, selection of the school and participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness of the data are further explained. Chapters 4 and 5 represent each teacher's case study, organized according to the themes that emerged from their data. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the study's findings and its implications for future practice and research.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to review literature related to how effective teachers think about and work to transform student behavior they view as challenging. Chapter 1 described research on teachers' views related to student behavior. Punitive and persistent disciplinary practices for marginalized students of color may engender feelings of distrust or lack of care. For Black children, who are punished more frequently and severely than any other racial group, this suggests that a particular kind of care from their teachers is needed. For these reasons, the literature review is situated within the conceptual frameworks of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) and culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC). The chapter begins with a synthesis of these frameworks and follows with a review of related empirical pieces. The review describes and critiques existing literature related to challenging student behavior and situates and establishes a need for the current study.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Situated in the seminal work of Emmer, Evertson, and Anderson, original classroom management literature consistently reveals the importance of clearly establishing rules for behavior (Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980; Evertson & Anderson, 1979), and consistent consequences (Emmer et al., 1980). Brophy (1988b) extended the definition of classroom management as being far more than controlling challenging behavior. Instead, he viewed it as a system aimed at increasing student engagement and learning:

> Good classroom management implies not only that the teacher has elicited
> the cooperation of students in minimizing misconduct and can intervene

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effectively when misconduct occurs, but also that worthwhile academic activities are occurring more or less continuously and that the classroom management system as a whole (which includes, but is not limited to the teacher's disciplinary interventions) is designed to maximize student engagement in those activities, not merely to minimize misconduct. (p.3)

Despite the research, classroom management continues to be cited as a major concern among all teachers, particularly novices (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Weiner 2003) and teachers in urban classrooms (Howard, 2003). Student discipline research continues to document the differential and disproportionate rates of punitive disciplinary practices for students of color (e.g. Arcia, 2006; Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Wallace et al., 2008), specifically in urban areas. It is clear that education stakeholders must look beyond the original classroom management literature for reducing the persistent discipline gap.

Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (2000, 2010), and others (e.g. Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) discuss effective teachers of non-White ethnically diverse students. In the literature, the terms "culturally relevant teaching" and "culturally responsive teaching" are often used interchangeably. However, culturally relevant teaching was coined to describe teaching that was respectful of and authentic for Black youth (Ladson-Billings, 1994) while culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) was defined more broadly for students of diverse cultures. Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally relevant teaching (CRT) for Black students as a pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 17-18).

CRT is premised on a deep valuing of, and respect for, students' knowledge and backgrounds, as well as a commitment to uplifting the Black community. CRT

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advocates a whole-child orientation; that is, teaching that cultivates academic, social, emotional, political, and ethical development for each child. The goal of teaching the whole child is to help the child live more consciously in the world. An aspect of the whole-child orientation includes the development of students' sociopolitical consciousness, empowering students to challenge the status quo that relegates certain groups to the margins of society while advantaging others (Ladson-Billings, 2002).

Building on the two frameworks, culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) brings culture and diversity to the forefront in creating classroom community. Culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) addresses "the need for teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and predispositions to teach children from diverse, racial, ethnic, language, and social class backgrounds" (Weinstein et al., 2003, p. 56). Weinstein and colleagues distinguished classroom management from student discipline, where the former focuses on ways of creating a caring, respectful environment that supports student learning, and the latter focuses on ways of responding to disruptive behavior.

The aim of CRCM is for teachers to create classroom environments in which students feel a sense of personal responsibility as they interact with others (Weinstein et al., 2004). Seeking to create classrooms where students are engaged and motivated to learn, their view of classroom management and student discipline is not restricted to students' behavioral needs—it encompasses the academic, social, and political wellbeing of students. I describe the CRCM framework in greater detail below and will address research based on the framework later in the chapter.

Components of CRCM

To practice CRCM, Weinstein et al. (2004) insisted that teachers develop the

following:

- recognition of one's own ethnocentrism and biases;

- knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds;

- understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context of our educational system;

- ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies; and

- commitment to building caring classroom communities. (p. 27)

In order to enact CRCM, Weinstein et al. (2003) also noted the significance of

establishing clear expectations for student behavior, building partnerships with families,

and communicating with students in culturally appropriate ways.

Recognition of One's Own Ethnocentrism and Biases

Recognizing one's own ethnocentrism and biases involves an assessment of

one's beliefs, assumptions, and values. Gay (2000, as cited in Weinstein et al., 2004)

warns:

> While most teachers are not blatant racists, many are probably cultural hegemonists. They expect all students to behave according to the school's cultural standards of normality. When students of color fail to comply, the teachers find them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation. (p. 56)

Gramsci's (1971) sociological theory of cultural hegemony is significant in the

discussion of ethnocentrism. Gramsci explained that domination of one social class can

manipulate societal culture to reflect the norms of that group. In this way, the beliefs,

perceptions, and values of the dominant class are imposed and perceived to be

"normal", universally accepted ideologies. Teachers who interpret student behavior

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using dominant hegemonic ideologies fail to recognize that behavior is culturally influenced, and they may punish students who do not follow dominant cultural norms (i.e., White and middle class). Understanding that definitions of "appropriate" behavior are socially constructed helps to shed light on teaching practices that marginalize some students while privileging others. An awareness of one's taken-for-granted assumptions and cultural biases exposes them to the surface, and enables teachers to understand the ideological influences that have shaped their classroom practices. Hinchey (1998) further argued that educators must be more than simply aware of tacit assumptions; they must engage in critical consciousness. That is, educators must participate in the mental habit of asking themselves what their assumptions are, how these assumptions guide their actions, and who wins and who loses based on the assumptions they endorse (Hinchey, 1998).

Knowledge of Students' Cultural Backgrounds

Teachers must also develop knowledge about students' cultural backgrounds in order to work effectively with students of color. Boykin's (1986) seminal work that compared African and European American cultures shows the vast difference between the two. Boykin characterized Black culture as rhythmic and highly charged in vernacular and feeling. It prioritizes harmony with nature, expressive movement, interconnectedness, affect, and oral communication. In contrast, Boykin described European American culture as characterized by a linear and often reserved style, mastery over nature, separateness, and print communication. In later work, Boykin and colleagues argued that Western European-based individualism and competitiveness are dominant ideologies undergirding U.S. classrooms (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005). This cultural disconnect, or mismatch is what Irvine (1990) called a lack of "cultural

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synchronization" in which the cultural backgrounds of urban students of color are inconsistent with the predominately Eurocentric, middle-class norms and values of U.S. schools and teachers.

Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2001) pointed to other pressing issues teachers face in urban schools. She noted that not only will teachers in urban classrooms encounter different races, but they will also teach students with a range of diversity including,

> students whose parents are incarcerated or drug-addicted, whose parents have never held a steady job, whose parents are themselves children (at least chronologically), and who are bounced from one foster home to the next. And there are children who have no homes or parents. (p. 14)

This also includes students who are learning more than one language and students with disabilities. The complexities that children bring with them to school certainly impact classroom learning and management. When teachers understand these myriad complexities, they can become better prepared to teach students in urban classrooms.

Teachers can develop knowledge of students as cultural beings by getting to know them on a personal level, visiting their homes and religious centers, and attending community events. Teachers who practice CRCM do not rely on a deficit discourse of students' home lives that sees deprivation in communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Instead, culturally responsive classroom managers recognize cultural wealth in these communities (Yosso, 2005). They unlock the cultural wealth in these communities by gaining awareness of student and family assets and viewing families as allies in ensuring student success. Teachers frequently communicate with families not only to bridge classroom expectations between school and home, but also to seek help so that children of color can thrive. They combat their own and others' deficit thinking, which

often assumes that communities of color do not value education and, therefore, are to blame for poor student performance (Weinstein et al., 2003).

Understanding the Broader Social, Economic, and Political Context

This component urges teachers to understand the ways in which schools and other institutions reflect the same inequitable practices that permeate the larger society. The common practice of tracking students is one way in which schools institutionalize inequitable practices. Tracking segregates students according into academic ability, which is troublesome because it typically allocates a majority of school resources to the students who already have the greatest academic and economic advantages. Ethnographer Jonathan Kozol is noted for his work in exposing the social, political, and economic inequities that plague the U.S.'s poorest children. He poignantly argued that children of low-income backgrounds have been robbed of "stimulation, cognitive excitement, and aesthetic provocation by municipal denial of those … treasures known to white and middle-class Americans for generations" (Kozol, 2000, p. 48). Day-to-day practices can also marginalize students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds. For example, teachers who insist that students look them in the eye may perceive disrespect in children from Asian backgrounds, who may avoid eye contact as a sign of respect. CRCM urges schools and teachers to reexamine their current views and practices within a larger sociopolitical context so that they do not reinforce institutional discrimination (Weinstein et al., 2004).

An essential part of understanding the broader social, political, and economic context is the acknowledgement of and access to what Delpit (1995) called "the culture of power." Five assertions compose the culture of power.

(1) Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.

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(2) There are established codes or rules for participation in a culture of power; that is, there is a "culture of power."

(3) The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of those who have power.

(4) If one is not a member of the culture of power, being explicitly told the rules of the culture of power makes acquiring power easier.

(5) Those with power are the least aware of, or least willing to acknowledge their power, and those who do not have it are least aware that a culture of power exists. (p. 24)

For many well-intentioned liberal educators,

the primary goal for education is for children to become autonomous, to develop fully who they are in the classroom setting without having arbitrary, outside standards forced upon them. This is a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture and power and who have already internalized its codes. (p. 28)

Delpit insisted that students of color be explicitly taught the rules and codes of power if they are to have equitable opportunities for success both within and outside the classroom walls. Milner (2006) argued that failing to teach the culture of power is irresponsible and likely to result in oppositional behavior. It is of critical importance then that students of color are granted access to the culture of power that governs how one attains success in society. This is not to suggest that students of color should only be instructed using skills-based strategies or that they should conform to society's dominant ideologies. Opposing the dichotomy between "skills" and "processes," Delpit (1995) argued that skillful teachers do not allow their students to be placed in such binaries. Instead, these teachers "help students to establish their own voices, and … coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society" (Delpit, 1995, p.46). Knowing that a culture of power exists, how it operates, and how it

can be attained provides students access to the culture of power with the goal of critiquing it.

Delpit's work informs the present study in that "appropriate behavior" is made up of codes that are socially constructed by those who are in power (i.e., teachers, administrators). Moreover, her discussion of the culture of power further supports the belief that students' diverse backgrounds *matter* and therefore students' behavior and teachers' management and discipline practices are not culturally neutral. Failure to understand implications of the broader social, economic, and political context may inadvertently contribute to social immobility and social reproduction (Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, 2004).

A Willingness to Use CRCM Strategies

The first three components of CRCM build a knowledge base that allows for critical reflection on the ways that classroom management and discipline promote or hinder equal access to learning. Viewing classroom management and discipline through a cultural lens enables teachers to create an environment that supports academic and social learning, establish and maintain behavioral expectations, increase student engagement, partner with families, and use appropriate strategies to assist students who demonstrate challenging behavior.

Weinstein et al. (2004) asked teachers to consider three challenges when working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. First, they urged educators to reflect on their own behavior. Teachers are pushed to ask themselves what might be uncomfortable questions such as, "Do I encourage some students more than others?" "What are my stereotypical judgments of my students' potential?"; "Do my reprimands convey threats?" Second, they asked educators to question traditional assumptions of

best practices in classroom management and discipline, as a one-size-fits-all approach disregards students' cultural backgrounds. Last, they contended that mutual accommodation is critical when teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 2000). When teachers mutually accommodate, they embrace and build on students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds but also provide students with tools to work within the culture of power.

With this in mind, a word of caution should be noted. Scholars whose work focuses on CRT or CRCM would deny that the task of the educator is to "save" children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They would also deny that the goal is assimilation into Whiteness. Rather, the goal of the culturally responsive classroom manager is to provide all students with equitable learning opportunities, and build a sense of personal and moral responsibility in their students.

Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities

The last component in developing a CRCM frame of mind is the teacher's ability to build a community where care undergirds the classroom environment. From the moment students enter the classroom, they are given multiple directives and asked to meet certain expectations from their teacher. Students make conscious decisions about whether to cooperate with or resist the teacher's directives. As such, a key factor in student cooperation or resistance depends on whether students perceive an ethos of care from their teacher. Caring teachers want the best for their students, and they build relationships that promote success.

Thompson (2004) reminded us that teachers who demonstrate culturally responsive caring:

help [students] develop thoughtful responses to both cultural difference and to racism….We cannot prepare children to make a better world if we cannot see *this* world for what it is….To truly see Black, White, and Brown relations in a raced and racist society—both as they are and as they might be—we must care enough to abandon our willed ignorance and political blindness. (p. 37)

A crucial component of culturally responsive caring is the ability for teachers and students to see society for what it is and to avoid adopting colorblindness. Caring-based education has academic, social, political, civic, moral, and transformative learning goals and behavioral dimensions (Gay, 2010). The following section expands on the last component of CRCM by taking a closer look at teacher care for Black children.

The CRCM framework described by Weinstein et al. (2004) emphasizes the importance of creating safe and affirming classroom communities. The five components of CRCM include a recognition of one's own ethnocentrism and biases; knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; an understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context; a willingness to use CRCM strategies; and a commitment to building caring classroom communities. Although their framework was constructed with culturally diverse students in mind, it is useful in thinking about how teachers interact with Black students.

Culturally Relevant Critical Teacher Care

Focusing on Black children, the research question that guides the present study is: How do effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging? Roberts' (2010) scholarship on teacher care for Black students also provided the backdrop for this study. Her phenomenological study of eight secondary Black teachers offers an expanded, culturally specific conception of teacher care for Black students.

Roberts proposed a theory of culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC), which acknowledges the prevalence of racism and hegemony that Black children experience in all aspects of life, including school. Guided by the intersection of care theory, critical race theory, and the pedagogy of Black teachers, CRCTC aims to disrupt the "mythology of a homogenous European American 'community of care'" (Roberts, 2009, p. 29). The next three sections discuss care theory, critical race theory, and Black teacher pedagogy in greater detail.

Care Theory

Understood from many perspectives, the definition of care holds various interpretations (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; 1992; 2002; 2006; Siddle Walker, 1993). Leading care theorist Carol Gilligan (1982) discussed that an ethic of care:

> contains the ideals of human relationship, the vision that the self and the other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (p. 63)

While Gilligan's research is concerned with a feminine perspective of care, philosopher Noddings (1984) extended Gilligan's understanding of care to the classroom and acknowledged that an ethic of care is relevant to both male and female caregivers. From Noddings' perspective, care involves engrossment; that is, thinking about someone in order to obtain a greater understanding of the person. Engrossment is a necessary element of care because the carer (the one caring) must understand the situation of the person who is cared for before the carer can determine appropriate actions. Engrossment points to the necessity of reciprocal relationships between the carer and the cared-for. Noddings' (1992) later work addressed the challenges of "knowing another's nature, needs, and desires when one party holds power over the

other or is a member of a group that has historically dominated another" (p. 3).

Furthermore, Noddings' (1992; 2002) work is significant because it highlighted how care

and caring interactions are not universal—what is perceived as teacher care and the

purposes of care differ among cultural groups. Connecting care to the classroom, she

acknowledged issues of cultural relevance and stated, "Two students in the same class

are roughly in the same situation, but they may need very different forms of care from

their teacher" (Noddings, 2002, p. 20). Noddings' scholarship highlights the need for

researchers to understand perspectives and practices related to effective, caring

teachers, and how such teachers work with children from various backgrounds.

Critical Race Theory

CRCTC is also informed by critical race theory, an academic discipline that

diverged from critical legal studies in an effort to directly address race and racism in the

U.S. At its essence, critical race theory acknowledges that,

> racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The
> individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive
> in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that critical race theory
> uses in examining existing power structures. Critical race theory identifies
> that these power structures are based on white privilege and white
> supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color.
> ("What is Critical Race Theory?," n.d.)

Legal studies scholars like Derrick Bell, Kimberly Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado have

developed the tenets of critical race theory. Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Tate,

Adrienne Dixson, and others have applied critical race theory specifically to education.

Critical race theory consists of three general tenets. Critical race theory begins

with the notion that racism is normal and deeply embedded in American life (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2012). It affirms that racism is permanent and

emphasizes the need to expose how the social order reproduces and reifies racism in

society. The second tenet of critical race theory uses storytelling and counternarratives to share oppositional accounts based on experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as "others" struggling to transform a world dominated by racial hegemony (Barnes, 1990). The intention is to provide a space for counternarratives that challenge the dominant discourse about race and power (Lopez, 2003). For example, Derrick Bell's (1992) book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* contains fantasy elements such as aliens in the chapter "The Space Traders." For many critical race scholars, the use of fantasy woven throughout stories sheds light on the power and consequences of racism. The third tenet argues for a critique of liberalism, as the liberal perspective tends to be satisfied with "a long, slow, but always upward pull" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1334) of social change. Critical race scholars are dissatisfied with such small, incremental movement. Instead, they argue that racism requires sweeping changes, which current liberal legal practices cannot facilitate (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical race theory in education uses social science scholarship from Black studies, Hispanic studies, Asian American studies, gender studies, and feminist studies to explore the myriad ways oppression continues to perpetuate deficit thinking about the capabilities of learners. Critical race theory addresses a "fixed-ness" of conceptual categories of Whiteness such as school achievement, intelligence, and beauty, whereas basketball players, gangs, and troublemakers become salient conceptual categories for Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). From this perspective, the classroom is not a neutral space—it is an environment where race plays a factor in the oppression of Black students. Thus, critical race theorists would argue that racism lies at the core of the discipline gap.

Black Teacher Pedagogy

Research on Black teachers pre- and post-Brown highlights Black teachers' experience of the injustices the Black community faced engendered concern for Black students' wellbeing (e.g., Case, 1997; Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji, & Wright, 2012; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2003; Ware, 2006). They were concerned with the whole child, not simply their academic development. This contributed to an emancipatory lens that guided the ways Black teachers interacted with their Black students. These teachers viewed themselves as othermothers for the students in their care and their practice was informed by political clarity.

The concept of othermothering derived from a West African philosophical orientation, which seeks community and cultural preservation through extended kinships (Collins, 1991; Hilliard, 1995; Nobles, 1985). Othermothering is guided by the teacher's communal bond and responsibility for nurturing the psychoeducational needs of Black children (Case, 1997; Collins, 1991; Foster, 1997). In this tradition, othermothers feel a sense of shared responsibility, and commit themselves to the social and emotional development of all children in a community (Collins, 1991). They highly value education and use their classrooms as sites for social activism (Collins, 1991). As othermothers, they take on roles as change agents who promote student empowerment and transformation (Schiele, 1994). The caring of othermothers goes far beyond interpersonal caring—it is political in purpose and in practice (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 2002).

Othermothers have been known to be guided by political clarity in their interactions with students. I draw on Bartolomé's (2009) definition of teacher political clarity, which first recognizes that teaching is not a politically neutral act. Politically clear teachers

understand that schools are socializing institutions that unjustly structure the successes

and failures of groups of students to reflect the greater society's culture, norms, and

values (Bartolomé, 2009). The unequal power relations at the societal level are then

reproduced in schools and classrooms, however teachers who practice political clarity

are committed to obstructing reproduction. Bartolomé (2009) points out that:

> teachers working toward political clarity understand that they can either
> maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural
> reality at the classroom and school level so that the culture at this micro-
> level does not reflect macro-level inequalities, such as asymmetrical power
> relations that relegate certain cultural groups to a subordinate status. (p.
> 342)

In practice, a teacher's political clarity may not be able to ameliorate the structural

inequalities that students experience outside the classroom; but teachers can help their

students cope with the oppression they endure outside the classroom (Bartolomé,

2009). Varied approaches for preparing students to prepare for inequality include

explicit discussions with students about their marginalized experiences, to implicit

approaches, such as creating learning environments grounded in democratic principles

where students are treated as capable. In other words, a teacher's political clarity

acknowledges oppression and inequality as students' lived experiences. Teachers who

have political clarity build a particular kind of environment to help foster their students'

resilience and sociopolitical consciousness.

The confluence of care theory, critical race theory, and Black teacher pedagogy, or

CRCTC, is enacted not only to ensure the educational success of Black students, but

also to uplift the Black community at large (Roberts, 2010). Black teachers' deep

involvement in students' lives within and outside classroom walls demonstrate their

commitment to the whole child. Central to their practice is a "it's my job" or "no excuses"

teaching approach—a stance that insists students can, will, and must succeed (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002) and it is their responsibility to ensure this goal is met. While Roberts' (2010) work highlighted Black teacher pedagogy in the CRCTC theoretical construct, it is important to note that this does not preclude non-Black teachers from caring for their Black students. Examples of White teachers, (Bergeron, 2008; Bondy et al., 2013; Cooper, 2003; Milner & Tenore, 2010) as well as teachers of other cultural backgrounds, (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994) have demonstrated cultural relevance and care. The point here is to highlight the role many Black teachers (and some non-Black teachers) have played and continue to play to uplift a community that has historically been characterized as "deficient" and "culturally deprived." These characterizations have continued to inform the dominant discourse that fallaciously assumes deficits in Black children.

To conclude, CRCTC is a framework informed by the intersection of care theory, critical race theory, and the pedagogy of Black teachers. The framework maintains that racism is ingrained in American society and that what is perceived as care is culturally situated. Systemic racism has led some to argue that Black children must be cared for in ways that are culturally specific. Roberts' (2010) framework is suitable for this study because it acknowledges race as playing a central role in student discipline.

Empirical Studies

Empirical research included in this review underwent a critical examination according to three criteria: (1) the work was related to student behavior, discipline, and classroom environments; (2) the studies included children of color; (3) the work had been vetted as a relevant contribution through publication in a peer-reviewed journal. This review is largely based on journal articles. However, other sources of information

such as books have also been included. Search descriptors included "culturally relevant care," "warm demanding," "student behavior," "discipline gap," "culturally responsive classroom management," "student discipline," and "student-teacher relationships." This literature search followed the steps outlined in Plano Clark and Creswell's (2010) guide for understanding and conducting literature reviews.

Deficit-Based Perspectives and Lowered Expectations

Richard Valencia (2010) is a leading scholar on deficit thinking, which refers to the idea that students, particularly low-income students and students of color, do poorly in school because they and their families experience deficiencies (e.g. limited intelligence, inadequate home socialization) that interfere with the learning process. This is a widespread ideology that assumes low-income students and students of color are incapable of performing well because of internal deficits. Deficit thinking blames the victim rather than examining the larger systemic inequities that pervade schools and teachers' perspectives about their students. A destructive force, deficit thinking can prevent positive educational experiences for historically oppressed students. The current section examines studies related to pervasive deficit thinking in schools.

Researchers have identified racial bias in teachers' perspectives and expectations about the capabilities of White and Black students. In a research synthesis of 35 studies focused on teacher expectations related to teacher and student race, Irvine (1990) found that White teachers' perspectives of Black children were less favorable than their perspectives of White children. White teachers, compared with Black teachers, communicated lower expectations of their Black students by providing less encouragement, less attention, less eye contact, less positive feedback, and more verbal and non-verbal criticism. Differential treatment not only impacted Black children's

achievement; it affected their behavior, self-worth, and degree of engagement. This is not to say that Black teachers are free of racial bias, but because Eurocentric, middle-class norms and values pervade U.S. schools, classroom and behavioral policies tend to reflect these culturally specific perspectives (Weinstein et al., 2003; Monroe, 2005a). Consequently, the behaviors of students who do not abide by mainstream norms are often misinterpreted, and therefore penalized by their teachers who make important decisions about discipline.

Although Irvine's seminal work was based on research conducted more than twenty years ago, issues of race and culture in schools continue to be the focus of researchers' agendas. Casteel's (1998) year-long study of 16 experienced White teachers in eight suburban Louisiana middle schools examined the acceptance and amount of feedback White and Black seventh-grade children received from them. Teacher nominations came from highly favorable principal evaluations. Based on student-teacher interactions in racially integrated classrooms, White students, males in particular, received the most favorable treatment. Conversely, Black students, again, males in particular, were viewed as least favorable by their teachers. Compared to their White classmates, Black students were asked fewer of the more demanding process questions, were provided with less scaffolding when answering a question incorrectly, were less frequently praised after providing the correct response, and were encouraged to ask fewer questions. Although Casteel's quantitative study was conducted in suburban middle schools, the findings are significant because they reveal teachers' implicit bias and negative stereotypes of their Black students, even when these teachers were regarded as highly favorable by their principals.

A similar study by Dee (2005) analyzed teachers' perspectives of student behavior and academic performance. As a primary data source, this study drew from The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), a nationally representative data set of approximately 24,000 eighth-grade students. Looking at negative teacher assessments, Dee focused specifically on the frequency with which a teacher perceived a student to be disruptive and inattentive. After disaggregation of the data, the study revealed that White teachers perceived Black and Hispanic students more unfavorably, with results more pronounced for children from low-income backgrounds. Because the NELS:88 data provide teacher and classroom information directly tied to individual students, Dee was able to examine how two racially different secondary teachers evaluated the same student, thus highlighting the subjective nature of misbehavior.

Bowditch's (1993) qualitative case study of one all-Black, urban high school's routine disciplinary practices added credence to the claim that misbehavior is subjectively defined. While not directly focused on teachers' perspectives, this study used observation and interview data to underscore the school's views, expectations, and attitudes about the children they served. Borrowing from labeling theory in criminology, which holds that those in positions of power define deviance at the institutional level, Bowditch asserted that schools determine what constitutes misbehavior and in turn labels students as "troublemakers." In this case, Bowditch found that the school encouraged disciplinarians to suspend, expel, and transfer students they perceived as troublemakers. In fact, after identifying why a student was sent to the office, disciplinarians asked a series of questions about grades, previous suspensions, attendance, and future plans for employment. A student's answers to these questions,

rather than the circumstances that led the student to the office, were of greater significance. In fact, about 35% of the suspensions for boys were for "repeated school violations," and that percentage increased to 63% when considering the percentage of suspensions for which a specific reason was not given. Only if the student's academic profile conflicted with the disciplinarian's expectations would the disciplinarian inquire further about the student's reported infraction.

Moreover, one of the disciplinarians in Bowditch's study explained that it was not the office's responsibility to solve student discipline problems. Rather, it was to maintain the status quo. When asked whether transferring students to another school helped, the disciplinarian stated, "They help this school. They don't help the kid. But, then, you can't do anything for those kids anyway" (p. 504). This case study illuminated the persistent trend that schools punish types of students (i.e., Black students) rather than types of infractions. Bowditch's work revealed the socially constructed nature of behavior as well as unequal power relations between school personnel and students that serve to routinely identify troublemakers through punitive disciplinary practice. Unfortunately, this process may be "one important but largely unacknowledged mechanism through which schools perpetuate the racial and class stratification of the larger society" (Bowditch, 1993, p. 506). Bowditch made an important contribution to the literature by investigating what happens to persistently disciplined students *after* their teacher has sent them to the office. However, if researchers are to understand the complexities of student behavior, it is necessary to examine the social constructions and actions of teachers, as they are the first to identify and respond to students.

Vavrus and Cole (2002) sought to fill this void in the literature by studying how disciplinary moments are initially constructed in two teachers' classrooms. Their longitudinal research in one urban high school used ethnographic data collection and discourse analysis approaches which drew from several sources. These sources included classroom observations, videotaped lessons, and interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and safety personnel. Their findings revealed that most suspensions occurred when students had violated ambiguous rules of classrooms that aimed to achieve student compliance. Suspensions typically transpired within a complex sequence of multiple non-violent events, one of which the teachers singled out as a "disruption." Vavrus and Cole contended that this singling-out process resulted in a disproportionate representation of Black students. These two high school teachers demonstrated the punitive moment-by-moment interactions between teachers and students in defining and punishing behaviors that the teachers considered disruptive or defiant.

In another study of large, urban high schools, Gregory and Mosely (2004) elicited teachers' implicit theories about the causes of behavior problems and specifically sought to understand how they considered race and culture as part of the issue. The authors sought to select participants who reflected the racial demographics of the teaching staff at the school. A total of 19 teachers—14 White, four Black, and one Hispanic—were interviewed once, with each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. Many of the teachers considered poor school organization and culture, the child, and the community as the main sources for behavior problems. While they held multifaceted understandings about factors that led to behavior problems, a majority of the teachers

did not mention issues of race, culture, or socioeconomic status as contributors to the visible discipline gap present at the high school. When teachers did mention race, many of them drew on a culture deficit theory, emphasizing the "problem" with Black students, families, and their communities. Viewing the Black community as culturally deprived disregards student and cultural assets, and fails to consider the school's and teacher's role in discipline. Most of the teachers reflected colorblind theories related to the discipline gap. In fact, only two of the nineteen teachers explicitly talked about cultural mismatch and teacher stereotyping as possible contributors to the discipline gap.

While this research makes a contribution to understanding teachers' views regarding the discipline gap, the research leaves much to be desired. Each teacher was only interviewed once, which limits the depth of teachers' perspectives about discipline. Furthermore, the description of data analysis refers to a "thematic analyses on the transcribed interviews to develop a coding scheme" (Gregory & Mosely, 2004, p. 21) but does not describe the analysis method or terms used in the coding scheme. Future studies could extend the literature that connects teachers' views of discipline to their practices within the classroom. For the two teachers who acknowledged cultural mismatch and teacher stereotyping, were they effective in enlisting cooperation from students who exhibit challenging behavior? Do their classroom environments and discipline practices differ from the other 17 teachers? If so, how?

Collectively, these studies suggest a "dysconscious racism" (King, 1991) deeply ingrained in the perspectives of some teachers that supports dominant norms of behavior and focuses on the deficits rather than the assets of their students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003). According to Blau (2003), "Race is powerful in

contemporary America in the phenomenological sense: the meanings people attach to race and racial differences pervade everyday life, shape social action, and are a dynamic component of interpersonal relations" (p. xiii). To be sure, the exposure of dysconscious racism through social science research is important, yet perhaps more crucial for the present study is to understand how effective teachers think about and work with students who exhibit what they perceive as challenging behavior.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Fortunately, some research reveals that negative teacher-student interactions may not occur across all classrooms with children from diverse backgrounds. Brown (2003) interviewed but did not directly observe urban teachers' use of CRCM strategies that helped them develop caring and cooperative learning environments. Choosing 13 teachers from seven urban U.S. cities, Brown interviewed them and found that they reported creating caring communities by showing a genuine interest in each student. Teachers were assertive and business-like, and explicitly stated their expectations for appropriate student behavior. They engaged in mutual respect with students, and used culturally congruent communication styles to connect with them. Cultivating a respectful relationship was a priority for these teachers; however, no observations were conducted to help educational stakeholders "see" these teachers in action.

In another qualitative study, Bondy et al. (2007) described strategies used by three effective novice teachers to establish CRCM. As teachers in predominantly Black, high-poverty schools, the researchers found that they communicated care by developing relationships during the first two hours on the first day of school. The three educators used a personal approach to teaching by showing photos and sharing stories about their lives. They built relationships deliberately and demonstrated care through getting-

to-know-you activities and games. Teachers set an important tone within minutes of meeting students through lessons about care, respect, success, and kindness.

Ullucci (2009) sought to understand what six successful, White elementary teachers did in urban settings related to CRCM. School administrators nominated the teachers who they believed best supported their students of color and who obtained high student test scores. Ullucci observed each teacher four to six times, with each visit lasting between 45 minutes and 2½ hours. Observations were guided by an observational protocol instrument and general field notes. Findings revealed that teachers established classroom norms that guided the learning environment. Teachers encouraged peers to talk with one another and solve issues that threatened the community. Rather than chastise students, they used humor to redirect students to the task at hand. While Ullucci's study makes an important contribution to the literature, a more holistic approach that employs multiple data sources is needed to triangulate the data (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), and provide deeper insight into the cultures of the teachers' classrooms.

A more recent study by Milner and Tenore (2010) examined CRCM in two urban male teachers' middle school science and math classrooms. The teachers were different from each other in that one was a novice and the other was in the middle of his career, and that one was Black and the other was White. Guided by the CRCM conceptual framework, the researchers sought to understand the complexities of teaching and learning, specifically in regard to how these teachers managed their classrooms, how they reached out to families, and how they provided learning opportunities for their students. The authors observed teachers for half a day once per

week, formally interviewed each teacher two to three times, and conducted informal interview questions. Milner and Tenore found that both teachers were effective culturally responsive classroom managers who worked to understand who the students were, their interests, and their lives outside of school. The teachers accomplished this in different ways. For example, one teacher asked the students about their various interests while the other teacher took an interest in basketball and connected with a student who also enjoyed basketball. The teachers built relationships with students by granting them access to their worlds, too. One of the teachers told personal stories about his family and revealed that he grew up living off of food stamps. The other teacher shared his wide range of music interests. Both teachers viewed their classrooms as a community of family members and allowed students to voice their perspectives about how their classrooms would be defined.

Perhaps the most significant finding was that both teachers were effective classroom managers, despite the fact that one teacher did not share his students' cultural background. At the outset, teachers who share the same cultural background as their students may have an advantage over teachers teaching across racial differences (Milner & Tenore, 2010). However, establishing culturally responsive student-teacher relationships can help White teachers and their students overcome racial barriers to support their learning.

Warm Demanding

Strong student-teacher relationships and an authoritative management style is part of the work of the warm demander. The term originated from Kleinfeld's (1975) study of effective teachers of Athabascan Indian and Eskimo children in Alaskan schools, and years later Irvine and Fraser (1988) elaborated on the construct to describe effective

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teachers of Black children. Irvine and Fraser described warm demanders as teachers who "provide a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured, and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society has psychologically and physically abandoned" (1988, p. 56). Warm demanders exhibit an "active demandingness" which is not a central characteristic defined in the dominant literature on effective teaching (Kleinfeld, 1975). However, the warm demander skillfully balances both care and authority to create a highly structured learning environment that supports a culture of achievement for Black students (Bondy & Ross, 2008). A growing literature base documents the actions of the warm demander.

Ware (2006) outlined the beliefs and practices of teachers characterized as warm demanders in her qualitative study of two effective Black teachers. The participants taught in dissimilar contexts—Ms. Willis was an elementary school teacher in the lowest socioeconomic community in the district with 30 years of teaching experience, and Mrs. Carter served for six years as a middle school teacher in a technology magnet school that ranged from low-income to middle-income Black students. Using semi-structured interview and observation data, her study characterized these teachers as warm demanders meaning their interactions reflected authority, caring, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

The teachers' no-nonsense approach typified their warm demander stance as they were quick to reprimand inappropriate behavior and "mean-talk" students when they were not meeting teachers' expectations. While this authoritative discipline style may seem harsh to the uninformed observer, teachers and students within the Black community perceive mean-talk to operate out of care and concern for students'

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wellbeing (Corbett et al., 2002; Monroe, 2005b; Ware, 2006). As Delpit explained in a 1996 lecture, "A lot of us get concerned because we hear Black teachers yelling at kids, but we are not listening to what they are saying … [They are really saying] you are too smart to give me work like this … you can do better. … I am expecting a lot of you." In other words, when one listens closely, their harshness is not intended to demean or control students. Instead, they communicate culturally relevant care for students through firmness and unrelenting insistence.

Demonstrations of teacher care are particularly important for Black children given the priority of person-to-person relationships and interpersonal intelligence within Black culture (Boykin, 1994; Nobles, 1985; Shade, 1994). The teachers in Ware's (2006) study exemplified the role of caregiver in that they viewed themselves as othermothers for their Black students. They held high expectations for their students, removed barriers to their success, and communicated care.

Insistence as a means to create a supportive psychological environment that facilitates student engagement is a key feature of the authoritative warm demander (Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2008). Ross et al. (2008) discussed the purposes, structure, and tone of insistence. Warm demanders "insist" because they wholeheartedly adopt the belief that children can, will, and must learn, and that it is their responsibility to teach them (Corbett et al., 2002). Their insistence is effective because they have developed personal relationships in which students understand that their teacher has their best interests in mind. In practice, warm demanders insist by repeating, reminding, and reinforcing their expectations.

Warm demanders instruct with authority and ground their teaching practices in a culture of mutual respect that they earn; that is, a teacher's authority is not assumed (Delpit, 1995). Because their classrooms are grounded in mutual respect, the tone of insistence is firm, yet warm; business-like, but caring. The authoritative warm demander is not to be confused with an authoritarian teacher, who imposes rigid restrictions in an attempt to control students, teaches them to be complacent rather than engaged, and is often feared. Being insistent means the classroom is guided by proactive strategies to teach expectations in conjunction with an abiding support for students to meet these expectations. In this way, genuine care and a refusal to give up on students is manifested through the warm demander's insistence.

Although some research portrays warm demanders as older, experienced, Black teachers, scholars have begun to examine warm demanding within the context of novice, non-Black teachers. Bondy et al. (2013) interviewed and videotaped two first-year White teachers who worked to become warm demanders for their Black students. The context of this study is interesting in that both teachers were graduates of an internship program that was designed to prepare prospective teachers to teach in high-poverty elementary schools. The findings highlighted a contrast between Alyson, a teacher who viewed warm demanding as a stance for teaching, and Dianna, a teacher who viewed it as a set of strategies for classroom management.

Even though both teachers talked about caring as critical for student-teacher relationships, Dianna spoke about caring in terms of her words and actions whereas Alyson talked extensively about caring as connectedness to her students and their families. That is, it was important to Alyson that students *perceive* her actions as care.

From Alyson's perspective, feelings of connectedness and the classroom as a family unit guided her interactions with students, her pedagogical decisions, and her unwavering commitment to their success. Alyson's enactment of warm demanding was grounded in her relationships with students that allowed her to firmly insist on appropriate behavior and respect for all in the classroom. In contrast, Dianna focused solely on her actions of care rather than how students perceived her care. She interpreted care from a Eurocentric perspective, one that did not consider her students' cultural constructions of care, which at times led her to struggle with connectedness and student cooperation. If teachers are to communicate abiding care for their students, this care must be recognized and felt by students.

A recent study by Ford and Sassi (2012) used ethnographic methods and discourse analysis to show how two veteran high school warm demanders, one White and one Black, built authoritative relationships with their students. Teacher selection differed in that one teacher volunteered for the study and the other teacher was referred through chain sampling, which identifies participants through referrals by knowledgeable sources (Patton, 2002). Irvine (2003) described the kind of familial relationships the Black teacher in Ford and Sassi's study had with her students: "The kids call me Mama. You know, I take ownership of these kids. I tell them on the first day to attach my last name to their last name" (Irvine, 2003, p. 11). On the other hand, the White teacher explained that this authoritative strategy as well as other strategies such as "going hard" on students, a term associated with how successful Black teachers instruct with authority, was ineffective in showing students her care for them. She revealed,

> They [Black colleagues] tell you when you first get here, 'You have to be
> grouchy. You can't be their friend.'… And it took me not very long to realize

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that as a White teacher, "going hard on them" … and being mean to them is to totally turn them away. Completely turn them away. … Like, 'Here's this White person who's gonna boss me around. *My mama* don't boss me around like you, let alone a *White* person do it.' (Ford & Sassi, 2012, p. 16)

Instead, the White teacher established her authority by communicating with students in culturally congruent ways. For example, she frequently employed Signifying in her discourse with students, a communication style that relies on wit and indirection to express one's thoughts (Smitherman, 1977). As part of the dominant racial group, she was transparent about institutionalized structures that hindered the success of her Black students. In a whole-group conversation regarding the bias of standardized tests, she challenged them to go against society's views that they would fail, insisting that they needed to be persistent about meeting her expectations.

The White teacher in Ford and Sassi's study (2012) pointed out that "going hard" to establish authority may be an effective strategy for warm demanders who share a similar cultural identification with their students, but for others who lack this cultural affiliation and knowledge of Black culture, these strategies may be inaccessible (Ford & Sassi, 2012). Doing so may be interpreted as an act of ownership, as highly offensive, and as communicating a lack of care. Developing one's authority can be achieved through various ways, and therefore a situated pedagogy that responds to the needs of children of color is necessary (Ford & Sassi, 2012; Irvine 2003). Warm demanding requires White teachers to rethink their own racial identities, transcend racial tensions that may linger given the presence of oppression and racism in society, and form cross-racial alliances with the Black community.

In summary, research reveals that warm demanding is a stance to teaching grounded in a social justice commitment to improve the lives of Black children (Bondy et

al., 2013). Warm demanders instruct with authority and demonstrate interpersonal

caring by which care is associated with creating an environment where "support and

encouragement are primary characteristics and where teachers and students interact in

personal, familial ways" (Siddle Walker, 1993, p. 65). At its essence, warm demanding

is characterized by an abiding care manifested through pedagogical decisions where

students' wellbeing is at the center of practice (Gay, 2010).

Closing the Discipline Gap

Few studies have focused specifically on teachers working to close the discipline

gap. Two seminal studies by Gregory and Weinstein (2008) revealed the complex

nature of student discipline in the high school classroom. Study One reviewed a mid-

sized city's urban high school discipline data to identify whether student referrals for

defiance were the most common reason for suspensions among Black students. Their

findings revealed that 67% of student referrals (n=1207) were classified under "defiance

of adult authority," and Black students were, in fact, the primary contributor to this

category. They made up 30% of the total school population yet represented 58% of

students referred for defiance. On the other hand, Whites made up 37% of school

enrollment, but only represented 5% of those referred for defiant behavior. Thus, the

proportion of referrals issued for defiance proved to be significantly higher for Black

students than White students and led to Gregory and Weinstein's second study.

Their second study explored cooperative and defiant behavior in teachers'

classrooms. A subsample of Black students (n=30) was chosen from the first study.

Then, these students each identified two teachers. For all students, the teacher who last

sent the student to the office for the most recent defiance-related referral (referring

teacher) was asked to participate. In addition, students each nominated one teacher

with whom they got along with well (nominated teacher). Both teachers and students completed surveys that measured several variables, including teacher caring, teacher expectations, defiant and cooperative behavior, trust in teacher authority, and student perceptions of referring teachers and nominated teachers. Surveys pointed to the salience of students' perspectives of teachers as being caring and communicating high academic expectations and the connection with student trust in teacher authority. Results showed that students' defiant and cooperative behavior differed between nominated and referring teachers' classrooms, a difference reported by both the teachers and students. That is, students were more cooperative in nominated teachers' classrooms and they attended nominated teachers' classes more often, which totaled to more than an additional week of classes compared with referring teachers. Findings suggested that students' perceptions of care in conjunction with high expectations from their teacher predicted student trust in teacher authority and cooperation. A limitation in these studies is that their findings relied solely on survey and student referral data. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) did not observe student behavior and teacher-student interactions, and because of this we know little about how relational trust is established with Black children who consistently receive behavior referrals. We also know little about classroom processes or how teachers work with students to transform defiant behavior into cooperation.

A qualitative case study by Monroe (2009) expanded the literature on teachers working to close the discipline gap in a Title I urban middle school located in the southern part of the U.S. The school enrolled more than 700 students with an Black population of 58%, followed by 37% of its students who were White. Teacher

nomination was sought for four math or science teachers based on the principal's perception of the teachers' ability to promote strong outcomes for student learning and for their familiarity with students' cultural backgrounds. Three female teachers and one male teacher were selected to participate in two interviews and ten one-hour observations. Monroe revealed that teachers had learning-based perceptions of student behavior. That is, teachers relied on their judgments about students' learning to determine whether students were being disruptive. When misbehavior arose, teachers drew on their subject-area expertise and from prior experiences from their teacher preparation programs to redirect such moments into pedagogical opportunities. Doing so enabled the teachers to continue a lesson without struggling to get students back on track. The CRCM framework described by Weinstein et al. (2004) captured many components of the four middle school teachers' perceptions and experiences in Monroe's (2009) study.

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore how effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging. Research about the discipline gap tells us that Black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in punitive school discipline, calling attention to Black children in particular, who endure more punitive disciplinary sanctions than any other racial group.

The chapter elaborated on the two conceptual frameworks that inform the present study—culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) and culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC). The CRCM framework views classroom management and student discipline as broader than behavior modification for children with challenging behavior. CRCM works to cultivate classrooms characterized by high

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student engagement and care, where culture is the lens through which the teacher views her management practices. CRCM affirms that teachers must be equipped with five components to teach children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Extending CRCM, the CRCTC framework proposes a particular kind of care for Black students because of the subjugation they have endured for years. CRCTC is an important framework that informs the current study because of the marginalization the Black community continues to bear, which includes their overrepresentation in school discipline.

In the second half of the literature review, empirical research related to student behavior was reviewed and synthesized, and led to two conclusions. First, children of color, especially those living in poverty, continue to learn (or not learn) in school environments where teachers do not genuinely believe they can succeed. They are part of an education system that interprets their attempts to voice their views as defiance, providing pathways to prison instead of opportunity. As an attempt to reform these students, many educators advocate a prescribed curriculum, office referrals, and a school uniform. Accused of defiance, Black children are often found sitting in the office because their teachers have removed them from the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2013), in a talk on what educators get wrong about children in poverty, poignantly noted that children *are* motivated, "it's just that they're not motivated to do the silliness [the teacher] wants them to do."

Second, the connection between the work of effective teachers and the diverse children they teach is being established, and the direction for future research is hopeful. Studies suggest the importance of establishing a community guided by components of CRCM (e.g. Bondy et al., 2007; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Monroe, 2009) and caring for

Black children in ways that communicate political clarity and a concern for students' futures (Roberts, 2010). Nevertheless, additional studies that explore effective teachers, culturally responsive practitioners, and teachers of color are sorely needed to understand the racial dimension of student discipline.

Milner (2013) recently posed the salient question: Why are students of color (still) punished more severely and frequently than White students? The present study seeks to go beyond the question of why they are punished more severely and more often to understand what effective teachers do to create caring and respectful learning environments for their Black students. The current study extends the literature that relies on teachers' self-reported practices (e.g., Brown, 2003) and research that uses observations as the only source of data (e.g., Ullucci, 2009). Few studies seek to understand how effective teachers think about discipline, how and why they respond to behavior in particular ways, and what influences their decisions. Understanding how teachers conceptualize student behavior and how they translate their theoretical frameworks into curricular and pedagogical decisions is crucial. Thus, a study that understands the culture and inner workings of effective teachers' classrooms can increase the knowledge base on how they work to narrow the discipline gap. This study focuses on Black children and seeks to take an in-depth, ethnographic approach to how teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study is informed by a constructivist perspective. At its essence, qualitative research aims to study the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers "seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them … [by gaining] access to the multiple perspectives of the participants" (Glesne, 2006, pp. 4-5). The research question that guides the study is: How do effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging? This question guided the research methodology and methods for this study. This section describes methodological decisions for this study and consists of the following sections: (1) Research Perspective, (2) Research Setting, (3) Site Selection, (4) Participant Selection, (5) Data Collection, and (6) Data Analysis.

Research Perspective

The epistemological stance that undergirded this study is constructivism, which holds that truth is not discovered but constructed as people engage with the multiple realities of the world (Crotty, 1998). The constructivist paradigm argues these realities are unique because they are constructed by people who experience the world from different viewpoints (Hatch, 2002). The construction of knowledge is a dynamic, active process in which sense making draws on the individual's understandings and experiences. A constructivist epistemological stance holds that researchers and their participants mutually engage in the process of knowledge construction. From this perspective, no single interpretation exists; thus, meaning cannot be described as

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objective or absolute. *Constructivism* is not to be confused with *constructionism.* According to Crotty, constructivism focuses exclusively on the meaning-making of the individual mind whereas constructionism is concerned with "the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning" (1998, p. 58). Because this study is interested in the individual teachers' unique sense making and less concerned about the ways culture has shaped a group of teachers' sense making, constructivism best aligns with the goal of the present study.

The constructivist research paradigm guided additional methodological decisions for the study. I assumed a philosophical stance rooted in Max Weber's work (as cited in Crotty, 1998) on interpretivism. Interpretivism is epistemologically distinct from positivism, as it is concerned with *Verstehen* (understanding) human and social reality. For Weber, all knowledge of cultural reality considers knowledge from particular points of view. Interpretivism is focused on culturally derived and historically situated constructed meanings of the world (Crotty, 1998). The interpretivist approach to inquiry suits this study because it provides a foundation for understanding effective teachers' perspectives and practices related to student behavior in the classroom.

In order to understand individual teachers' perspectives and practices related to student behavior that they believe violates classroom norms, the researcher must closely investigate the teachers' sense making and social contexts in which these perspectives are constructed and subsequently enacted. Teacher-student and student-student interactions, and teachers' experiences outside of the classroom are fruitful settings to explore. Thus, the ways in which teachers view and work to transform challenging student behavior can be understood by exploring the teachers' sense

making related to student discipline. From this view, the researcher attempts to co-construct with the participants their perspective (Denzin, 1974). I examined the perspectives and practices of two teachers through the use of qualitative methods aligned with the constructivist paradigm.

Research Setting

Decisions about research settings are driven by several factors. Most importantly, the setting should provide rich data that will answer the research question (Hatch, 2002). Specifically, this study took place in one elementary school in Miami-Dade County, FL, the fourth-largest school district in the United States (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012). Interestingly, about one-third of the 20 largest school districts in the U.S. are in Florida. County demographics reveal that Black students compose 25% of total school enrollment, yet half of them have experienced at least one out-of-school suspension. Hispanic students make up 65% of total enrollment in MDCPS and 46% have received at least one out-of-school suspension. These data indicate that both racial groups experience overrepresentation in out-of-school suspensions, where Black students are subjected to significantly higher disproportionality. These statistics designate MDCPS as a fruitful setting to study effective teachers' perspectives and practices related to challenging student behavior.

Site Selection

One school was selected according to four criteria: (a) a low-income elementary school as defined by Title I status; (b) at least 70% of the student population receives free or reduced-price lunch; (c) at least 30% of the student population is Black; and (d) racial disproportionality in disciplinary practice exists. These criteria were purposefully chosen to represent the diverse population in Miami-Dade County. A 30% Black student

population reflects a slightly higher percentage than the current Black student school enrollment in MDCPS and was chosen to ensure that the teachers' classrooms reflected a percentage of Black children congruent with the average Black student enrollment for the entire county. The final criterion reflects the presence of a discipline gap in the school.

The study took place at Treitman Shores Elementary (pseudonym), a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school. The principal granted access after IRB approval from the university and the MDCPS Research Review Committee. The school is housed in an older building on a fairly busy street, a mile away from the local high school. The school's mission states that "the staff, students, parents, and community partners of Treitman Shores Elementary School will work together to enable children to become caring, competent, well informed citizens empowered to successfully meet the changes of tomorrow" (School's parent/student handbook, 2012, p. 1). The school day begins at 8:35 A.M. and ends at 3:05 P.M. for students in second through fifth grade. Students in Pre-K, Kindergarten, and first grade have a shorter school day, arriving at 8:20 A.M. and leaving at 1:50 P.M. On Wednesdays, all students in the school are dismissed at 1:50 P.M. The official uniform is navy-blue pants, shorts, or skirts with light-blue or white shirts. Students are required to come to school with the proper uniform and are expected to maintain personal cleanliness. Students are also allowed to bring cellular phones, however they may not disrupt the educational process. A before- and after-school care program is provided for families at an additional cost.

A section of the parent/student handbook specifically addresses school discipline. Treitman Shores's discipline theme is, "We expect the best from those who walk our

halls" and "repeated disruptions and non-compliance…will result in detention, suspension, and/or expulsion of a student for an indicated number of days" (School's parent/student handbook, 2012, p. 7-8). The handbook highlights zero-tolerance for school-related violent crime and notes that the school strives to ensure that students are able to develop their potential for learning, and to interact positively with peers in a safe environment, without disruptions. The discipline section further details the code of student conduct and includes specific rules for the classroom, cafeteria, and hallways. Explicit rules are outlined for detention procedures. As an example, "talking, working, or eating during the detention period is not allowed. Water and/or bathroom breaks are not permitted during the detention….This is a punishment, not a social time" (p. 10).

In the past, elementary schools in MDCPS could give students in-school and out-of-school suspension, but have recently done away with in-school suspension in an attempt to reduce the number of suspensions in the county. Suspending students was once done quite readily. However now, elementary schools must receive approval from the district to authorize an out-of-school suspension. The following quote from the assistant principal illustrates the pressures received by the district to reduce suspensions: "We need to try and keep them here as much as possible and short of them killing one another they can almost tear the school down and we can't suspend them now." The discipline at Treitman Shores is haphazard at best, with no schoolwide system for improving behavior outcomes for students. Some teachers send students to the office on a weekly basis, and some never at all. During the two months of this study, I noticed the same students sitting in a small back room in the office because their teachers had kicked them out of the classroom.

Students who attend the school are from the neighborhood community and reflect diverse racial backgrounds. The demographic profile published by the U.S. Department of Education 2009-10 Civil Rights Data Collection shows that school enrollment is approximately 820 and is comprised of 51% Hispanic, 38% Black, 8% White, and 3% Asian. Treitman Shores is a Title I school and approximately 85% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch. Twenty-three percent of students at the school are designated as Limited English Proficient, meaning that they are learning to read, write, and speak English through the school's English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) program[1]. A total of 51 out-of-school suspensions were reported from the first day of school to when the referral report was requested (August 20, 2012-October 31, 2012). Twenty-nine percent of students suspended were Hispanic and 61% were Black; males made up 66% of students suspended. Given that 38% of Treitman Shores's students are Black and 61% of those students have experienced an out-of-school suspension, it was evident that a racial discipline gap was present.

Participant Selection

Participant selection was based on a homogenous sample; that is, identifying participants who share common experiences or characteristics with the goal of understanding the subgroup in depth (Hatch, 2002). As this study explores a particular kind of teacher, all teachers were identified as effective in working with student behavior. In this context, an effective teacher is defined as one who has been nominated as obtaining repeated measures of high academic student performance,

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[1] The ESOL program is composed of five levels that denote a student's level of English proficiency. Levels I, II, III, IV, or V categorize a student's understanding of the English language, use of grammatical structure, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading ability. Level I is considered novice, typically assigned to children who have recently immigrated to the United States and speak little to no English. The goal is for students to reach fluency at level V.

holding high expectations of students, and demonstrating successful approaches to working with student behavior. Nominations of effective teachers were sought by the elementary school's principal. The principal was chosen to nominate effective teachers because he has spent time observing and working with teachers at Treitman Shores.

Required and preferred criteria guide the selection of teachers. In conjunction with the principal's nominations, I asked the principal to provide a list of teachers with the lowest number of office referrals in the school, which helped to determine the teachers who rarely refer students to the office for behavior issues. Teaching in a general education, diverse classroom was an additional requirement for selection. Diverse in this context means that the students in the classroom represent various racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers in departmentalized teaching arrangements and teachers in similar grade levels were given preference, as a kindergarten context is dissimilar from a fifth-grade context. The behavior support personnel, who is the assistant principal, was contacted to participate in one interview, as described in the methods section.

The two teachers, Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl, and the assistant principal, Dr. Zeek, were asked to sign an informed consent form that explains the purpose and procedures of the study. The informed consent indicated that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I provided a copy of the informed consent and a description of the study to both teachers and the assistant principal. In Chapters 4 and 5, I begin with detailed descriptions of each teacher that I gathered during the two months I spent with both teachers. For more detailed information about the initial interview, refer to the "Interviews" section below.

Mrs. Geller

Mrs. Geller is a fifth-grade reading, language arts, and social studies teacher. Her day is split up into two segments of instruction, with lunch dividing her morning and afternoon class. Her morning class, which is also her homeroom class, is composed of general education students. The afternoon class has some general education students but contains mostly special education students. A special education teacher assists Mrs. Geller with working with the special education students every afternoon. Treitman Shores is the only school Mrs. Geller has ever worked in, and prior to her fifth-grade assignment she taught first grade for four years. She has a witty sense of humor with a hint of sarcasm. When her principal asked her to move from first to fifth grade, she eagerly accepted the opportunity to work with older students. This is her ninth year of teaching, and she is currently working on a doctoral degree in education.

Mrs. Pearl

Similar to Mrs. Geller, Mrs. Pearl's day is split into two segments of instruction, and the two teachers share the same lunchtime. Their rooms are next door to each other, and it is not uncommon to see them exchanging lesson ideas in the hallway since they are both reading, language arts, and social studies teachers. Mrs. Pearl's morning class consists of fifth-grade ESOL students, whereas her afternoon class is made up of general education students. Her ESOL students are from several different countries, including Bolivia, Peru, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Haiti, and the students vary significantly in terms of their English-speaking ability. Mrs. Pearl has been an educator for nineteen years in predominately Hispanic settings and has also worked at the district level before deciding to come back to the classroom.

Data Collection

A variety of data collection methods were used to investigate each teacher's perspectives and practices related to student behavior. The classroom provides an ideal environment where the researcher can "understand from the participants' point of view what motivated the participants to do what the researcher has observed them doing and what these acts meant at the time" (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 8). In order to understand each teacher's perspectives and practices holistically, data collection methods were composed of interviews, observations, field notes, and archival data.

Interviews

When interviews are conducted in conjunction with observation, they provide an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on what was observed by the researcher (Hatch, 2002). Interviews provide a way to capture "the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something" (Glesne, 2006, p. 105). To understand teachers' perspectives and practices related to student behavior, I conducted four formal interviews and multiple informal interviews with each teacher. This study employed intensive interviewing in which the researcher listens, observes with sensitivity, and encourages the participants to elaborate on their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). What may be glossed over in a typical conversation was an opportunity to probe deeper. Interviews took place at the teacher's convenience and at the school, in the teacher's classroom.

The first formal interview was conducted before any observations. The purpose for this initial interview was twofold. One, I asked teachers general questions about their personal and professional background. Two, the initial interview was designed for the

participants to get to know me. Far too often, the researcher enters a site wanting to learn about the participants, yet there is no disclosure about the life of the researcher (Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2003). I shared with them my background, situating myself within the research. Spending time to develop and build rapport with participants is essential for building trust and furthers researcher reflexivity. The first rapport building interviews were the longest, lasting approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

Following the first formal interview, I conducted two additional formal, semi-structured interviews with each teacher. Following the theme of what Hatch (2002) called a "flexible structure," I led the interview with a few guiding questions yet remained open to following the leads of my participants, probing areas that arose during our discussions. These interviews elicited teachers' thinking about student behavior based on the research question and my ongoing review of the data. Interviews began with questions related to specific classroom observations and teacher's comments, and moved toward more general questions about student behavior. I was responsive to the teacher's comments; therefore, the interviews went in the direction that the teacher took them, and they drew on the teachers' unique professional experiences and their teaching. On average, each of the three interviews lasted 62 minutes.

After providing participants with emergent findings and impressions, a fourth member checking "interview" asked participants to think about how their perspectives and practices, related to student behavior, have been represented. I use the quotations deliberately because the interview took place through an exchange of emails. The purpose of this final formal interview is to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study by asking each teacher to verify, clarify, or add to the ways they think about student

behavior. Participants were aware that all interviews were "on the record," and they had the opportunity to ask for certain information to be "off the record" if they wished. All formal interviews, except the final member checking interview were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Appendix A details the length as well as number of transcribed pages for each interview.

Informal interviews are unstructured conversations that provide opportunities for the participant to elaborate further on what the researcher has observed (Hatch, 2002). Drawing from "here and now constructions" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91), these interviews "take advantage of the immediate context to give informants the chance to reflect on what they have said, done, or seen" (pp. 92-93). The informal interviews occurred directly after observations to get immediate feedback, interpretation, and clarification about observations on that particular day. For example, a new student arrived to Mrs. Pearl's class, I asked her why she placed him next to a particular student. Further clarification allowed me to understand the connections between what teachers said during their interviews and what they did when working with student behavior. This required me to listen deeply so that I could create relevant questions on the spot, engaging in a reflective conversation with the teacher about what I observed. I jotted down notes and key phrases in my field notes immediately after our conversation for that particular observation. In instances where I wanted to ask an informal interview question, but the teacher was unable to talk with me, I was respectful of her time and did not ask the question. During the two months of observations, I asked Mrs. Geller 10 informal interview questions and asked Mrs. Pearl nine.

In addition to the teachers, I interviewed the assistant principal, Dr. Zeek, who served as the school's behavior support personnel. Interviewing her allowed me to understand schoolwide and districtwide policies and practices related to student behavior. Although she is in his first year at Treitman Shores Elementary, she began her employment in MDCPS as a custodian and has been an assistant principal at three other schools in the district. While the teachers in the study are the focus of this dissertation, Dr. Zeek provided contextual information about the school's culture. The interview lasted about 50 minutes and was audio recorded. Refer to interview protocols in Appendix B.

Observations

This study focuses on classroom life as student-teacher interactions and the learning environment are two factors that can be shaped by individual teachers. Ethnographic observations were another of data. The goal of observation is to examine the culture, setting, or phenomenon under study from the perspectives of the participants. In other words, my intent as the researcher was to look through the lens of the teachers to acquire knowledge related to how they think about and work with student behavior. This was accomplished through direct, frequent observation (Spradley, 1980) in the classroom, which allowed me to find patterns in the teachers' behavior and prompted me to ask specific questions in the interviews about their practice. To understand the teachers' experiences at school, I conducted context observations (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000) and attended other school-related activities outside the classroom. For example, I followed the teachers and students to the library, cafeteria, assemblies, and to PE class. I wanted to know what life was like for the teachers and students, not only within the walls of the classroom but throughout

their many transitions. Although observation raises the concern that participants will act in ways they think the researcher wants to see, repeated visits for several hours at a time served to minimize this possibility. Through prolonged engagement, I was able to gain access to their natural behavior.

When studying classroom phenomena, researchers begin with a broad focus and then narrow the focus as observations continue (Hatch, 2002). Spradley (1980) describes these first explorations into research settings as "grand tour observations" (p. 77), an initial approach that pays attention to the major features of the social context rather than the specifics. During the grand tour, I observed dimensions such as explicit understandings of classroom culture, routines and expectations, rules, transitions, affect, use of language, and the physical arrangement of the classroom. These dimensions helped to develop initial impressions and directed me to specific teacher-student and student-student interactions related to student behavior. For the first three weeks of data collection, I conducted nine half-day observations in each teacher's classroom. During weeks Four through Six, I continued with half-day observations twice a week. During weeks Seven and Eight, I observed each teacher for a half-day once a week. Teachers were observed both in mornings and afternoons to enable me to understand how classroom contexts may shift. In total, I observed each teacher 14 times for approximately 2 to 2½ hours each visit. Refer to the observation schedule in Appendix A for a breakdown of the two-month observations.

My prolonged engagement in these classrooms enabled me to fully capture how each teacher works with students' behavior. As the study continued, observations became more focused, leading me to ask interview questions that followed up on the

decisions specific to each teacher's practices. These practices included, but were not limited to, how the students interacted with the teacher and one other, how the teacher communicated academic and behavioral expectations, and how the teacher worked with student behavior. In addition, I frequently referred back to the research question to ensure that my observations did not stray from the purpose of the study.

Identifying the researcher's level of involvement is a key issue in qualitative observations. I assumed a non-participant observer role, as it was my goal to capture naturally occurring activity without impacting the classroom environment. Wolcott (1999) describes non-participant observers as "researchers who make no effort to hide what they are doing or deny their presence, but neither are they fully able to avail themselves … to take a more active or interactive role" (p. 48). Spradley (1980) suggests that a researcher's role fits within a continuum, identifying passive, moderate, and active levels of researcher participation. For this study, I assumed a passive level of participation meaning that I was physically present in the classroom, but did not participate or interact to any great extent. While the presence of any person other than the teacher and his or her students makes the classroom unnatural to some degree, my goal as the researcher was to be "invisible," observing unobtrusively during teacher-student interactions. I accomplished this by sitting silently in the background while recording field notes as indicated below, only speaking to the teacher if spoken to first. For example, when Mrs. Geller polled the students about whether they thought her unborn child would be a boy or a girl, she also asked for my vote, and I responded. When students asked for my help, I politely directed them to a classmate or their teacher, depending on the kind of request.

Field Notes

Raw field notes were taken with a laptop during each observation in order to record descriptions of contexts, actions, and initial impressions in a fast-paced environment (Hatch, 2002). Since my goal was to portray an accurate account of what was occurring in each classroom, raw field notes included "key words, names, and apt phrases to prompt the memory later" (Woods, 1986, p. 44). This was especially important for the study because I honed in on how the teacher thought about and worked with students' behavior in the moment. For example, if the teacher repeatedly admonished a particular student, it would be important for me to know the student's name so that I could refer to the student in a subsequent interview.

As mentioned earlier, field notes focused on each classroom context. A firm grounding in the teachers' contextual realities then framed my approach for later observations. For example, toward the end of the study I spent more time in Mrs. Geller's afternoon class because there were two students in particular who she discussed at length. During each observation, a two-column format for notes was used. The left, and wider, column contained descriptions of the classroom contexts, the actions of the teacher and students, and the teacher-student and student-student interactions. While it was impossible to record everything, these descriptions "[made] a careful record" of what was attended to in order to provide "as careful a representation as possible of the action[s] observed in the research setting" (Hatch, 2002, p. 78). The right column included initial impressions and interpretations of what was observed, keeping observations and research assumptions separate. For example, when I observed a child sitting away from the rest of the group, I noted this in the right column of my notes as a reminder to ask Mrs. Pearl about it later.

Since the classroom is a rapidly changing social environment, there was limited time to type full comments. However, directly after each observation, raw field notes were fleshed out with additional notes to complete classroom descriptions and interactions. Field notes were then used to guide conversations about specific events during the interviews.

Archival Data

Background data were sought to describe the research setting. I obtained archival data sources related to student behavior by asking key informants, such as the guidance counselor and the secretary at the school. Informants were asked questions such as, "Where could I look to find student suspension data for this school?" and "Where may I obtain a copy of the school's parent/discipline handbook?" These data helped me understand the school's policies regarding what constitutes appropriate behavior as well as disciplinary consequences for breaking school rules. The archival data were not primary sources for analysis; rather, they contributed to a fuller description of the setting and helped me formulate questions for the participating teachers. Archival data, then, served to contextualize the research study.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

</div>

As appropriate for a qualitative study with constructivist epistemological underpinnings, I analyzed the data using basic grounded theory guidelines to produce cases of each teacher. Grounded theory emerged from the work of sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), who aimed to systematically construct abstract theoretical explanations of social processes. The application of grounded theory as described in this study uses flexible practices and guidelines of more recent methodologists who have adapted the method, moving away from the positivist grounded theory of Glaser

and Strauss and toward a constructivist approach (e.g. Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2006; Thornberg, 2012; Williamson, Carnahan, & Jacobs, 2012). Rather than view the researcher as an authoritative expert, constructivist grounded theory "places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130).

Social construction-focused research fits within the constructivist grounded theory methodology because both underscore the importance of shared experiences of the researcher and participants as a means to understand student behavior. I approached this study from the perspective that there are many interpretations of the world, constructed by the participants' explicit and implicit meanings, perspectives, and experiences of reality. Viewing the world through their eyes brought fresh insights and allowed me to understand the beliefs that guided their actions. My role as the researcher was to co-construct these realities—not discover one reality, as one reality does not exist.

Initial Coding

Initial coding is important because it is the first step for moving beyond concrete statements to understanding what is happening in the data. Charmaz (2006) suggests three ways for grounded theorists to begin initial coding: word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-to-incident. I began the initial coding process by analyzing interviews and observations separately. First, I read through all interviews first to determine initial codes. Then, I read through all the field notes to identify additional initial codes. As constructivism is interested in participants' sense making, I read all interviews first, and

followed with field notes to find evidence where the observations would support the teachers' perspectives.

I began line-by-line coding of the first interview transcript, naming each line of my written data. I soon realized that this method was problematic because it rigidly fragmented my data in such a way that the teachers' words lost meaning. Instead of capturing the sense making of the teachers, their words became isolated and incomplete. This led me to code the transcripts and field notes in larger chunks, coding by meaning unit for transcripts and incident-by-incident for field notes. Seeing the totality of these units better enabled me to recognize emerging patterns in the data. Careful initial coding of meaning units using the participants' own words as much as possible deterred me from imposing personal motives or agendas on the data. I coded meaning units as actions whenever possible to refrain from making conceptual leaps before doing a complete analysis of the data. Using an example from Mrs. Pearl's second interview, she revealed, "it's also that I have a lot of kids, parents that are immigrants, parents that may not have a high school education, so it's not only for me to empower my kids, but my kids also empower their parents." Her words prompted me to use the initial code "empowering students to empower their parents," staying close to her words. Dedoose, a cross-platform Web-based application for analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, helped to keep the initial codes, totaling to 492, and excerpts of interview and observation data organized.

Initial coding guided decisions about future core conceptual categories from which I constructed the analysis. I used constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine analytic distinctions throughout the analysis process. To start, I

compared data to find general similarities and differences, but as I delved deeper to

form conceptual categories, I compared interviews, compared earlier observations with

later observations, and compared interviews with observations. For example, I

compared the daily routines that the teachers used to maintain the classroom

environment across all field notes. Once the most significant initial codes were

established as determined by reoccurring patterns in the data, I began the second

phase of analysis— focused coding.

Focused Coding

Focused coding is the process of taking initial codes to separate, sort, and

synthesize larger amounts of data. Focused coding allowed me to make decisions

about which initial codes might be consolidated to form broader conceptual categories.

As an example, the initial codes "uses terms of endearment," "engages in personal

conversations," "fixes students' special chair," and "hugs student," indicated ways that

Mrs. Geller communicated care for her students. These initial codes were subsumed

under the larger focused code: "ways she demonstrates care." Appendix C provides a

visual example of the analysis process. Again, I used constant comparative methods to

refine the relationships in the data, "continually question[ing] gaps in the data—

omissions and inconsistencies, and incomplete understandings" (Moustakas, 1994, p.

5).

Memo Writing and Conceptualizing Larger Categories

As focused codes emerged, I began memo writing, the pivotal step between data

collection and writing initial drafts of cases. Memo writing is crucial in grounded theory

because it prompts the researcher to analyze codes, define their properties and

characteristics, and raise them to a conceptual level for further analysis (Charmaz,

2006). This allowed me to actively engage with the data, develop ideas, and refine previous thoughts. For example, when Mrs. Geller consistently referred to "student learning" as her goal for students, I returned to the data to define her meaning of the term with the following two questions in mind: What does student learning mean to her? What is she trying to accomplish? As I continued to refine conceptual categories, I compared categories to make analytical distinctions. I posed the questions: What do these categories mean and how are they distinct? How are her practices different from the conditions in which learning occurs? Through this recursive, analytic process and with the help of the chair of my committee, I was able to better understand what the teachers were thinking and doing, and grapple with what it meant.

Conventions of the Language

This qualitative study used ethnographic methods to answer the research question. To be consistent in my report of the findings, a few words about language are provided here.

Data are presented in the past tense when they describe a particular event that happened in the past (e.g., Mrs. Pearl asked Jonathan to pass out his classmates' reading notebooks). By using the past tense, the findings are communicated as statements of what was observed or recorded instead of assuming an eternal truth to what is perpetually situated in context (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

When I refer to the teachers' abiding beliefs, the past tense is also used (e.g., Mrs. Geller believed in her students' abilities to achieve excellence). While the assumption is that their beliefs continue beyond this study, I chose to remain consistent in the tense usage.

Participants' words are represented verbatim and can be identified by text followed by codes, as described below, or quotation marks. In addition, emails from the participants follow APA guidelines for personal communication.

- Teacher code: Mrs. Geller (G), Mrs. Pearl (P)
- Data source: observation (o), interview (i)
- Date of data collection: month/day (1015=October 15)
- Lines within interview transcript: lines from the transcript page (ln14-16)
- Pages within field notes: page number from the field note (p4)

As an example, the code P-o1030ln76-78 should be interpreted as Mrs. Pearl, observation, October 30, lines 76 through 78.

Role of the Researcher

My recent reading of scholar Kevin Kumashiro's work informs the lens that I bring to my work. Kumashiro's book *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice,* argues that unspoken assumptions about "good" teaching often regarded as "common sense," actually reify oppressive practices in U.S. schools. Kumashiro (2009) asserts that,

> What [we] have come to be defined as good teaching in the United States are approaches to teaching that reinforce certain ways of thinking, of identifying, and of relating to others, including ways that comply with different forms of oppression (including racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, colonialism, and other 'isms'). (p. xxxii)

While commonsense ideas about good teaching permeate national education discourse, research suggests that there are *official* perspectives of what and how schools should teach and these perspectives typically reflect the beliefs and values of dominant views in society, particularly those in privileged positions or with political power. As I conceptualized and conducted this study, I strove to work toward anti-oppressive research, acknowledging that research (and anything for that matter) is

partial and never neutral. To claim its neutrality only serves to oppress those who do not possess the same assumptions and expectations. The anti-oppressive researcher, then, must validate multiple ways of knowing and continue to trouble the conclusions once a research project is over. From my perspective, teaching and research are not composed of one set of best practices, because I believe that the nature of teaching and learning is multifaceted, complex, and highly contextual. My commitment to anti-oppressive research has prompted me to continually ask myself: How do my tacit assumptions and beliefs about "good teaching" influence the way I perceive my participants' views and practices related to student behavior? By keeping this question in mind, I sought to understand and honor the different views and approaches for responding to challenging student behavior.

My own experiences have undoubtedly shaped the way I think about teaching and learning in urban schools. I am a graduate of a teacher preparation program in the U.S. and have taught for three years in urban settings. For two of those years, I worked in a culturally and racially diverse elementary school in south Florida, and for one year I taught English to K-8 students in an urban city in Japan. I hold a master's degree in curriculum and teaching and have completed coursework towards a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in curriculum, teaching, and teacher education. Although I have never taught in a Title I school, my experiences as an elementary school teacher in south Florida, provide me with a context from which I can relate to my participants' experiences.

In addition, my work as a doctoral student is grounded in teaching, and learning to teach, in high-poverty settings. I spent three semesters teaching a graduate course for

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preservice teachers that addressed teaching and learning in diverse schools. For two semesters, I worked as an intern supervisor in which I observed and coached preservice teachers in the development of pedagogical skills to meet the diverse needs of their students. I have taken coursework such as Critical Pedagogy, Teacher Learning and Socialization in High-Poverty Schools, and Issues in Teacher Education, which all focused on teachers' and students' experiences in high-poverty settings.

My previous research projects highlight my longstanding history and commitment to exploring classroom processes in high-poverty schools. As an undergraduate University Scholar, I worked with a research team that examined the classroom management practices of effective beginning teachers in two high-poverty schools on the first day of school. I also helped to design an online course called Critical Pedagogy, which was taken by full-time practicing educators working on a doctorate in education. Not surprisingly, my interest in historically oppressed groups has strongly guided my research trajectory, thus providing the foundation for the current study.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Rather than the words "validity" and "reliability" frequently used in quantitative reports, qualitative inquiry seeks to ensure that empirical knowledge is trustworthy. The goal of trustworthiness is to support the argument that the study's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). This study addresses three areas of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, and transferability. Credibility is an evaluation of whether the study's findings present a "credible" interpretation of the data. Closely related, dependability is an assessment of the quality of all the integrated pieces of the research design and how these pieces are implemented. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings in a study can apply beyond the scope of the project.

Practices such as triangulation, member checking, thick descriptions, expert audit

reviews, and researcher reflexivity will minimize threats to trustworthiness. An absence

of these practices may lead to research-respondent mistrust, distortion of the data due

to researcher assumptions, or misinterpretation of participants' data (Manning, 1997).

To establish trustworthiness, it is not enough to simply mention these terms in

qualitative research reports (McWilliam, 2000). Therefore, I explain how these practices

were used to enhance authenticity of the research.

I triangulated the data to ensure that conclusions were drawn from multiple

sources. Cross-examining the interviews, observations and field notes, and referring to

archival data, provided a more detailed and integrated picture of the findings. Member

checking occurred throughout the research process; I frequently checked my

descriptions and interpretations of the data with the teachers during the interviews. Also,

I sent each teacher an email attachment of her case and conducted a member checking

interview as described above. I did not receive a response from Mrs. Pearl, but this may

be because I sent the case after the school year ended. It is possible that Mrs. Pearl

does not check her school email during summer break. On the other hand, Mrs. Geller

confirmed that I accurately described her commitments and practices regarding her

work. In her member checking interview, she said:

> It was really quite fun to relive those moments with the kids (a few made me lol[2]), and it was really interesting to see how I am perceived as a teacher. I must say that it made me feel proud of the work I do…. You summarized succinctly (specifically in your visual representation) how I see myself as an educator and what I generally find to be the most important elements of my work as an educator. It was really different (and exciting) to see that laid out in this fashion. In my opinion it was a great depiction of what I value in

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[2] Lol is an acronym for "laugh out loud" in Internet slang. It is commonly used in computer-mediated communication.

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education and my classroom. Thank you! Oh, and thanks for the nice physical description in the beginning! (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013)

Mrs. Geller attached a picture of her newborn baby to her responses in our member checking interview, an indication of the rapport I worked to establish with my participants. Through this in-depth examination of two effective teachers, I aimed to intimately situate the reader by developing thick descriptions of each teacher's beliefs and practices related to the research question.

In addition, I relied on expert audit reviews to bolster the study's credibility and rigor. The members of my doctoral committee, all experienced researchers, assessed the quality and rigor of the research methods and analysis before, during, and after the study's completion. The committee provided guidance in selecting qualitative design approaches that aligned with the study's research question and purpose. As the chapters were constructed, committee members provided feedback to ensure that the findings were supported by the data collected. I frequently met with, emailed, and held phone conversations with the chair of my committee as I continued to work on this research project.

To address transferability, all interview protocols and a code representation are included in the appendices to enable other researchers to repeat or build on this work. Finally, I employed researcher reflexivity by continually reflecting on my beliefs and assumptions about the research topic. Reflexivity began with a written researcher subjectivity statement and continued with a researcher journal that included identification of subjectivities as they emerged. For example, in my observations with Mrs. Pearl, I observed what I perceived as yelling. To me, this is not an effective way to interact with students because it does not communicate care. I took note of this

assumption in my researcher journal and when I asked Mrs. Pearl about her "yelling" in an interview, she clarified that she was not yelling at students. Rather, she was teaching with energy and one of the ways she accomplished this was by projecting her voice loudly. In addition, instead of relying on my own perceptions of yelling, I began to look at how the students perceived her "yelling." It became clear that even though her voice was loud, students eagerly raised their hands to participate.

Study Limitations

A key limitation lies in the fact that the research study does not directly address the impact of the teachers' practices on student achievement. Impact studies on teacher learning and teacher practice are important because of the role they can play in affecting educational policy (Desimone, Smith, & Frisvold, 2007). Nevertheless, we get considerable insight into effective teachers' perspectives and practices when we understand the sense they make of students' behavior and how they work to create environments of success for students, particularly for students of color.

A second limitation stems from how nominators understood my definition of an "effective" teacher. In this study, I defined an "effective" teacher as obtaining repeated measures of high academic student performance, holding high expectations of students, and demonstrating successful approaches to working with student behavior. It is possible that education stakeholders did not understand my definition of effective in the same way. To ensure that our definitions were as consistent as possible, I asked the principal for the specific evidence he drew from when he nominated particular teachers as well as a list of teachers with low referral rates. Before beginning the study, I met with the principal for about 45 minutes to discuss nominations he had in mind.

A third limitation is related to power dynamics inherent in the researcher-participant relationship. It is important that education researchers are aware that they are historically positioned to have a higher social status than those they study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). The unequal power between the researcher and the participant may contribute to the Hawthorne Effect, a phenomenon in which participants in behavioral studies change their performance because they are being observed. To mitigate this effect, my goal was to remain open to negotiating power and not overstep boundaries with my participants. I was flexible with the teachers' schedules and approached them with informal interview questions only when they had time to speak with me. The teachers were available to participate in the semi-structured interviews on particular days and times and I was sensitive to these needs.

CHAPTER 4
MRS. GELLER: THE LIFE COACH

Introduction

The present study sought to understand how two teachers, nominated as particularly effective with student behavior, think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging. This question emerged from my concern about the discipline gap and from work I have done in high-poverty schools specifically. The literature related to the discipline gap led me to the supposition that effective teachers view certain behaviors as challenging. However, Mrs. Geller's story reveals an assumption in the research question. In fact, Mrs. Geller did not view student behavior as challenging. Instead, she assumed that students needed to develop many skills to prepare them for their lives in and out of school, and it was her responsibility to help them develop those skills. Despite my attempt to elicit her thoughts directly related to student behavior (for example: Whose behavior are you concerned about? What concerns you?), Mrs. Geller redirected the interview in order to talk more broadly about all of the skills she intended to teach her students. She had a whole-child orientation, which is typical of effective teachers of Black students; that is, she was concerned about students' safety, physical and emotional wellbeing, and character, as well as their academic development. This is the story of a teacher who believed it was her job to improve students' lives, which included working with them to strengthen the knowledge, skills, dispositions she believed they would need to determine their own futures.

It is important to note here that neither teacher talked specifically about how they worked with or cared for their Black students. Given their teaching histories, it is possible that discussing Black students in particular never emerged in the teachers'

interviews because their frame of reference was historically oppressed students. That is, Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl did not talk specifically about Black students because they had only ever taught Black students and other students of color. Nevertheless, their cases reveal the ways in which they enacted critical care for their Black students.

The chapter provides an expansive and detailed account of Mrs. Geller's sense making and practice related to her teaching, including her approach to behavior. I begin the chapter with a description of Mrs. Geller, followed by background information about her students. Then, I provide a model of how I understand her work. I describe Mrs. Geller's teaching stance, which influenced the way she approached her teaching. Then, I articulate core principles of her practice and conditions she enacted that supported students' learning.

Who is Mrs. Geller?

Mrs. Geller was sending her students outside to PE on the October day when I walked into her classroom at Treitman Shores. Her hair was short and dark brown with carefully streaked blond side-swept bangs. She had bright blue eyes and a slim, athletic build. She greeted me with a hug and kiss on the cheek, a social norm in the Hispanic community and her way of welcoming me to her classroom. I could sense within minutes of meeting Mrs. Geller that she had an extroverted and friendly personality. We had been in contact via email a few weeks prior to our first meeting to discuss her participation in the study, and on this day I visited her classroom to complete the first rapport-building interview. We sat in a small back room that was connected to her classroom so that she could supervise the several students who were finishing a computer program before running off to PE. We got to know each other quickly, and I felt an intimate connection with her because we had a lot in common: we were of similar

age, both from the Miami area, both liked working out and the beach, and both were completing our doctorates in education. During our first interaction, I felt as if I had known her for quite some time.

Born to a Cuban American mother and a "as White as White goes" (G-i1025ln14-15) father, she was raised in Miami with five siblings, three sisters and two brothers. She is the youngest of the six and remembers growing up Catholic and going to church every Sunday as a child. Her Cuban grandmother was a large part of her life and would pick up all the siblings from school every day. Because her grandmother did not speak English, Mrs. Geller acted as the translator so that her grandmother could have conversations with her teachers after school. Since her childhood years, Mrs. Geller's Spanish speaking skills have diminished; she can understand conversations in Spanish and will speak it if she is in a situation that demands it, but she does not describe herself as fluent. She shared with me that her childhood upbringing was quite busy as "everybody played sports or did activities, so when I was young we were always constantly going and doing" (G-i1025ln107-108). Respect was a significant part of her childhood upbringing:

> There was no raising your voice or talking back. I wasn't silenced in my house as a child or as an adolescent. There was a time when I could respond or I could talk, but there was a level of respect just from somebody that's wiser, somebody that has more knowledge or somebody that's your elder. (G-i1114ln115-120)

After she graduated high school, she attended a four-year college in Florida on a volleyball scholarship. She played the sport most of her life. Her career sights were set on becoming an on-air journalist, and after she completed a bachelor's degree in media studies and journalism she landed an internship at a local television station in Miami. She did not complete the unpaid internship, which left her financially unstable. She

needed a source of income quickly, so when a friend nudged her to interview for a teaching position at Treitman Shores, she went to the interview and was hired immediately. Without a background in education, she began her teaching career mid-year in a first-grade, ESOL Level I classroom. She continued to teach first grade for the next four years before her principal assigned her to fifth grade. In discussing her transition to an older group of students she explained,

> I was ready for a richer dialogue, if you will [laughter], and just the way I interact with kids, it's not that I'm not good with the younger kids but I think I'm better with the older kids. There's a level of sarcasm in a fun way, and humor that I like to use in my classroom that is totally over the heads of the younger ones. (G-i1025ln70-75)

Mrs. Geller was comfortable and confident teaching fifth grade, and as I observed her interactions with students, I began to understand the kind of humor that characterized her personality and allowed her to connect with students.

Mrs. Geller was a married 30-year-old when we first met and had recently found out that she was pregnant. Already a mother to a one-year-old boy, she lives in a middle-class, suburban, family-oriented community about 40 minutes away from the school. She was not showing in late October when this study began, but by the end of December, she certainly had a waddle to her walk. As I spent more time with her, we developed what I believed to be a more personal relationship—we learned that we share a passion for hot yoga (it's uncommon to find someone who enjoys 90 minutes in a 105-degree room!) and became even closer when we talked about our journey through graduate studies. She and her husband travel whenever they can and try to stay active by running, going to the beach or the pool, or playing tennis. While they enjoy staying active, graduate school has certainly limited her free time.

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In 2006, Mrs. Geller began a master's degree in curriculum and instruction as she

knew there was more for her to learn about her teaching. In her first interview she

revealed,

> I just wanted more direction. At that point I felt good with what I was doing
> but … the foundation was limited, obviously, because I didn't come in with a
> lot of information, so I just wanted to be able to expand my knowledge base
> in what I was doing and different options and avenues on how to reach the
> kids that I was teaching. I knew what was working in my class but I knew
> that there was probably a million other ways to do it that I hadn't even been
> exposed to yet. (G-i1025ln154-161)

The continued desire to grow professionally also influenced her decision to pursue an

Ed.D. in a professional practice doctoral program in which she is entering her third

year[1]:

> Again, I think I was just kind of thirsty for more. … I want to move beyond
> the classroom in regard with affecting student learning, and so again, I need
> to know more; I need to feel more secure in my knowledge of the practice
> and as a professional, and I want a broader perspective. (G-i1025ln168-
> 175)

Being part of a professional practice doctoral program gave her the opportunity to learn

and work with other practicing educators including school administrators and teachers,

which helped her to understand issues related to education from different perspectives.

She shared that the doctoral program's mission itself helped her see teaching in a

different light. She maintained that the program strove to:

> bring to light, or bring a voice to this sense of individuals, these
> marginalized, underprivileged individuals that you know tend to get
> silenced, and this idea of bringing their voices to the forefront and creating
> visibility for these students. … There's been [an] umbrella of this woven
> throughout the program. (G-i1025ln215-222)

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[1] A professional practice doctorate is designed specifically for practicing educators. Students generate knowledge through the systematic study of problems of practice in their particular contexts. Both the professional practice doctorate and the Ph.D. confer the title "Dr.," but the Ph.D. prepares students for careers as scholars and academics, while the Ed.D. prepares them to become practitioner scholars who solve problems of practice.

Some of the courses in the program placed an emphasis on teaching for social justice. Mrs. Geller found these courses to be useful as they helped her think about teaching with an equity-oriented focus. That is, the courses reinforced her practice as she interacted with her students.

One assignment she described as "enlightening" was an inquiry project in which she explored the perspectives of six of her Black and Hispanic students who lived in extreme poverty. Using interviews and questionnaires, she learned about the complex challenges they faced on a daily basis. The inquiry urged her to hear their voices and rethink her role as their teacher. She was deliberate in her explanation that inquiry is not simply a project or assignment but that it must become a habit of mind: "I make it a part of my practice; it's not a study that I was doing for those two months; it's something that I try to incorporate all the time" (G-i1025ln258-260). Whereas inquiry in teacher education programs is often viewed as a time- and place-bound project, Mrs. Geller conveyed that inquiry informed all facets of her professional work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

In the early years of Mrs. Geller's teaching, she held radically different views about working with students. In fact, she was a self-proclaimed dictator who described how she managed her students:

> When I first started teaching…the kids were totally on task, quiet. I'm speaking, you're not. That's the way it goes. Collaborative groups? Them working in a center? That would drive me insane …. I was very much a dictator, very much in control of everyone's behavior just by silencing them. It was like straight line, hands to your side, facing forward … and every other teacher would send their misbehaved children to my class like I was a dictator. (G-i1213ln227-242)

Her description characterized a classroom that she believed once felt more like prison and less like a learning community. In fact, she said that students once feared her.

Mrs. Geller's graduate studies engendered her shift from a dictator who silenced students to a teacher who enacted critical care. In discussing the connection between her own awareness of students' opportunities or lack thereof and her role in possibly preventing them from success, she revealed:

> I mean, was I aware? Was there a sense of awareness? Yes, I'm teaching high-poverty students and a lot of these students are in a position where they don't have opportunities that others have or they're looked at [by other teachers] like, 'We can never teach these students. We can never reach these students,' or they're compared to students that obviously have privileges that they have never been privy to. Yes, I have that awareness, from working with them day in and day out. But, was I able to recognize things that *I* might have been doing to contribute to that? No … it took me stopping and going, 'Whoa, hold on, there are things that I might have been doing?' and not even recognized it. (G-i1025ln226-237)

Mrs. Geller revealed that she made assumptions about students and their needs without genuinely knowing them. Examining the biases that guided her interactions with students, she elaborated on prior assumptions in her early years of teaching:

> Like not stopping to ask them, to listen to them, or to assume that I knew what was best for them. [I] assumed, poor them, this is what they need…but having no idea of their perspectives or their point of view or what they want from a teacher or what things that teachers do that affect them. I never stopped to ask the students, 'What are some things that a teacher's said to you or done in the classroom that's really been so helpful? What hurts you? What makes you not really want to learn?' (G-i1025ln239-249)

She attributed the equity-oriented graduate programs to her evolving thinking and practice. Mrs. Geller moved from her tacit assumptions of universal care that may have harmed students to taking a genuine interest in their perspectives to understand how *they* wanted to be cared for.

Who are Mrs. Geller's Students?

Mrs. Geller went into great detail about the difficulties her students experience. I mention these here because they help to explain the context in which she taught. She

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has trusted me with intimate details; therefore, I conceal students' names to protect their anonymity. This section focuses on family challenges, but I am acutely aware that there is much more to their lives than the adversity they face. Nevertheless, their struggles are real and shape the way Mrs. Geller worked with them.

A striking observation Mrs. Geller made was that this year, more than any other in her teaching career, students have been displaced from their parents and live with grandparents, other relatives, or are in foster care. One child had a mother who tried to set their house on fire. Others never knew their mother and father. Another parent has been in and out of drug addiction treatment centers for years. A few parents were in jail. Several of the students were cared for by adults who work in the evenings and sometimes work two or three jobs. It was quite common for her students to be responsible for completing their homework without assistance, finding something to eat for dinner, caring for younger siblings if they are the oldest, and putting themselves to bed. They sometimes came to school without adequate school supplies, disheveled, or without their uniform. Some arrived without breakfast and having slept little. Mrs. Geller perceived that these conditions affected her students' lives in the classroom. Some were described as "well-adjusted," but others as "emotionally unstable." She said, "Their reactions are inconsistent from day to day. You might see an outburst, or [a student] over-emotional one day with tears. … I mean [their issues] find their way out in different forms" (G-i1025ln369-373). Knowing about her students' lives helped her understand their struggles and think about ways to help them succeed.

A Model of Mrs. Geller's Teaching

Figure 4-1 is a graphic representation of how I understand Mrs. Geller's teaching, which includes but is not limited to her approach to working with students' behavior. She

addressed multiple dimensions to ensure that each child was challenged academically and was prepared to participate in a global environment. The model is informed by Mrs. Geller's whole-child orientation to teaching.

At the core of the model is Mrs. Geller's stance to teaching, which represents the commitments that guide her work. Her stance is her professional positioning, and what I have come to call "learning for life." Due to her stance, the way in which she worked with behavior is similar to the way she worked with anything students need help with. It is for this reason that the model is not a model of how she responds to challenging behavior; rather, it is a comprehensive representation of preparing students for life. The second ring includes five principles of practice that guided the ways in which she enacted the stance of learning for life. This is not to suggest that Mrs. Geller was guided only by these principles, but rather these were the most salient principles that emerged from the data. The outer ring contains four lines, which supported her stance and the principles that guided the enactment of the stance. The lines represent the conditions, or the environment Mrs. Geller created to facilitate learning for life.

Learning for Life: It's my Job. Period.

Consistent with Corbett and colleagues' (2002) two-year study that examined urban teachers' assumptions about the capabilities of high-poverty students as learners and how they influenced classroom instruction and student learning, Mrs. Geller embodied what the researchers call the "it's my job" philosophy. This philosophy holds that all students are capable of success, and it is the teacher's responsibility to actualize that success. While educators often repeat the mantra "all students can succeed," some attach qualifiers to this belief, suggesting that there are limits to what teachers can accomplish. It is not uncommon to hear statements such as, "All students could

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succeed *if* they weren't so lazy" or "All students could succeed *if* their parents value

education," placing blame for student failure on the "inadequate" support system at

home or other variables unrelated to teacher and school practices. These qualifiers

convey that the onus for student success is on the family; if students lag behind, it is

because their parents do not care about education. Qualifying one's beliefs about the

capabilities of low-income students indicates that one likely does not genuinely believe

that all of the students can succeed. The varied meanings teachers attach to "all

children can succeed" are important to understand because they have practical

implications for how teachers conceptualize their role in the classroom and their day-to-

day interactions with students.

Mrs. Geller repeatedly referred to "student learning" as the overarching goal for

students and insisted it was her job to ensure that students were successful. She

expressed this goal in our interviews and in her interactions with students:

Mrs. Geller: What's this benchmark test? Give me a hand in the air if you know. (very few students raise their hands)

Mrs. Geller: The benchmark test is just to see what you know. I do expect you to do well at the end if I've done my job, right? I'm confident that you'll do well so don't give up just because it gets a little annoying. (G-o1029p1)

Mrs. Geller then proceeded to draw a visual representation on the board of her

expectations for their progress. She wrote the word "August" and drew an ascending

arrow from August to "October" and told them that she expected them to make

improvements from their August benchmark assessment.

Mrs. Geller kept track of their achievements and was not blind to student

differences. She expressed that students had different strengths and skills they needed

to work on, but one thing was clear—these differences did not reflect a student's innate

ability to learn. She adamantly stated, "Their capabilities are there … I hate talking about that because I think they could all do well if I could just have them for ten years" (G-i1025ln391-393). Viewing students from an asset-oriented perspective, she envisioned students' possibilities and helped them to see themselves as capable of the success she knew they could achieve. When Ryker told Mrs. Geller that he was fine with his overall grade of a C because "it means average," she rebutted,

> You think you're average? You're not average. … I don't raise my son just to be 'average.' I want him to excel; I want him to be the best he can possibly be, I want him to do his very best all the time and [your grandparents and I] feel the same way about you. They do not look at you and say, 'Oh, he's just an average boy.' They see you like I see you, that you're capable of getting straight A's. We want to put you in the gifted program. … Nobody here thinks you're average, and you need to prove to us that we're all right. (G-i121312ln706-725)

Even students who had a reputation for problematic behavior were not viewed from a deficit perspective. Referring to one of her Black students, the school's most well-known "behavior problem" Mrs. Geller said:

> I like him. He takes more redirecting than some of the other kids. … He likes to sing; everything I say turns into a song, but I don't interpret that as bad, just lively. [laughter] Energy. … I really think that he's so smart; I think he's got a lot going on in his head, and it's just impulsive and just like he hears me say something. … Like today, I said something about no excuses, and it was like, 'no excuses, no promises,' whatever that song is, and he starts singing. … I was just like, right, no excuses, promises, whatever, just no excuses. Get to work, okay? (G-i121312ln529-544)

Mrs. Geller also shared that the student was no angel. In fact, he fractured a classmate's arms for which he was suspended for a day. Despite this, Mrs. Geller *still* believed that it was her job to curb his poor choices because he was capable of success. There were no excuses for failure, because she genuinely believed that success was within her students' reach.

Mrs. Geller repeatedly referred to the phrase "student learning" as her overarching goal for the students in her classroom. In an exchange of emails, I probed further to understand her definition of student learning. In an era of education reform, student learning tends to refer to the standardized measurement of achievement in a subject area. Student achievement is concerned with an increase in test scores. For Mrs. Geller, this was too narrow a definition of student learning.

From her perspective, student learning meant more than mastering academic skills; it meant mastering life skills so that students would experience success both within and outside the classroom walls. In other words, Mrs. Geller's stance, learning for life, concerned the whole child. She believed that it was her job to "push student learning past the textbooks" which meant that students must:

> master certain basic academic skills (writing using proper grammar, identifying certain characteristics or traits based on a person's actions, or understanding particular facts about, let's say, history). But I really don't like to limit learning to particular components where they can be 'tested' to see if it has been mastered. I'd like to think that I'm teaching them many skills, values, ways of thinking that will not only allow them to perform well on a test, but that they'll also be taking with them out into another class, home, social interactions, careers, etc. (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013)

It was no surprise then to hear Mrs. Geller talk about what she believed to be the purpose of school. She stated, "I believe the function of schools is to develop thinkers and doers, facilitate individuality and creativity, and promote the desire for students to be strong contributors to our society" (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013). As such, she wholeheartedly viewed herself as the conduit between her students and their learning. She hoped to "prepare students for what [was] beyond school as an institution" (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013) and she talked about her role in preparing students to contribute to society:

> I want my role as a teacher to be to foster an environment where I am pushing them to think in different ways, challenge scenarios, provide strong reasoning for their beliefs and thoughts, communicate their thinking accurately, and transition creative ways of thinking into some type of action. (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013)

Getting students to think differently and to challenge scenarios are indications that she wanted to prepare students to "think outside the box" and take action toward making the world a better place. In other words, her data suggests that learning for life included encouraging students to enact change. This meant that she strove to make connections between tested academic skills from the state-mandated curriculum to the bigger picture: *life*. She explained:

> As a teacher, I might be teaching vocabulary essentially, but I [teach] how and why we might choose certain words to use in different scenarios. We might go into how those words can be switched around depending on whom I'm talking to … what's more appropriate? So what seems like a synonym lesson … quickly becomes a lesson that [students] might consider the next time they have a conversation with an adult, or when they are in an interview-type setting. (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013)

Since her goal was for students to experience success in life, teaching them how to respond in challenging situations, such as "complaining at a bank for a fee you don't believe you got" (G-i1114ln36-37) or behavioral skills, such as how to speak in a respectful manner, were just as crucial as the academic skills that would prepare them for their lives in and out of school. Just as she would not send students to the office for failure to master an academic skill, neither would she send them to the office for failure to master a behavioral skill. Her role was to prepare them for tough academic assessments as well as "skills that they'll use forever" (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013). She did not value one as more important than the other, but did note the challenge of weaving into her curriculum the skills not part of the district's curriculum pacing guide (e.g., respect, honesty). Focused on nurturing the

whole child rather than a teaching agenda that merely addressed academics, five

principles guided how she ensured student effort and excellence in learning for life.

Principles of Mrs. Geller's Practice

Principles of practice are the ways in which Mrs. Geller enacted her stance—

learning for life. Five principles guided her thinking which informed her day-to-day

interactions with students: 1) knowing students and caring for them, 2) facilitating

student engagement, 3) differentiating teaching, 4) assisting students to achieve high

expectations, and 5) empowering students as collaborators in teaching and learning.

Although I separate them for purposes of description, the five principles are interrelated

in practice.

Knowing Students and Caring for Them

Building relationships and communicating care were a priority for Mrs. Geller who

worked hard to get to know her students to create a positive learning community.

Knowing students' backgrounds was the first step in showing students that she cared

for them. She made the connection between knowing students and showing her care

clear:

> The first two weeks of school, while everybody's already into the curriculum,
> I'm like the curriculum's going to wait. I don't do what the pacing guide says
> to be doing the first two weeks of school; I crumple that up, I don't even
> touch it. So I just focus on [relationships]. Because I think that building
> relationships in the beginning and getting to know them and making them
> think that I care is more important than jumping into focusing on Florida
> curriculum. (G-i1025ln415-433)

This is a bold statement given the high-stakes environment that ties teacher salaries in

Florida to test scores. Delving into the curriculum would eventually come, but helping

students feel understood, accepted, and connected to her and their peers conveyed her

care for them. Mrs. Geller communicated her care through getting-to-know-you

activities, by removing barriers to their success and by acknowledging them for a job well-done.

On the first day of school, students completed questionnaires that elicited a range of responses about their interests, strengths, and background experiences. Mrs. Geller then spent the next two weeks conducting mini-interviews with students, getting to know them on a more personal level. Students also had the opportunity to interview each other in smaller groups to get acquainted. Mrs. Geller enabled students to get to know her on a more intimate level by providing them an opportunity to ask her questions. Her rationale behind this was clear: "I'm asking them, so if I'm going to start with that mutual 'I want to get to know you,' it's like, then you can know nothing about me? … If we're talking in relationship terms, it's got to go back and forth" (G-i102512ln433-447). She believed reciprocity in the relationship was key for students to perceive her care.

Mrs. Geller's care went beyond getting to know students at the beginning of the year. She frequently circled the room to check on students and patted them on the back as they worked on academic tasks. She praised students often with positive and specific praise, such as, "This is impressive," (G-o1105p4) and, "You did exactly what I wanted you to do. You highlighted the chunk for the answer. Good job" (G-o1113p3). She acknowledged them for working hard, which she believed made them want to work harder. Her commitment to caring for her students was also evident when they did not perform well. For example, when Mrs. Geller asked Jamal how he did on an assignment he said:

Jamal: I got an F.

Mrs. Geller: Jamal, what happened???

Jamal: I keep trying to bring my grade up but it keeps going down.

Mrs. Geller: We need to talk more then and figure out a way. (G-o1205p5)

Refusing to give up on students further reified her "it's my job" approach to teaching.

Not only did Mrs. Geller refuse to give up on students, she worked to remove barriers to their success. For example, when a student's decrepit backpack had unwoven stitching and no longer had working zippers, she stapled the broken sections of his backpack together so that he was able to take his books and other supplies home after school. That same day, another Black child's special reading chair broke. As students read independently, Mrs. Geller sat on the carpet trying to fix the chair. In doing so, she cut her finger. "See? I got a cut from trying to fix it. See that love and dedication I have for you?" (G-o1113p6), she said. She smiled, and so did he.

Some of the barriers were much larger, yet she refused to allow them to come between her students and their learning. Teachers were required to send students to the office if they were in violation of the school's uniform policy. Coming to school was of upmost importance to Mrs. Geller, so when she learned that one of her students repeatedly missed school simply because he did not have a clean uniform, she instructed that he come to school and promised that she would not send him to the office. She believed that missing school for this reason was not a good excuse and defied school policy. Mrs. Geller went against the grain to ensure students were learning.

She also worked to remove larger barriers outside of school that interfered with student learning. In one of our informal interviews, Mrs. Geller shared a story about a mother who was ordered by the Department of Children and Families to give up her six children because she left them alone in their home without electricity. Her oldest son was in Mrs. Geller's class, and upon learning this, she placed an application to become

his foster mother. For various reasons, he did not end up living with Mrs. Geller, but her actions communicated her deep care and concern for the student. Despite obstacles small and large, she was committed to doing whatever she deemed necessary to ensure her students' learning.

Getting to know students is certainly not a new idea in the culturally responsive teaching literature, but one worth further interrogation. Mrs. Geller recognized distinctions between knowing students on a surface level, such as what they like to eat and their hobbies, and knowing students on a deeper level. Although Mrs. Geller used a questionnaire activity as a first step to knowing students, she also understood the contextual layers that have shaped students' lives. This kind of sociological knowing goes beyond collecting information about students' favorite colors and subjects, and seeks to understand the child within his or her community. The following quote shows how deep knowledge of a student helped Mrs. Geller approach what on the surface might have appeared to be a simple instance of off-task behavior:

> He'd be messing around with his backpack or he'd be talking to somebody figuring something out, and he'd never have his homework and he just seemed really off task but … [at home] there's nobody asking him, 'Did you have homework today? Can I look at your homework?' Nobody's at home with him; mom works at night so he can go to bed … sometimes he'd just be putting his head down anytime he wants. Nobody's home; they don't get home till two in the morning, so he goes to bed when he goes to bed, and they're still sleeping when he wakes up … so he gets himself up in the morning and gets dressed and those are all the things that I had to know about him to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and say this isn't somebody with a behavior issue, there's other elements there, and just try and work on like a little piece of it. (G-i1114ln664-681)

By understanding the contextual layers that impacted students' lives, she was better able to help them in learning for life. Mrs. Geller was adamant about finding ways to

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reach students so that she could teach them, and in order to do so, she had to know

them on a personal level. She asserted,

> They need that personal level. I need to know who their families are, I need to know what they like, where they come from, what their struggles are, why, why are they struggling, what helps them, all of those little things. It's my responsibility … that I use those to help them with the goal of student learning. (G-i1025ln266-270)

Knowing students, then, guided her decisions about how she would teach and motivate

students to learn for life.

Facilitating Student Engagement

Motivating students to learn in school was what Mrs. Geller believed was her

greatest strength as a teacher. She wanted students to be excited about learning, to

demonstrate knowledge they had acquired, and to take pride in their accomplishments.

She wanted students to be "in it, like in it to win it,"[2] which inspired her to plan for

activities to facilitate student engagement. She avoided rote and mundane tasks where

"they're not allowed to talk, and they just have to sit there and do it; they're not allowed

to get up, or no you can't work with a partner" (G-i1114ln356-358). Mrs. Geller used

several strategies to facilitate student engagement, which included inviting students into

the curriculum, asking open-ended questions, and responsiveness to students'

comments.

Mrs. Geller sought ways to make learning personal by inviting students into her

curriculum. For at least 30 minutes of each class period students would gather on the

carpet and Mrs. Geller would read to them. They began reading the book *Holes,* which

begins with a description of the setting, Camp Greenlake. The following is an excerpt

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[2] "In it to win it" is a colloquial expression used to indicate that one is invested and willing to do what is necessary to achieve a goal.

from field notes that demonstrated her ability to get students engaged by personally

inviting them into the story:

Mrs. Geller: You are now entering Camp Greenlake. (she continues to read) … you will
die a slow and painful death.

Student: (under his breath) Oh, damn.

Mrs. Geller: Okay, let's stop there. Tell me about this place. An old run down camp?
Some people actually want to get bit by scorpions? Why?

Student: Because if not they make you dig holes.

Student: This place sounds like torture.

Teacher: So Nick thought, jail or Camp Greenlake. What would you choose? (G-
o1030p4)

This question prompted an interesting discussion about whether students would choose

jail or Camp Greenlake and why. She also had them draw the setting of the camp to

help envision what it might look like. To conclude their discussion, she validated their

responses and concluded, "So, some of you are saying yeah that sounds nice—a lake,

a hammock, and some of you are saying no thank you, scorpions? NO!" (G-o1030p3)

When it came time to read *Holes* and the other class novels, students' heads were

buried in their books, eager to find out what would happen next.

Asking open-ended questions to stretch students' thinking was another common

practice to elicit student engagement. "What could these holes be for?" (G-o1030p4),

she asked when they learned that the kids of Camp Greenlake dug holes all day. When

the author introduced a new character in *Holes* she inquired, "Why is this guy's name

Armpit? We're going to infer here. What does that say about him?" (G-o1105p2)

Students vehemently shared their varying perspectives, and she listened intently and

was responsive to their comments.

Her responsiveness to students' comments led her to facilitate conversations that she did not plan for. When a discussion about Thanksgiving engendered issues of racism and sexism, Mrs. Geller was open to the conversation:

Mrs. Geller: Were the women at the Thanksgiving feast?

Students: (in unison) No.

Mrs. Geller: Why not? Were they looked at as equals?

Students: (in unison) No.

Mrs. Geller: How about Blacks and Native Americans?

Students: No.

One student: They were racist.

Mrs. Geller: That's right, they were racist because they didn't think of Blacks as equal. If you are racist, you think that what?

Students: That your race is better.

Teacher: EXACTLY. And when we talk about being sexist, that means you think your gender is better than the other. (G-o1205p3)

Conversations about racism and sexism are often considered taboo issues in school settings, but this certainly did not stop Mrs. Geller who understood that these topics were significant to her students of color. In this way, the conversation went in the direction that the students took it, engaging students in topics they wanted to discuss.

Active teaching guided Mrs. Geller's practice, and the students participated in several ways. They learned a continents song that involved body movements to help them identify all seven continents. After learning the song, she broke the class up into two groups and had a friendly competition for which group could sing the song the loudest. They also made a human map with their bodies that represented the world. To help students remember their inference skills, Mrs. Geller created an inference chant:

"An inference is a guess. We use the words to define what's going on inside!" (G-o1108p2) Since this was a skill that was practiced on a daily basis, students repeated this chant loudly and in unison quite often. Also, partners or small groups were formed to encourage them to tackle challenging tasks as a team. In this way, she was able to tap into the interests and learning styles of her students, motivating them to excel.

Differentiating Instruction

A third principle of Mrs. Geller's practice included tailoring instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Often, teachers differentiate academic content (i.e., skills in the curriculum pacing guide), but learning for life meant that Mrs. Geller differentiated other important learning and the processes to achieve that learning based on what students needed. She explained, "They all respond differently so there's no one way that all of them will respond; there's no one technique that's going to work for all of them," (G-i1114ln724-726) and she further noted the significance of knowing students in making instructional decisions:

> That's where you have to know your students. … I may have to for one student only one time, go over and put my hand on their shoulder or look at them a certain way, and they'll respond that one time and it will be fixed. There's other students that I could do that fifty times and that's just not going to work. (G-i1114ln83-88)

Knowing students prompted her to employ several different strategies to help them. These were composed of non-verbal cues, pep talks, hugs, and communicating in culturally responsive ways.

Mrs. Geller's deep knowledge of each student made her cognizant of the different learning each student needed to work on. Some of these included handwriting skills, organization skills, staying on task, learning how to work with others, setting personal goals, and having a positive attitude. Her approach to assisting in their transformation

was different and individualized for each student. For example, Mrs. Geller used a special hand code for a student who constantly called out during instruction. This particular student was an only child who craved attention; therefore her subtle, special hand code made him feel as though he received special attention. Taking the time to communicate with a non-verbal hand gesture was an effective reminder for the student to stop calling out without embarrassing him or making it appear to other students as though he received special treatment. For another student who also incessantly called out, she often used proximity or what she referred to as a "subtle stare." Her rationale was that if she were to verbally respond to every comment he made, it would impede the instructional pace of the entire group. Therefore, she was sure to acknowledge his appropriate behavior with positive praise instead of harping on inappropriate behavior that she believed was sometimes out of his control.

Three of Mrs. Geller's afternoon students frequently came to her class in terrible moods after leaving their morning teacher who often punished them. When this occurred, which was at least twice per week, Mrs. Geller greeted them at the door, always with a smile. She would not begin instruction for the day until she gave a pep talk to get them back on track:

> It's like, let's make this a good afternoon, you and I together; try and do what you can do, I'm going to try and be positive we're going to leave anything bad that happened. So it's a way for either me to try and get them in a good space mentally, and if they were in trouble in the other class or they were in trouble in the office or they were coming back from a three-day suspension or whatever it is, that that doesn't matter to me; that's not important to me. What's important is now you're with me, and let's have a good afternoon. (G-i1114ln640-647)

It was easy for these students to harbor feelings of distress about incidents for which they got into trouble. However, dwelling on these incidents and refusing to let them go

could impede their ability to learn in Mrs. Geller's class. Her pep talks encouraged them

to stay positive and let them know that they had a clean slate upon entering her room.

For Ryker, who needed daily work on having a more positive attitude, the class period

always ended with what came to be known as "Ryker's hug." She recalled:

> I said [to Ryker], 'Everything with you is 'ugh, this sucks, I don't want to do this,' the worst negative attitude. You need some positive energy in your life; does anybody ever give you a hug?'… I said, 'You know what? From this point on you're not allowed to leave my classroom every day until you give me a hug, and it's going to be a good, long hug because I need to give you some positive energy, and for five seconds we're going to hug and those arms are going to be wrapped around me. … Before he leaves, [the students] all count and he gives me a hug, and I'm like 'Positive energy, Ryker. Positive energy.' (G-i1213ln805-816)

The following observation illustrates Ryker's hug in action:

Mrs. Geller: Positive energy, Ryker.

(Ryker walked over to her.)

Mrs. Geller: Come on, Ryker. We need a long hug today before you go to Mrs. Vivian's class for math. (Ryker put his arms around her, and she and the students began to count in unison) One, two, three, … come on get those arms around me! (G-o1119p5)

Mrs. Geller used her knowledge of families' communication styles to interact with

students in differentiated, culturally responsive ways. She described how she conveyed

the same message in contrasting ways:

> I have one student that is very soft-spoken and when I've met with his parents they're both very soft-spoken people…when they talk to him they're, 'You understand honey?' and they're like very sweet and I know that if I were to ever raise my voice it would probably freak him out; he would probably crawl into his shell and that would be it. So he's somebody that I have to reflect what I see he's used to at home, and so even if he's done something that I would normally be upset and say, 'We need to talk about this' and maybe become a little bit more stern, with him I have to say, 'Do you understand what I'm saying?' I have to come across that way and I see that he reacts and he responds really well to that. And then there's other students that if I try to have a conversation with them like that, they've zoned out; they couldn't care less. I really need to get them to look me in

the eyes, and I need to come on with a stern voice in order for them to be like, 'Oh, she means business; I better listen. I need to get my act together.' (G-i1114ln795-812)

Addressing a soft-spoken student in a stern and direct manner could have led to feelings of intimidation and disengagement whereas a stern and direct style was likely to be effective with other students. Mrs. Geller continuously monitored the varying needs and styles of her students and responded quickly by changing the pace of a lesson, modifying instructional activities, providing individual assistance, and redirecting their attention to the task at hand. A one-size-fits all approach for students was futile. Mrs. Geller differentiated instruction based on who her students were and what they needed to experience success.

Assisting Students to Achieve High Expectations

As a teacher who proudly declared, "I have high expectations and students don't have a choice but to meet them" (G-i1213ln82-83), Mrs. Geller refused to accept anything less than students' best efforts. Many state they have high expectations, but fall short in assisting students to meet them. However, Mrs. Geller expressed high expectations *and* coached students to reach these expectations. She was consistent, reminded students of her expectations, and expressed the importance of not "flip-flopping" as a means to bolster their success. In her words, "If I'm expecting it every time, no, that's not good enough, you know what to do" (G-i1213ln87-88). "They know I mean what I say and I'm consistent" (G-i1025ln813), she asserted in a business-like manner; therefore, when she stated an expectation, she followed through. While this may sound rigid or harsh, Mrs. Geller's students understood that she was operating from care and concern for their wellbeing.

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Expectations for what was appropriate depended on the context. During whole-group instruction, students knew that they had to focus on the lesson. Therefore, getting up to throw away a piece of paper or engaging in side-bar conversations was unacceptable. On the other hand, when students worked in small groups to craft a short story, talking with their peers was expected. Expectations were established and practiced during the first two weeks of school and continually reinforced through reminders:

> Reminders, I'm constantly reminding them of the expectations or if we go to the carpet or if we line up. It doesn't matter if we've done it fifty million times, just a reminder when we go over to the carpet I expect that you're doing this or that, or when we go to the library or whatever it is… even if they've heard it a million times, if I'm reminding them instead of having to reprimand them it's going to take a lot less energy just to throw out that little reminder. (G-i1114ln387-394)

Mrs. Geller believed that students were capable of adapting to the different expectations she required, and her reminders served to prompt them. Before students transitioned to another task, she clearly assisted them to meet her expectations by reminding them of what was expected:

> But before we go [to the carpet] since we haven't been there in a while, let me remind you: one pillow per person and no one can lie flat on the ground because there won't be enough room for everyone. If you're not following along or having trouble, I'm going to say your name and you will sit back in your seat. This is not a race. (G-o1030p3)

Her role as their life coach was to push them to meet her expectations *and* to support them in the process of doing so. "There's constant work. It's not just, 'this is what I expect and that's it'" (G-i1114ln436-437), she stated. Mrs. Geller viewed her practice as a careful balance between supporting and pushing students to reach her expectations, and she was able to push students to achieve because of the caring relationships she had worked to maintain throughout the year:

> The fact that I've had these conversations just means … it's almost a reminder, 'Oh, yeah, Ms. G. wants me to do this; she's not going to let me get away with not doing it.' So I mean because of the background and because of the foundation that I've set with them that I have these conversations and that I try and teach them and lead them there and then once I know they know better, I push them. (G-i1213ln102-108)

From her perspective, she could not simply demand what she expected from them; she had to assist, or show them *how* to achieve success. For example, she continually taught students how to make inferences using clues provided in the text:

> Can you prove that to me? Where is the evidence? Don't just point. Prove it to me! Don't highlight the entire sentence because you're going to highlight way too much. (asked the students to instruct her on the SMART-Board) So what's the part I should highlight? (Students tell her the part of the sentence she should highlight.) How am I going to show the EVIDENCE? We want just the answers, just the evidence, just the PROOF. You are going to go back in that story, and I expect to see where you found the answer with your highlighter. Let's go back and number our paragraphs so it's easy for me to find it later. (G-o1113p2)

Making inferences was a skill practiced from the beginning of the year. Therefore, when a student rushed to finish his reading assignment, she gave him a stern look and firmly said, "No, your inference does not have SPECIFIC evidence. You must be specific and draw conclusions from the text" (G-o1105p6). Returning his paper, she insisted that he go back and redo the assignment, and she refused to accept less than his best effort. Even her classroom walls had posters that read, "What's going on? How do you know?" and "Prove it!" to reinforce her expectations.

Assisting students to meet her high expectations outside of the skills in the curriculum pacing guide, such as organization, was just as critical:

Mrs. Geller: Is that organized?

Student: No.

Mrs. Geller: How could this be more organized? (She tells the student to get his folder.) Part of not being organized is not putting things in a specific place. (She

places his homework in the left-side pocket of his folder.) Next time you need to put your homework in your folder. It's gonna take work for you to remember this but you need to do it to stay organized. Next time we take out homework, I'm going to be looking at you to make sure you take it out of your folder.

Student: (nods his head) Yes, Mrs. Geller. (G-o1101p2)

She demanded that the student stay organized not only because he often misplaced his homework assignments, which was detrimental to his academic success, but staying organized was a skill he needed to be successful in life. Unwavering in her efforts, she *supported* the student by showing him how to be more responsible. Then, she *pushed* him by clearly asserting her expectation ("Next time you need to put your homework in your folder."), and told him that she would hold him accountable ("Next time we take out homework, I'm going to be looking at you to make sure you take it out of your folder."). She exercised her authority and monitored students because she took responsibility for student learning. As their life coach, she expected students to perform to a high standard and helped them to meet their goals.

Empowering Students as Collaborators in Teaching and Learning

Mrs. Geller wanted students to make decisions about their learning: "I want them to be involved. … I noticed that they become a little bit more empowered and they become more part of the process" (G-i1213ln14-18). She accomplished this by co-creating classroom rules, helping students establish and meet personal goals, using their ideas in her instructional decisions, and pushing them to take responsibility for their learning.

During the first week of school, Mrs. Geller asked students to co-create classroom rules. A classroom discussion facilitated by Mrs. Geller provided students the opportunity to voice their desires for the kind of classroom community they hoped for.

Students said they should be expected to come prepared to learn each day, treat others with respect, and follow directions. Rules were posted next to the SMART-Board at the front of the classroom to remind students of the kind of classroom environment they agreed on.

An aspect of collaborating in teaching and learning was establishing and meeting the goals students set for themselves. The day report cards were distributed, Mrs. Geller had students reflect on their grades to think of one goal they were going to work on. Students were required to write their goal on a piece of paper, and more importantly, how they planned to reach that goal. They turned these goals into Mrs. Geller who later revisited them with each student. Just before a major standardized assessment, Mrs. Geller spoke with them about performing better than the previous assessment:

> Let's talk about your personal goals. How much do you think you should get higher? Five points? Ten points? Fifteen points? Hmm, I'd really like to see ten. I'd like for you to do at least—somewhere between 5-10% higher. Does that seem like a fair goal? Is that something you can work towards? (G-o1030p1)

Furthermore, Mrs. Geller coached her students to make academic and behavioral improvement plans. These were referred to as "action plans" and involved intentional planning to improve individual student's goals. The following is a conversation between Mrs. Geller and the aforementioned student who needed assistance with staying organized:

(Student cannot find his homework assignment.)

Mrs. Geller: What do I expect when you don't have your assignment? Where is your homework assignment? Take out your homework folder.

(Student takes out his homework folder, but there is no homework assignment.)

Mrs. Geller: Wait, what did we agree? It wasn't my rule, WE agreed on it. Listen to me. You put it in there last night and it disappeared? No, that's not believable.

Stop digging in your backpack to try and find it and listen to me. I'm disappointed because I was excited to come in here this morning and see you take out your homework from that folder. Okay, we need to try this again tomorrow.

(Minutes later, the student continues to dig in his backpack and finally finds his homework assignment crumbled with other miscellaneous papers. He immediately brings it to her.)

Mrs. Geller: And where was it? Why was it there? You need to promise me that tomorrow, you will have your homework in your folder.

Student: I promise, Mrs. Geller. (G-o1105p3)

The next time I observed her classroom was three days later. As their usual routine, Mrs. Geller asked students to take out their homework to review. Open on the student's desk was his folder, with his homework assignment inside of the left pocket. With a sense of pride and accomplishment, he smiled, sat up straight and tall, and had his hands folded. He was ready for her to check it and she responded to him promptly.

She genuinely valued their input and empowered students by using their ideas in her instructional decisions. When a student proposed a slight change in a reading assignment, Mrs. Geller said, "Yes, that's a good idea" (G-o1105p3) and encouraged students to do it his way. As they came to the end of *Holes*, a novel they had been reading together, a classmate suggested that their next novel be *Small Steps*, the sequel to *Holes*. Recognizing their excitement about this prospect, she promised to investigate the book.

She also pushed students to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, when a student did not complete an assignment because he was absent, yet failed to tell her, she admonished, "You have to stand up for yourself and tell me that. In middle school, teachers have so many kids and they can't keep track of everyone. If you don't say something they're not going to know and you'll be lost" (G-o1212p5). She was

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coaching them to become independent, which included speaking up for themselves and getting the work they missed.

Conditions that Support Learning for Life

The present study aims to understand how effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging. Given that Mrs. Geller viewed student learning as learning for life, behavior was just one of the many domains of learning that she addressed. Conditions that supported learning for life, the outside ring of the model, were the features of the classroom environment that Mrs. Geller put in place to facilitate student learning. She created a particular kind of learning environment grounded in a culture of success supported by four conditions: respect, perseverance, comfort, and urgency. These conditions complement one another, and as a whole they facilitated the principles that guided her teaching.

Respect

Student behavior was not challenging to Mrs. Geller. Instead, she assumed that students needed to be competent in many life skills, and viewed it as her responsibility to coach students toward success in life. As such, Mrs. Geller shared that many of her students did not know the meaning of respect and what it looked like; thus, it was her duty to teach them. From her perspective, respect embodied an array of skills, including how to speak to adults, how to speak to peers, how to have conversations, how to respond when asked a question, telling the truth, not stealing others' belongings, and knowing one's boundaries. She was responsible for creating a positive learning community with respect at the core, thus a clear expectation of respect was communicated at the beginning of the year:

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I set my expectations. They're very clear in the beginning of the class as far as respecting one another and how they speak to me and how I'm going to speak to them in return. I try to keep that fine line, that balance between where they're going to respect me…[but] they still find me personable enough that they can come to me if they're struggling or if they have issues or they need help. … So it's not that I'm trying to instill fear in them where they're just going to behave out of pure fear, but it's like they want to please me because they know I'm there to help them. (G-i1025ln402-412)

Even though Mrs. Geller insisted on a classroom environment characterized by respect, this did not mean that she wanted students to fear her because she was the authority figure. She acknowledged that yelling or degrading them when they were disrespectful would be counterproductive to the respectful classroom she was trying to create. As their life coach, she carefully balanced her role between teaching them about respect while still being approachable if they needed her assistance. Refusing to embarrass or degrade students reinforced her commitment to maintaining a respectful classroom environment.

Mrs. Geller used redirecting language when students were disrespectful. Her tone of voice was firm, but respectful, direct, and specific concerning the violation of respect:

Your comments are not necessary. We can move a lot faster without your comments (G-o1107p3).

Excuse me. Your hand is up and you're talking. The two don't make sense (G-o1205p3).

I'm talking. You certainly can't listen to me if you're talking at the same time (G-o1115p1).

Ryker: (to another student) Yo, what's your problem?

Mrs. Geller: Excuse me? Is that how you speak to people? You need to take your time before you begin to speak. (G-o1105p6)

Although she did not harp on or lecture students, she was sure to curb comments or actions she viewed as disrespectful because she believed they could damage the learning environment.

Sometimes the disrespectful behavior was more serious and called for a problem-solving conversation to help students understand *why* their actions were inappropriate. When Mrs. Geller received a note from the substitute indicating that Ryker was disrespectful in her absence, she called Ryker to her desk to discuss the incident. At the end of their conversation she asserted, "I do care about you, and I do want people to think you are respectful. I don't want teachers to write that you've been disrespectful." Rolling his eyes, she continued, "This is the behavior I'm talking about. When you roll your eyes, that is disrespectful" (G-o1105p1). Several days later, when she learned that Ryker stole a piece of candy from her desk, Mrs. Geller walked to his house to have a conversation with him about stealing. Being unaware of one's surroundings warranted a talk about why the behavior was inappropriate as well. As students entered the library, one student was flailing his arms, jumping around, and accidentally hit Mrs. Geller. She called him aside and said, "No, that's not okay. You totally just bumped into me and are unaware of your surroundings. You need to be aware of your SETTING" (G-o1030p6).

To maintain a respectful classroom environment, it was important for her to teach students why the behavior was disrespectful. She wanted them to discontinue their disrespectful behavior, not because she was the authority but because she was coaching them to be respectful human beings. Establishing a classroom ethos of respect was of significance to the teacher who aimed to teach skills students needed to be successful in life.

Perseverance

Perseverance, the steady persistence in a course of action despite the presence of difficulties, was a condition of Mrs. Geller's classroom. She wanted students to do their absolute best and to keep going even when things got tough. Instead of rushing through tasks to complete as much as possible, she told students to take their time, be thorough, and recheck their answers. She showed them she was persistent in her own life. Mrs. Geller also persevered in her work with her students, which communicated her unrelenting goal to coach them toward a successful life.

When a student had difficulty with a question on a reading assignment, she insisted that he reread the paragraph. Once he selected the correct answer, she smiled at him, placed her hand on his shoulder and reassured, "It might be a pain in the butt to have to read a paragraph three or four times, but doesn't it feel good to be sure that your answer is right?" He smiled back, thanked her, and nodded his head in agreement (G-o1113p5). She acknowledged the difficulties and reminded them, "Just because it gets difficult you can't let the effort go. You HAVE to keep trying" (G-o1212p2). By coaching him to persevere, he showed Mrs. Geller and himself that he was capable of success.

Mrs. Geller expressed that they were not the only ones who had to persevere when challenging obstacles arose. In fact, she showed them that, as an adult, she had to persevere too:

Mrs. Geller: I need someone to explain to me why you got C's, D's, and F's.

Student: I didn't try my hardest.

Student: Well, I wasn't going back to the story to try and find the answers.

Mrs. Geller: Uh huh! Uh huh! I see you guys doing that in class so I know you're doing that at home. You have to go back to the text. I do that in school, too. Look, let me show you my book for school. (She grabs a book from her purse, which is from a course she is taking. She opens it, shows them all the notes and highlighting she has made. She also shows them dog-eared pages.) So I'm not asking you to do anything that I don't do myself. I fold important pages, and I take notes. It's because there's no way I can read all of this and remember it all. Nobody can! Even if you think you're sure, STILL go back and check. (G-o1205p6)

This communicated to students that perseverance was a valuable and necessary character trait to have if one wanted to experience success. Overcoming obstacles was a part of life, and Mrs. Geller insisted on teaching them determination and resilience.

As a ubiquitous condition of the classroom, Mrs. Geller persevered in her schoolwork and in her work with students. When a student seemed to have difficulty with answering a question, Mrs. Geller got on her knees and leaned in close, assisting her with the question. The student stared blankly at the paper and continued to have trouble. Mrs. Geller took a deep breath and calmly helped the student once more. Eventually, the student answered the question correctly (G-o1105p6). In other example, she noticed that a student was not doing his best on his *Holes* quiz. Mrs. Geller immediately intervened and told him to take out his *Holes* book:

Mrs. Geller: Gary, I like that you're getting that out because you have to be very specific in your quiz.

(Student tells her his answer to a specific question.)

Mrs. Geller: But that is not correct. So, go back to Chapter 8 and when you reread it, you'll realize that it's not what you wrote.

(Student refers back to Chapter 8.)

Student: You were right, Mrs. Geller. It was a little different.

Mrs. Geller: Good I'm glad you went back and looked at the book. (G-o1213p3-4)

She demanded that students continue to work hard and stay the course because she believed that perseverance was important for life.

Comfort

Mrs. Geller believed that feeling comfortable in one's environment was necessary for optimal learning to occur. From her perspective, comfort included physical and psychological components that made the environment feel welcoming and safe. Both components were an important part of what she viewed as comfort.

The physical environment was an inviting place for Mrs. Geller's students. She had a large carpet at the back of the classroom where many whole-group lessons took place. Students each had their own pillow or foldable chair to use on the carpet when they read and discussed their novels. They brought the pillow and chairs from their homes, which helped them to feel at ease as they worked. Desks were arranged in clusters of four or five to facilitate cooperative learning. She did not want them to feel isolated as they learned.

Establishing a comfortable learning environment went beyond the physical arrangement to include psychological components of the classroom. Her amiable disposition toward the students helped to create comfortable learning environment. Mrs. Geller "balance[d] being fun and personal" with letting students know that they were "not going to fool around" when it was time to focus on a learning task (G-i1025ln702-703). In the following example, Mrs. Geller showed her personal side when talking about her unborn baby:

Mrs. Geller: Guys, what day is today?

Students: November 8th.

Mrs. Geller: Yes, but aside from this!

Student: Oooh, you are going to the doctor today to find out if it's a girl or boy inside of your belly!

Mrs. Geller: Yes! You're right! (students are excited and make guesses under their breath) Let's take an official poll now and then when I get back from the doctor tomorrow, I'll tell you what it is. So, who thinks it's going to be a girl? (16 students raise their hands) Who thinks it'll be a boy? (five students raise their hands) So, if we made that into a pie chart, it would look like this (She draws a pie chart on the board representing students' predictions using a red marker for girl and a blue marker for boy). Well, you'll find out tomorrow. (G-o1108p1)

Allowing students into her personal life humanized her and made them feel comfortable.

She was friendly, and she made it easy for students to approach her. She described herself as "silly sometimes" with students and made them laugh. As she helped a student draw a fish on his paper she asked, "Are you laughing at my fish drawing?" The student nodded his head and laughed. She continued, "Because this is beautiful work. I could sell it." (G-o1030p3) Her charming demeanor, pats on the shoulder, smiles, and humor gave them feelings of ease and encouragement and psychological safety.

Mrs. Geller understood that learning for life involved taking risks and, therefore, students needed an emotionally safe environment where they would feel comfortable taking those risks. Instructing students to read an article and jot down words they did not understand, she reminded them: "Nobody's judging you. No one's gonna say 'Oh my gosh I can't believe you don't know that.' I think we are all going to learn something from this article" (G-o1205p7). While everyone had different background knowledge, she reassured students that no one would make them feel inadequate if they did not understand parts of the article; by the end of the lesson, all students would have the same knowledge. As another example, when two students began an assignment incorrectly she said, "Look I know you made a mistake, it's fine. Just get another paper

and fix it so you can do it right in the future" (G-o1115p3). Mrs. Geller acknowledged that making mistakes was a part of learning, and gave students second chances to support them in a psychologically comfortable environment.

Being consistent was another way of establishing a psychologically comfortable learning environment. She said, "There's this comfort; there's a value in coming in here and [students know], 'I know what she expects from me and I know if I don't do this, this is what's going to happen, and I know if I do this, this is what's going to happen'" (G-i1025ln820-823). Rules, procedures, routines, and expectations were consistent and clear, and students felt comfortable because they knew what was expected. In other words, Mrs. Geller believed that predictability created a physical and psychological environment that allowed students to learn.

Urgency

Mrs. Geller's sense of urgency communicated the indisputable message: What we are learning is important and there is no time to waste. By building a sense of urgency in her classroom, she refused to allow students to be lackadaisical in their work, and she held herself to the same standard. She rarely sat at her desk, frequently roamed the room, had materials ready before she began each lesson, and at times used a timer for learning activities. As she roamed the room, she pushed students to extend their thinking on the task at hand. Every minute was precious and could not be wasted. In fact, she would firmly tell students to stop wasting time if they appeared lackluster or sluggish. The following are a few examples that convey Mrs. Geller's sense of urgency:

> Grab a highlighter and go. No wasting time. Anthony, did you hear me? No discussion. You are highlighting and taking notes in your notebook (G-o1205p7).

What are we waiting on? Get out your agenda and write down your home-learning so we can go to the library. I need you to get it out when I'm telling you to (G-o1030p6)

Mrs. Geller: What does our classroom Rule Number One say?

Student: (reads rule on the wall) Always be prepared.

Mrs. Geller: Right, and you are not prepared because prepared in here means that you have three sharpened pencils, and you are wasting time. So, quickly get it sharpened. (G-o1105p6)

Mrs. Geller expected students to be on task and ready to learn because she had many life skills to teach them. While there was never any downtime, it is also important to note that the activities she planned for challenged students to think and be creative. In other words, "busy work" did not exist. If students completed an activity and had a few extra minutes, they read a book or completed a prior assignment that they had not yet finished. Her instruction was fast-paced, but not so quick that students became lost. Urgency, in conjunction with respect, perseverance, and comfort were aspects of the classroom environment that Mrs. Geller established to assist in the progress of learning for life.

Conclusion

The present study seeks to understand how two effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging. However, Mrs. Geller did not perceive behavior as challenging. Instead, she believed that students needed to be prepared for life, which meant learning many kinds of skills, and it was her job to help them develop these skills. She recognized them as whole persons and tended to the many crucial aspects of their growth and development. Her whole-child orientation extended beyond the academic curriculum to a curriculum that prepared them for life.

She believed that students were capable of success, and she actively coached them to maximize their potential. Mrs. Geller enacted her stance by knowing students and caring for them, facilitating student engagement, differentiating instruction, assisting students to achieve high expectations, and empowering them as collaborators in teaching in learning. She created the conditions for learning to take place by establishing an environment characterized by respect, perseverance, comfort, and urgency. Her stance guided the ways in which she interacted with students, communicating the abiding belief that students were capable of excellence, and that she would coach them to be the best they could be.
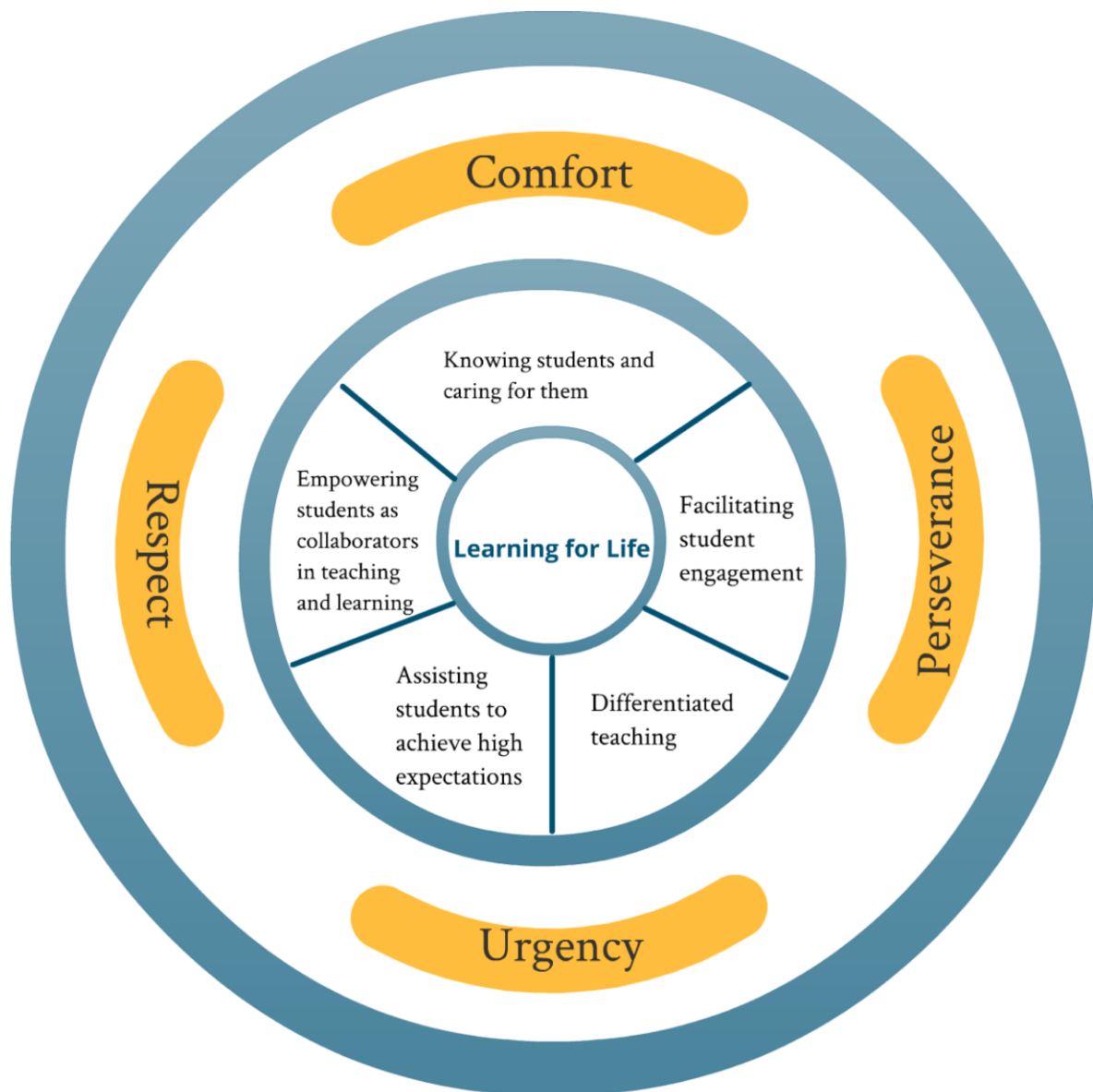
Figure 4-1. Mrs. Geller's model of preparing students for life.

CHAPTER 5
MRS. PEARL: THE LIBERATOR

Introduction

The present study seeks to understand how effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging. I hoped to learn about the perspectives and practices of these teachers to better understand how preservice and inservice teachers might approach student behavior in more informed ways. Like Mrs. Geller, Mrs. Pearl's story uncovers a faulty assumption in the research question. I learned that she believed challenging behavior did not exist in her classroom. In probing about particular students' behavior that concerned her, she stated, "To be very honest with you I'm not concerned as far as behavior issues in the classroom. They may have behavior issues outside of the classroom, but I've never had that problem" (P-i1115ln385-387). Repeatedly asking this question in different ways, I received the same response: behavior problems were absent from her classroom. Concerned that she would be a poor candidate for a study that sought to understand teachers' views of and responses to challenging behavior, I nevertheless continued to visit her classroom, curious about her assertion that her students did not exhibit challenging behavior. It is no surprise that the chapter does not specifically address behavior. Rather, the chapter describes a veteran teacher who sought to improve students' lives by empowering them to change the status quo.

The chapter describes Mrs. Pearl's sense making and practice related to her work with students. The essence of her teaching is deeply connected to her personal history; therefore, first, I share a bit of background about her life. Second, I provide a model of how I interpret her teaching. I describe Mrs. Pearl's teaching stance—learning

for liberation—which influenced the way she approached her students and their families. Last, I describe core principles of her practice and the conditions that supported the enactment of her stance.

Who is Mrs. Pearl?

I had heard a lot about Mrs. Pearl before I met her. Speaking with the principal about nominations for the study, he expressed without hesitation, "You've got to see Mrs. Pearl. Definitely a classroom you want to be in." The moment we met, she exuded a magnetic personality. She carried herself with confidence and poise. During the months I spent in her classroom, Mrs. Pearl always came to school with high heels on; it looked as if she stepped out of a hair salon each morning, and she always wore makeup. Of course, there was far more to Mrs. Pearl than her hair and high heels. The students looked up to her—they loved her and it showed.

A native of Miami, Florida, Mrs. Pearl came from a working-class family of seven siblings—four boys and three girls. She was the oldest of the three girls. When her father died at an early age, her mother raised them, which was no easy task for a single mother making ends meet on a music teacher's salary. Her family moved three or four times within the Miami area because they could not afford rent. The Baptist church was one of the places Mrs. Pearl's mother found solace. With her mother's experiences in teaching music, Mrs. Pearl grew up surrounded by music. Mrs. Pearl sang in the church choir and sometimes played piano at Sunday service. She did not enjoy singing and playing piano, but because her mother was a musician in the church choir she appeased her for some time. Eventually, she developed a mind of her own:

> I wanted to deviate from the norm because I just did not want to be like
> everyone. I wanted to have my own identity, my own personality, my own
> way of doing things… I wanted to dance, so that's what I did. I channeled

my energy into dancing instead of playing the piano, because when everyone would come to the house, you know, they wanted you to sing or they wanted you to play a musical piece, and I just did not want to do that. (P-i1026ln41-52)

Mrs. Pearl was determined to have her own unique identity. She expressed that she was "not a model student," doing just enough to get by in school, but she proudly described herself as a strong, energetic, personable, and assertive Black woman.

To truly know Mrs. Pearl, one must understand the political clarity that was a significant feature of her character. She critiqued race-based assumptions and brought race to the forefront, unveiling the ways in which inequity is a ubiquitous element of society. For example, she shared, "You need to understand being Black, you need to understand the struggles that Black people have gone through…[As a Black person], you need to learn how to deal with adversity because you're going to be faced with it big time" (P-i1218ln722-729). She was keenly aware of the stereotypes about Black people and low-income children in the greater society. Mrs. Pearl has been accused of "acting White" because she speaks the dominant American dialect. People have said to her, "Oh you're not really Black… Black people are very poor and illiterate and not educated" (P-i1218ln443-444). When she talked about Black boys in particular, I sensed anger and frustration in her voice. She asserted, "To be very honest with you, a lot of Black boys are misunderstood. Sometimes teachers don't know how to tap into their interests, and I can say that, because I have an Black son who is misunderstood" (P-i1218ln603-607). Mrs. Pearl was aware that many Black students' teachers did not understand them and viewed them as incapable, and believed that they were not being cared for in ways that the students perceived as care. Political clarity was the lens that informed her work with students.

Mrs. Pearl graduated from a small college in south Florida. She majored in Business Administration and went on to become a manager at Toys"R"Us and then at Budget Rent-A-Car. Even though she had jobs within her area of expertise, she was exhausted from the long work shifts that gave her little reward. She recalled:

> I do so much; I'm exhausted, I'm young, I need to do something that's a little bit rewarding. Maybe I need to go into education; I need to touch some souls. That's why I decided to go into education because I realized everything that I do [in management], it's not rewarding, being in management; what do I get out of this? People just overwork you. …I did not fit the norm because I was a young, Black female. (P-i1026ln337-343)

"Touching some souls" was the reason she decided to become an elementary school teacher. For the first five years of her teaching career, Mrs. Pearl taught fourth grade in a high-poverty, predominately Hispanic elementary school. She continued to work for MDCPS in the district office as an educational specialist for Title I schools, a curriculum support specialist, and a reading coach. When the district mandated small class sizes three years ago, Mrs. Pearl returned to classroom teaching and has been at Treitman Shores ever since.

Together for 28 years, Mrs. Pearl and her husband have two teenage children. Her husband is of Caribbean decent and is a public elementary school principal in Miami. They live in a culturally diverse, gated community in a suburban part of south Florida. The community is made up of middle-to-upper-middle-class families from all over the world including Haiti, Bangladesh, India, China, and Cuba. I know this area quite well, as it is the same community in which I began my first teaching position. In fact, Mrs. Pearl's son was in the fourth grade when I began teaching fourth grade at the very same school. Upon discovering this coincidence during the initial interview, it helped to

establish rapport and mitigate the power dynamic in the researcher-participant relationship.

Mrs. Pearl talked extensively about raising her children and how this was different from her upbringing. Mrs. Pearl walked almost two miles to school each day, whereas her children are taken by car, even though they live directly across the street from their school. She acknowledged the many opportunities her children had that she was never privy to and she constantly reminded them of this because, at times, she believed they felt a sense of entitlement. In addition, she made sure her children voiced their views:

> We live in a very nice neighborhood, and the kids attend very good schools. The expectations of my kids are very high; we expect a lot from them, but they also have their own identity. I allow my kids to have certain freedoms, and by freedoms I mean my kids are able to voice their opinion. I give my kids a voice; I listen to my kids, because when I was growing up, my mom did not listen to me. Whatever she said was gold; you had no voice; you had no opinion. (P-i1026ln83-90)

Not having a voice as a child engendered a commitment to raise her children to use their voices. Mrs. Pearl strove to cultivate a voice in her children because she believed that they must "stand up for themselves; their parents won't always be there for them. I try to give them that voice; allow them to have that voice, to speak." (P-i1026ln130-132)

Mrs. Pearl was proud of her children's ability to exercise their voice and solve their own problems. When her daughter was unhappy with her math teacher, she respectfully expressed this concern to the principal and was placed in another math teacher's classroom. At times, their voices got her children into trouble. On one occasion, her son assertively told one of his teachers that she had made what he believed to be an inappropriate comment toward him. He was later reprimanded by the teacher. Despite this, Mrs. Pearl continued to cultivate their voices because she believed it made her children stronger individuals. Cultivating their voices as a means to

empowering them was a prominent theme with both her biological children and the children she taught.

Who are Mrs. Pearl's Students?

Several demographic similarities existed between Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl's students. They were predominately Black or Hispanic and almost all students received free or reduced lunch. Using people-first language, she made sure she differentiated between "low performing students" and "students performing at a low level" when describing her children: "I'm not going to say 'low performing students.' I'm going to say 'students who are performing at a low level.' Yes, students who are performing at a low level, because I think students will rise to the occasion if they're given the correct tools." (P-i1026ln349-352). Despite their low academic scores, she acknowledged them as people first and foremost, and was confident in their abilities to achieve success. Like the families of Mrs. Geller's students, Mrs. Pearl's students' families worked two or three jobs to provide for their children. Sometimes, students came to school without having breakfast and not dressed in uniform.

Mrs. Pearl's morning class consisted of ESOL Level I and II students, and her afternoon group were general education students. This was different than Mrs. Geller's class, which consisted of one special education class and one general education class. They came from several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her ESOL students varied greatly in their ability to speak English, ranging from beginners to fluent. Many of her students' families spoke little English, and some spoke no English. It was difficult for her to communicate with families at times because she did not speak Spanish or Creole. To solve this, she used the school's translator and her students to communicate with students' families. When a student did not understand Mrs. Pearl,

another student who spoke the student's language intervened and helped translate. Students who were just beginning to learn English spoke in their native language to communicate their ideas.

A Model of Mrs. Pearl's Teaching

Like Mrs. Geller's model, this model was subjected to a recursive analysis to arrive at the essence of Mrs. Pearl's teaching. Going back and forth from the data to the working model, I developed a representation of Mrs. Pearl's work with her fifth-grade students. Figure 5-1 shows the center of the model as her stance, or what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) call "the ways we stand, the ways we see, and the lenses we see through as educators" (p. 50). Again, Mrs. Pearl did not believe she had challenging behavior in her classroom; therefore, the model does not describe how she responds to challenging behavior. Instead, Mrs. Pearl's model represents preparing students for liberation. Learning for liberation is described in the next section.

The second ring represents four principles of practice that helped her enact the stance of learning for liberation. The four lines are the conditions, or the environment Mrs. Pearl created to facilitate learning for liberation. Exploring the culture of her classroom and her thinking allowed me to collect a considerable amount of data to support this model. The chapter does not capture every detail as her practice is complex, but I attempt to describe the prominent themes in Mrs. Pearl's work.

Learning for Liberation: "Breaking the Mold"

Mrs. Pearl was a woman with strong convictions. As such, she wanted students to experience success and believed it was her responsibility to help them to accomplish that success. Helping students achieve success was evident at the beginning of Mrs. Pearl's first interview:

> As a teacher, my job is to empower, and I feel great… I'm only as good as my students. I may be a good teacher but you know what, if you guys don't get it, I have failed. I have done something wrong. I have failed you, I have failed myself, so if something is wrong, we need to correct that, we need to fix that. (P-i1026ln419-423)

She believed that students had to learn beyond competence; they had to achieve success in their lives. Achieving success meant that she had to prepare students beyond "teach[ing] just the ABC's" (P-i1026ln185)—they had to learn many other skills including respect, compassion, empathy, and acceptance of others. Academic skills were important, but focusing narrowly on academics would impair them in becoming well-rounded citizens:

> When I give my kids lifelong lessons, that's important to me because when they leave this classroom, when they leave middle school, you want to know that you prepared them to be productive citizens, respectful citizens. This year will come and go, but lifelong citizens that are productive, respectful, tolerant, compassionate—that's important. (P-i1026ln680-684)

> Translating this belief into practice, she taught them skills that went beyond academic learning. For example, when students began to talk over one another, Mrs. Pearl quickly stopped the lesson to teach them about what she viewed as respect. In an assertive yet calm voice she said:

> Okay boys and girls, we need to learn manners. When Mrs. Pearl is speaking, you do not try and over-talk the person. It's very rude. You have to learn manners, so when someone is speaking you are to be quiet. If you wish to be noticed, raise your hand. (P-o1218p1)

Talking over someone was considered inappropriate and violated the classroom's norms. She encouraged discussion, but learning how to listen to others without interrupting them was an important skill she believed they needed both within and outside the classroom walls.

Another vital skill she believed they needed to learn was how to accept others who were different from them. She knew that once they were adults in society, they were going to interact with people who had different frames of reference and ways of being. She urged:

> You have to work with various personalities—strong, passive, bossy personalities. But you know what it's called? It's called LIFE and you have to deal with it! How do you deal with it? You could just say, 'That's her personality.' If someone is bossy, is that a bad thing? Not necessarily. Maybe that's her personality. She may be bossy, but is she easy to get along with? I have a very big mouth. Mrs. Pearl has a VERY big mouth. I can be very boisterous. I am LOUD! But guess what? I am also a very easy person to get along with, and that's just my personality. It's all about ACCEPTING people. (P-o112712p2)

She encouraged them to have a positive attitude and to view others from asset-based perspectives. Instead of viewing people as bossy, she urged them to reframe their thinking, helping them to see others in a positive light. She wanted them to embrace others' differences and learn to work with them in challenging situations.

Extending the notion of learning life skills, Mrs. Pearl insisted that students do what she told them to do. While this may sound dictatorial, her rationale was not about controlling her Black and Hispanic students. Rather, doing what she told them to do was a way she communicated her unyielding care for them. Knowing the challenges of racism, living in poverty, and marginalization from her lived experience, she asserted:

> You look at [my students'] family backgrounds, the struggles, and the challenges that their families have to go through. I tell my kids 'I want you to break the mold. That's what I want you to do.' I tell my kids, 'do what I tell you to do and you will have success; do what I tell you and you will have success. I want you to be successful.' (P-i1026ln504-508)

She was concerned for their wellbeing and genuinely wanted students to live successful lives. She saw her students as racial beings that had to break free from social and economic inequality if they were to succeed. In other words, she was committed to

improving students' lives because of her larger goal, or what she called "breaking the mold."

Breaking the mold was a phrase Mrs. Pearl used deliberately and often to refer to her larger goal of learning for liberation. Her teaching approach was grounded in a social reconstructionist "philosophical orientation toward education" (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, p. 209), one based on the perspective that social systems are unjust and in need of change. Social reconstructionists are concerned with equipping students to eliminate social inequality. In this role, the teacher prepares students to "take charge of their lives, work collectively with others, and speak out to bring about social change" (Grant & Gomez, 1996, p. 10). As a teacher working for social reconstruction, Mrs. Pearl equipped students to lead self-determining lives and assert their voice. In other words, Mrs. Pearl prepared her students to break free from society's chains that restricted their access to successful lives.

Mrs. Pearl was keenly aware of students' current challenges and anticipated future opposition they would face. Notwithstanding, she was determined to teach them to overcome challenges and take control of their lives. By helping them break the mold, she was preparing them to become leaders that determined their own path: "It's empowering them to be effective leaders, not only inside the classroom but outside the classroom. Several of my students are on patrol; several of them are interested in going into leadership roles" (P-i1115ln126-129). She was preparing them to become leaders at school, leaders who would then become change agents of society.

In the preparation to become leaders, she recognized the importance of cultivating student voice:

[Students] may feel that as a child, 'I can't say this; I don't know if Mrs. P. is going to get upset.' But how do you empower students to become leaders? How do you empower them? By not having a voice? When do you give that kid a voice? You have to cultivate that voice. You have to provide opportunities for that student to have a voice. You need to let them know that it's okay in here. (P-i1026ln154-159)

Empowering students' voices made them stronger individuals, getting them ready to take on the obstacles and opposition that would lie ahead. Mrs. Pearl believed that students should use their voices to speak out, and she encouraged them to do so: "Sometimes there are things they may have to question. You can question your teachers. Mrs. P does not know everything" (P-i1026ln164-166). On one occasion, a student felt Mrs. Pearl was treating her group unfairly and addressed the issue to the entire class:

Mrs. Pearl: Why are only certain groups raising their hand? Everyone should be speaking.

Catie: (raises her hand) Mrs. P., our entire group was raising our hands but you didn't call on us.

Mrs. Pearl: Oh, you did?

Catie: Yeah, we were all waving our hands in the air.

Mrs. Pearl: Oh, I'm sorry. I missed it. Forgive me. (P-o1126p4)

By acknowledging and validating a student's concern, Mrs. Pearl attempted to send a message about the potential of student voice. For the students, this showed them that their voices would be heard and could initiate change. As a woman informed by political clarity, Mrs. Pearl's practice was guided by four interrelated principles that helped to enact her goal of learning for liberation for her students.

Principles of Mrs. Pearl's Practice

Mrs. Pearl accomplished her stance, learning for liberation, through the enactment of four main principles of practice. The following principles guided her work with students and are elaborated in the subsections below: 1) transforming student identity, 2) othermothering, 3) facilitating student engagement, and 4) insisting on high expectations.

Transforming Student Identity

It is important to recall that Mrs. Pearl did not work to transform challenging behavior. Instead, the data show that she worked diligently to transform students' identities. She worked to actualize this transformation by helping students see themselves in new ways, explicitly telling students her goals for them, and shaping them to be relentless in their efforts.

When students entered her classroom at the beginning of the year, they saw themselves as troublemakers, poor English speakers, and children who repeatedly failed high-stakes standardized tests. Many students did not see themselves as successful because of the labels that had been placed on them in the past:

> When I see a kid at the beginning of the year, [their] whole mindset has been transformed. … When I see the transformation of my students, that is when I know my work is done. At the end of the day I look at Marisol, ESOL student. Teachers may have said, 'Well, she didn't do anything last year.' And another student from Haiti, one teacher said, 'Last year, all she did was poke her mouth out.' I said, 'Really? She's performing for me. She's doing exceptionally well.' When I hear the comments from teachers, that gives me such a high, such a high. … When kids know you genuinely care, the sky's the limit … you could take them to a totally different level, and that's what I do. (P-i1026ln785-797)

The political clarity that informed Mrs. Pearl's teaching acknowledged the world as inherently inequitable. She knew her students of color would be silenced and

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unsuccessful if they continued to view themselves from these deficit-based labels. "The world is a competitive place," and "these students won't have a chance" (P-o1031p1) she told me early in the study. Mrs. Pearl knew her students of color would eventually be up against others from more privileged backgrounds, thus she worked to arm them with confident student identities, equipped with a strong voice, ready to face the world.

Specifically, she worked to help students see themselves in new ways: from silent to confident, from timid to bold, and from low-performing to capable of excellence. By changing how they saw themselves, she helped them to envision the possibilities. In another interview, she expressed how students described their own identity change and noticed changes in their peers:

> One kid said, 'You know last year Mrs. P., I didn't feel comfortable raising my hand, I never said anything in class.' Another kid said, 'I was afraid to talk.' Another kid said, 'Oh, Mrs. P., he wasn't like that last year. He was a troublemaker', but you look at that same student; he's totally a different student. He raises his hand, she raises her hand, they participate, they're not afraid, they're not timid, they're not shy. So it's building a level of confidence within the kids, and if they feel confident, the opportunity for them to learn is so great. (P-i1115ln133-142)

Mrs. Pearl transformed students' identities by helping students imagine themselves as confident and strong individuals. For example, when it was time for Henry, a soft-spoken and shy student, to present in front of the class, Mrs. Pearl smiled and said, "Henry, let's do it, babe. I want you to talk like you're on the PE field. Like you're the coach now, okay?" (P-o1115p2) Mrs. Pearl reassured timid Henry that his classmates wanted to listen to his presentation:

> You guys are really interested in what he has to say and you want to be able to hear him. You know what he wrote was great and you want to hear the great things he has to say. That's why I need you to speak from your diaphragm, Henry. (P-o1211p2)

She was explicit in her statements about her goals for their success in the future.

Mrs. Pearl explained to them, "When you go out in the world, I want you to feel confident," (P-o1031p2). Again, she actively worked to help students visualize their later success in life:

Mrs. Pearl: Matthew, what do you aspire to be when you grow up?

Matthew: I want to be an architect.

Mrs. Pearl: Well imagine that you are a 24-year-old young architect and people are like 'Oh wow this guy is intelligent,' and people really respect his knowledge.' People might be intimidated but you're on top of the world, Matthew. (P-o1218p4)

Transforming their identities included the need for students to be "on fire," a phrase Mrs. Pearl used to describe state of mind in which people believe they are unstoppable and can do anything they want—and they do. Mrs. Pearl constantly reminded students that they had to be on fire at all times. One morning in particular, I walked into her classroom to see the lyrics of Alicia Keys' song "Girl on Fire" displayed on the SMART-Board. She heard the song on her way to work that morning, and it prompted her to turn the song into a teachable moment. Discussing the lyrics and meaning of the song, the following conversation took place:

Mrs. Pearl: Okay, so if she's on top of the world, what character trait would someone like that exude?

Students: (shout out) Bold, determined, confident!

Mrs. Pearl: Yes, those are all character traits. Okay, (points to one line in the song) what does that statement mean? What does that signify? THINK THINK! You are analyzing.

(Students give answers.)

Mrs. Pearl: Uh-huh. I'm so grounded but my head is in the clouds. We are making things happen here in the community we live in. We're on such a natural high. I can do anything I want to do.

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(One student elaborates on her interpretation.)

Mrs. Pearl: YES! That girl is on fire! (Student goes up to Mrs. Pearl to give her a hug.)

Mrs. Pearl: Boys and girls, doesn't this really make you think?

Student: Yeah, it's like deep.

Mrs. Pearl: It's like deep, isn't it? (P-o1114p1)

In this example, Mrs. Pearl used a popular song the students were familiar with to send the message that they could do anything they desired. Her reference to enacting change in the community alluded to her belief that they would be responsible for uplifting their own communities. However, students of color had to first see themselves in new ways if they were going to change the inequitable status quo, and she worked to help them achieve new identities.

Othermothering

Consistent with the literature on successful Black teachers, othermothering was another principle of Mrs. Pearl's practice that facilitated her enactment of learning for liberation. She viewed herself as an othermother to the children she declared her love for:

> I've opened the window for my students to just soar because they have the confidence inside of them that they feel, 'I can do anything that I want to do. I determine the path that I go though.' But, you have to have somebody showing them the direction, showing them the correct path to go down and that it what I do as a teacher, as a mother. I'm like a mother to these kids, a second mother. (P-i1115ln142-148)

As their second mother, she viewed it as her responsibility to guide students down the path of success. Mrs. Pearl used several strategies to convey her care as their othermother, which included establishing a close bond with students, a familiar discourse style, expressing her love for them, and uplift of the community.

She established an interpersonal bond with students, showing care and concern for their wellbeing. When a student felt ill just before winter break, she comforted him yet told him he needed to continue with the task at hand:

Mrs. Pearl: Come on baby Jordan, you don't feel well? Does your head hurt? (puts her hand on his shoulder)

Jordan: Yes, a little.

Mrs. Pearl: Mrs. Pearl wants you to feel better. Did you eat? (Jordan nods his head yes.) Jordan, you are doing so well and Mrs. Pearl needs you to keep up that momentum. Don't give up now. Give me ALLLLL you, what?

Jordan: GOT!

Mrs. Pearl: Right, and then you have two weeks to rest. (P-o1218p3)

Asking students if they were okay when they missed school, wondering about birthday parties, and inquiring about their families were all ways that she established a close interpersonal connection with students. "You are like my children away from your parents," (P-i1026ln519-520) she expressed to them.

Another way she demonstrated othermothering was through her discourse style. Like many mothers, she used terms of endearment, such as "sweetheart" and "babe," that communicated genuine affection when she spoke to them. After a student walked into class late, she said, "Hey baby, how you doin'? We're glad you're here" (P-o1107p3). Rather than chastise the student for arriving late, she used a term of endearment to welcome her into the room. Many use these words to convey care, but not all are genuine. Mrs. Pearl communicated with students in culturally responsive ways, which played a central role in othermothering. At times, she spoke Black English Vernacular (BEV). For instance, she bellowed, "Giirrl you ooooo!" (P-o1031p4) when a

student gave an impressive answer. Her goal was to connect with students in ways that communicated her love and care for them.

Mrs. Pearl also communicated her love for them in explicit ways by blowing kisses, giving pats on the back and hugs, and telling them she cared for them. They were her "little Munchkins" (P-i1218ln129) and even though they were not her biological children, she loved them the same: "I care for each and every one of them the same way I care for my own children. The same way I treat my son and my daughter, I treat them the same exact way" (P-i1218ln152-154). They, too, perceived her as their othermother. Like many children who want to please their mothers, Mrs. Pearl's students sought her approval. The following example conveys their affinity for her:

Student #1: I love you, Mrs. Pearl.

Mrs. Pearl: I love you too darling.

Student #1: Mrs. Pearl, you are like our second mom.

Student #2: No, you're our first mom!

Student #3: I'll be your special baby!

Mrs. Pearl: You all can come visit me anytime you want. (P-o1031p3)

This interaction suggests that once the academic year ended, their relationship did not. In her role as their othermother, Mrs. Pearl attempted to show them that she loved them just as much as they loved her.

This notion of the maternal guided her practice whereby she believed that learning could not be done alone, and that she and her students were responsible for encouraging one another. Learning had to be accomplished by developing "independent thinkers" but also by a communal responsibility to help each other. Mrs. Pearl asserted, "If there's an area in which one is weak, how do we make that person stronger? What is

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it we can do to build that person up?" (Pi-1115ln125-126) I observed many instances where students helped to build one other up. They helped one another by offering constructive criticism on their writing assignments (P-o1108p2) and presentations (P-o1115p1). They also recognized their classmates' academic progress to encourage their continued improvement. Clapping for students who tried their best and celebrating their peers' improvement by acknowledging what the student did well (e.g. "Oh, Mrs. P., she's answering more questions … Oh, she's reading fluently now,") were ways they encouraged each other to improve.

Her enactment of othermothering included student uplift as well as uplift of students' families. Regarding uplifting students' families she asserted:

> Your parents had to struggle to get here, your parents have to struggle to maintain, so you are going to break the mold. You are going to do that, that's your responsibility. I don't care if your parents don't know how to read. You read to your parents. That's what you're going to do. (P-i1026ln452-456)

In other words, one of the aims of learning for liberation was to empower students' family members who struggled to live prosperous lives. Her classroom was a site for social activism—she expected students to use what they learned in school to then educate their family members at home. For example, she wanted them to teach their families new words, how to navigate different computer programs, and how to read. Mrs. Pearl valued education and used her classroom to promote student empowerment and community uplift.

Facilitating Student Engagement

Mrs. Pearl's students exhibited enthusiasm, effort, and concentration in the classroom. She believed that behavior issues were non-existent because the students were actively engaged. In her classroom, students were eager to raise their hands to

contribute to classroom discussions. "Pick me! Pick me!" they would exclaim, and when it was time for students to leave her class, they would cry, "Nooo!" (P-o1107p4) She facilitated their engagement through storytelling, student choice, connecting prior learning to new concepts, active learning, and her responsiveness to students' comments.

Stories enabled Mrs. Pearl to relate with students and they revealed a personal approach to her teaching. She explained,

> They relate to the stories I tell them... I have to bring in a personal side of me. When I bring in that personal side of my through storytelling, it makes it much easier for my kids to understand and then perform for me... wanting to do their very best. (P-i1218ln23-30)

Some of the stories were about her family. For instance, when she explained the word "recede," she connected the word to her husband, Dr. Pearl. "You see, Dr. Pearl is getting old and he has a receding hairline now. What does that mean? I want someone to intelligently tell me what that means." (P-o1121p3) Discussing the meaning of the word "incident," she used a story to illustrate:

> Okay, pretend you're on your bike and you're pedaling and pedaling. And then you fell off your bike. You scraped your knee. Maybe that gave you a flat tire, and now you can't ride your bike. So then, you had to walk home. Then, when you had to walk, what else could have happened?" (P-o1211p3)

Continuing the conversation, she told additional stories about various incidents such as, falling off the bed and getting stitches, and getting attacked by wasps. Her storytelling helped students relate to the concepts she taught them.

Providing students choice was another way she facilitated student engagement to enact learning for liberation. She stated:

> I think when you give students choice, they are probably more apt to do the assignment. If you involve the students in the decision-making, you

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probably would get more out of that student instead of just dictating, 'No, you have to do this,' or, 'You have to do that.' So, I try to give them opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process. (P-i1218ln236-240)

She allowed some flexibility as they completed classroom tasks. Most of the time students were allowed to work where they felt most productive. Sometimes, they chose whom they wanted to work with, under the condition that they could not get off-task. Students often chose where they wanted to work—they could work at their desks or on the carpet, but again she required that they diligently work on the task at hand. For a take-home project, they chose how they presented their projects (i.e., Powerpoint presentation, book, etc.) to the class.

She also used students' prior knowledge as a means to engage them in new learning. Teaching the meaning of the word "obnoxious," she asked, "How many of you have siblings? [Most raise their hands] Ah, do you think you could use that word with perhaps some of your siblings or even some of your friends?" (P-o1107p1) To help them understand how technology has evolved, she drew a cassette tape on the board and explained how iPhones and iPads are current devices with the same function as a cassette tape, with additional and improved functions (P-o1107p3). Many students then commented that their own cell phones could record, and could be used to talk to others and surf the Internet. Connecting learning to what they were familiar with provided a relevant context in which they could understand new concepts she taught.

The desire for students to learn for liberation prompted her to get students actively participating in their own learning. Rather than sit quietly during a lesson, Mrs. Pearl required them to develop ideas, use their bodies to demonstrate what they knew, brainstorm solutions to problems, and talk to and listen to their peers. While reading the

novel *Frindle,* a book about a fifth-grade boy who creates a new name for a pen, students worked with peers to develop a new name for an object. They were eager to work with one other, and were enthusiastic about inventing a word that only their group knew (P-o1107p4). To help them understand the phrase, "completely absorbed in one's thoughts," she and a student pretended to daydream and bumped into Mrs. Pearl (P-o1107p3). Students also performed the meaning of many vocabulary words:

Mrs. Pearl: When we talk about rowdy, what does that mean? How would that look on the PE field?

(Students provide several responses including, loud, free, and crazy.)

Mrs. Pearl: I want you to show me the word "rowdy"!

(Students wave their hands in the air, screaming and shouting.) (P-o1115p3)

Students were excited about learning because her pedagogy was active and engaging.

They were quite a bold, inquisitive group that unabashedly brought up society's issues that concerned them. These included women's sexual reproductive rights, racism, and homosexuality. The following observation illustrates her responsiveness to their comments when a discussion arose about racism:

Student: There's a little boy in my neighborhood who doesn't like them.

Mrs. Pearl: Who is them? You mean Black people?

Student: (nodding her head) He says they smell and look like ca-ca.

Mrs. Pearl: You know that kid, he's a little ignorant.

Student: Yeah, he's racist.

Mrs. Pearl: I think you're right, he is racist. You know what? That could be something that is a LEARNED behavior. Let me ask you, if there was something you could all say to him, what would you say?

Student: I would say, 'You need to respect other people.'

Student: That's not right.

Student: Everyone is human.

Mrs. Pearl: Right, remember we talked about learning different cultures and accepting different cultures? Remember we talked about turbans? It's okay to say Black, you understand? Maybe we could teach him something about having tolerance and acceptance of other people. (P-o1127p3)

It is uncommon for one to observe such a frank conversation about racism, but Mrs. Pearl understood these topics were significant to her students. This is not surprising given that her students were members of historically oppressed groups. To empower their voices, she followed their lead, engaging them in topics they wanted to discuss.

Insisting on High Expectations

Mrs. Pearl believed that having high expectations pushed students to reach for excellence. She asserted, "I have high expectations. ... I always knew that if you took kids, if you exposed students to another level, they would perform for you" (P-i1218ln365-367). She wanted students to experience success in life and, therefore expected that they always try their best. Because Mrs. Pearl prepared students to enact change in their communities, she also expected students to think critically and independently.

Mrs. Pearl demanded that students meet the high expectations she set for them. She insisted in two complementary ways. One, she required students to repeat the task until they reached success. Two, she required them to repeat her expectations.

During individual presentations, she expected students to speak clearly and confidently. When a student began to mumble about his project, she stopped him and said, "WAIT, WAIT, WAIT. What did I tell you guys? Talk from your diaphragm. Open your mouth and speak. You are not mumbling to us. You need to open your mouth and speak" (P-o1115p2). Dissatisfied with the student's low volume, she demanded that the

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student start from the beginning. By asking him to redo the task, she insisted the student meet her high expectations, which reinforced her message that he was capable of success.

Just as she expected them to be clear in their speech, Mrs. Pearl was explicit in communicating her expectations to students. She asserted, "You are fifth-grade students. The quality of work I expect of you is one in which you have to do research, present, and speak in front of the class. Remember we talked about expectations?" (P-o1029p3) Requiring students to think critically, the following observation illustrates how she used a call-and-response strategy to remind them of her expectations before they began a task:

Mrs. Pearl: I tell you to think. I tell you to analyze it. WHY DO YOU ANALYZE THE QUESTION?

(One student answers.)

Mrs. Pearl: What else do I want you to do? You have to do WHAT?

Student: INTERPRET!

Mrs. Pearl: You have to interpret! Very good sweetheart. What else do I want you to do sweetheart? Are you going to underline every word in that question?

Students: (in unison) NO! (P-o1029p1)

Students' synchronized responses show that this was a common strategy Mrs. Pearl used to remind students of the expectations. Mrs. Pearl reminded students to think critically in other ways. For example, the large poster displayed at the front of her classroom read, "Elevating Minds Toward Deeper Thinking." The words "interpret," "analyze," "process," and "predict" surrounded the poster and reminded them that they had to think about situations critically if they were going to change the status quo.

Mrs. Pearl often communicated her insistence by exclaiming the phrase, "get your head in the game!" Using this expression, she communicated her expectation of that students would put all of their energy into the task at hand:

Mrs. Pearl: All right, guys, let's do it. We're gonna do what?

Students: Get our head in the game!!!

(one student is slouching in her seat).

Mrs. Pearl: While you are in my class, you are not to slouch. Put your butt in the chair. You see, when you go and get a job and you're slouching, they're not gonna hire you. You need to sit up. (P-o1107p3)

Mrs. Pearl believed it was important for her students of color to get their "head in the game" because she was concerned for their futures. Slouching, or other behaviors such as putting their head on the table, might communicate disinterest or inattentiveness, which would hinder their success in a job setting. She was explicit in her teaching about society's codes for what was considered appropriate behavior, and she reminded them that they needed to be alert and ready to learn.

Conditions that Support Learning for Liberation

This study sought to understand how effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging, but Mrs. Pearl simply did not believe challenging behavior existed in her classroom. Again, her teaching stance was guided by learning for liberation; that is, learning to break free from the inequitable status quo. She established classroom conditions to facilitate her stance. The four conditions that permeated the classroom environment include comfort, intensity, modeling, and urgency.

Comfort

From Mrs. Pearl's perspective, feeling safe and at ease in the environment was critical for learning to take place. Establishing this kind of environment reinforced her larger goal of learning for liberation. She said,

> If I provide that comfortable environment for you and you feel it's okay to share this, it's okay to say this, eventually it's going to be instilled in you that it's okay to have that voice, regardless of what your home situation might be like, regardless if your parents are not educated and if your parents are working two or three jobs. (P-i1026ln182-187)

Explicit in her desire to alter the students' life trajectories, students had to learn in conditions that supported their voice. Mrs. Pearl worked to achieve a comfortable learning environment by creating a family setting, redirecting students that attempted to compromise the comfortable environment, and using humor in her interactions with students.

Mrs. Pearl worked to establish a family setting, letting students know that her classroom was more than just "open up your reading book or your social studies book" (P-i1218ln181-182). She provided a space where students could feel free to laugh and be themselves, not having to worry that their family members would bring them down. While cultivating a group of leaders, the learning climate was centered on building one another up rather than tearing one another down. She understood that learning involved taking risks and making mistakes. This was particularly important in this context as many students were learning how to communicate in a second language. Thus, she created a classroom culture grounded in support and encouragement. Mrs. Pearl frequently gave positive comments for working hard, "Great. Let's give everyone a hand. You all did a great job" (P-o1126p2). Students encouraged one other by giving compliments (P-o1031p1), cheering (P-o1126p4), and clapping (P-o1121p3) for a job

well done. If a student had trouble with understanding a lesson, another student who was more fluent in English would assist by translating. They viewed their classmates as family members who they helped because they wanted to see them succeed. Feeling comfortable as they took risks in their learning allowed them to flourish.

In the middle of the year, she welcomed a new student to the family by making him feel comfortable on his first day of school. The student had recently immigrated from a Spanish-speaking country and appeared timid upon entering a new environment. As their othermother, Mrs. Pearl asked each student go around the room and introduce themselves. Making the student feel welcome and loved, many students took her request one step further and introduced themselves in Spanish to make him feel at ease in his new environment. Even students whose first language was Creole attempted to introduce themselves in Spanish, going out of their way to make the new student feel accepted. Students were excited to have a new member in their family, giving high-fives and shaking his hand as they introduced themselves (P-o1126p1).

On rare occasions, students attempted to compromise the comfortable learning environment, but Mrs. Pearl did not allow this to happen. For example, when a student turned to another student and said, "Shut up!" Mrs. Pearl stopped, turned to the student who made the comment and calmly yet firmly redirected her, "Shut up is such a negative word. Why don't you try that again?" (P-o1105p1) She refused to tolerate unkind words when she worked tirelessly to build them up. Inquiring about the incident in one of our interviews, she explained:

> I don't want the students to feel threatened by the teacher or even their
> peers because when the students are threatened I feel that they can very
> easily shut down and there is no engagement because they're afraid of

what [other students] may do or what they may say, or the reaction they may get from their teacher. (P-i1115ln66-70)

Making clear that students would disengage from learning if they felt uncomfortable or threatened, she nipped hurtful comments in the bud. It is interesting to note how Mrs. Pearl responded to students when the learning environment was threatened. She expounded:

I don't linger on…because if I do that I'm interrupting the learning environment and it takes away from my instructional time. [Why] linger on to say 'Why did you do that?' and go on into a full lecture…the kids know right from wrong and I don't need to embarrass the students. I redirect them quickly and I move on. (P-i1115ln207-212)

This suggests that instructional time was of paramount importance and harping on students' inappropriate behavior would simply take away from student learning. Again, these kinds of comments were few and far between because of the constant work she put in by creating a comfortable learning space.

Another way she provided a comfortable learning environment was by showing students that she was funny and full of life:

I think the students have to realize also the teacher is not as stiff and the students are able to relate to the teacher even more so when they realize boy, she's funny, too. She's just a regular person as well; I'm just a normal person… it provides a very welcoming classroom. The kids are not threatened in any way. (P-i1115ln38-43)

She accomplished this by using humor to show her personal side. For example, after students introduced themselves to the new student she concluded by saying, "This is wacky, wacky Mrs. Pearl's class, okay?" (P-o1126p1) When they were discussing the meaning of the word "anxious," Mrs. Pearl said, "How would you show that your dog is anxious?" Then, she got down on her knees, crawled on the floor, pretended to lick a student, and wagged her bottom, pretending it was the dog's tail (P-o1108p2). Students

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laughed loudly, and it communicated her willingness to engage in silliness to make students feel comfortable.

Intensity

As an uninformed observer of the classroom at the beginning of the study, it seemed as though Mrs. Pearl was yelling at her students. However, as I spent more time understanding the culture of her classroom, it became apparent that she was not yelling at the students; rather, she was teaching with great intensity. Her words best describe the intensity that was a prominent feature of the environment:

> My kids will say to me, 'Well, Mrs. P., you're just different. I just love you, I just love the way you teach, the way you scream, and you just get into it, and I just love it. I love it when you say, 'love it!' It's the energy, and that pours over to my students and it makes a big difference. (P-i10261n8-12)

Teaching with intensity included her energy, the loudness in her voice, and her constant moving around the room. She revealed, "I like when I'm on stage. I'm an actress and I just love it. … I transform" (P-i1026ln797-799). In other words, her "stage presence" and entire delivery helped to captivate her students.

Mrs. Pearl's intensity got the students excited about the learning activities she had planned for them. Loud and at times a bit dramatic, her spirit transmitted onto them. The following remarks highlight the intensity that permeated the classroom:

Mrs. Pearl: "Very good! Thank you, Yasmine. WOOOO YASMINE!" (P-o1126p4)

Mrs. Pearl: How are you guys today?

Students: (in unison) FABULOUS!

Mrs. Pearl: Oh, I am so glad you're FABULOUS! (P-o1031p1)

Mrs. Pearl: Lucas, you always do an exceptional job. Wow! Fabulous love it!! (P-o1031p2)

Mrs. Pearl described herself as boisterous, and she instructed with emotion that allured the students, making learning more enjoyable. As Mrs. Pearl and I talked in depth about her energy, she chuckled and proclaimed, "I look at the way my students look at me when I'm walking. When I'm walking around my classroom, my students are so in tune to me. They notice every single thing" (P-i1026ln521-524). In a way, they were mesmerized by who she was as a person. Captivated by her intensity, they wanted to be like her.

Modeling

According to Mrs. Pearl, being a role model for students was a necessary component in helping students to break the mold. She believed it was her responsibility to lead by example by serving as a role model. Being a role model was the fabric, or the underlying structure of her classroom:

> I know this is where I belong because I know I make a difference with these kids, and I think kids need role models like Mrs. P. As educators we leave our footprints on these students and we need to be very careful about what we say and how we say it because we are cultivating these young beautiful minds, these young leaders. That's what we're doing and we have to mold them the right way. (P-i1026ln15-21)

She continued to tell me that she wanted students to exude some of her own character traits because it would help to build students' self-esteem and character. Students needed role models to show them how to be positive, what success looked like, and how to achieve success.

As their role model, she believed that it started with the way she physically presented herself. She said,

> Kids want to see their teacher well groomed; it makes a difference … I can't speak for everyone else but I'm effective when I'm dressed, when I'm well groomed, when I'm polished. I'm a very effective teacher and it transcends onto my students. (P-i1026ln24-28)

Every day she was meticulously dressed, and the students watched her closely.

Observing her new outfits, they would compliment her on her stylish dresses, freshly

pressed pants and collared dress shirts. They would tell her how much they liked the

way her hair was styled, and liked her lipstick shade and her many accessories. Even

though there were no official rules on professional attire, she was one of the most

professionally dressed teachers at the school.

She shared that being a role model for her students was more than the way she

dressed, but it was an aspect that the students noticed first. Being a role model also

meant she demonstrated what compassion, working with others, acceptance, and a

positive attitude looked like. Thus, she embodied the same character traits she wished

to cultivate in them. For example, when she and her students walked through the halls,

she typically greeted other teachers in passing with a warm, enthusiastic greeting. In

this way, she showed her students how professionals acknowledge with one another. In

many instances, she held collegial conversations with the ESOL lead teacher in front of

students that demonstrated her ability to work with others to achieve a common goal.

Mrs. Pearl and I both noticed that being a role model was the fabric of her

classroom. In her first interview, she laughed and said:

> Sometimes it's so funny because when you see your kids' personality you
> see your personality reflected in your students, and it's like 'Oh gosh, it
> sounds like a Mrs. P.' … I remember having parents tell me 'Mrs. P., she
> acts just like you.' (P-i1026ln14-17)

The students looked up to her and some began to emulate her personality. During one

observation, a male student professed, "I want to be like you Mrs. P.," to which she

responded, "Let's mold you guys to be productive, intelligent kids. Failure is not an

option" (P-o1114p3). As a successful Black woman, she modeled that success was within their reach.

Urgency

It is no surprise that a teacher who instructed with intensity also worked to create an environment characterized by urgency. From her perspective, urgency indicated that there was much to learn and students had to act as though every minute counted. Mrs. Pearl shared the following story:

> Today we were talking about the sense of urgency and I was telling students that … sometimes some of you do not display a sense of urgency. It's as if Mrs. P. tells you to do an assignment and some of you take five, ten minutes to get started. You need to have that rush. It needs to be very important to you…And I went on to say that I'm turning fifty. … I felt that I needed to exercise so I went downstairs, I went into the garage, I got on the treadmill for one hour and then I got on my trampoline, I was doing jumping jacks. … There are some things that I need to get done (P-i1218ln8-19).

She expected that students complete the tasks she asked of them immediately because she genuinely wanted to see them succeed. If students appeared sluggish, she firmly told them that they were wasting time and that they needed to get back on task. The following three statements are examples of how she communicated urgency in the classroom:

> You need to stop looking around Don and get busy. What's taking you so long to get started? (P-o1108p3)

> Son, you need to hurry up because you are wasting instructional time. No, no, you are wasting time. (P-o1127p4)

> When I tell you to do something, do it right now. DON'T WAIT. (P-o1126p4)

Mrs. Pearl understood that her students needed to learn many skills to compete in an inequitable society where the stakes are high for Black students in particular. As such,

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when she observed what she perceived to be off-task behavior, she firmly redirected students to get back to work.

Conclusion

I began this dissertation with the goal of understanding how effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging. However, from Mrs. Pearl's perspective, behavior issues simply did not exist in her classroom. The findings indicate that Mrs. Pearl's teaching was deeply connected to who she was as a person. As a strong Black woman, her political clarity was a significant part of her character and it informed her work with students. She acknowledged that Black children were misunderstood and not cared for in ways that they perceived as caring. She also recognized racism and poverty as key hindrances her students' success. Her social reconstructionist orientation sought to prepare students for a successful life so that they could become change agents in society.

Mrs. Pearl believed that students were capable of success and worked with them to achieve success for the larger goal of changing the status quo. Mrs. Pearl's stance sought to prepare students for liberation, which included a commitment to empowering students and their families. In fact, she repeatedly mentioned breaking the mold for her students of color. Four principles guided the way she prepared students for liberation: transforming student identity, othermothering, facilitating student engagement, and insisting on high expectations. Mrs. Pearl created the conditions for learning for liberation by establishing an environment defined by comfort, intensity, modeling, and urgency. Her stance informed the ways in which she interacted with students, caring for them in ways that would help them break free from the social and economic inequality that confined them.
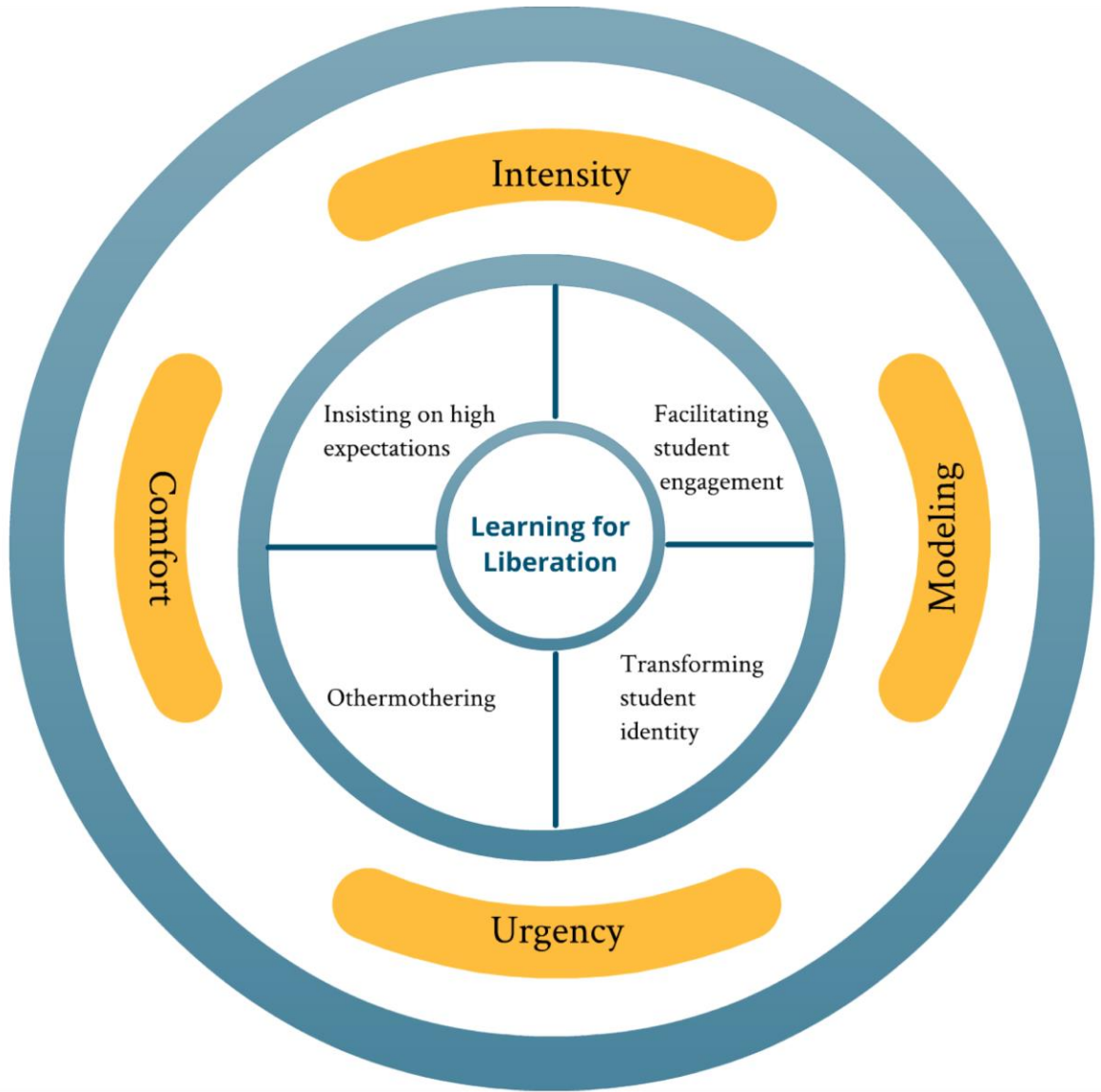
Figure 5-1. Mrs. Pearl's model of preparing students for liberation.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the Study

Disparities in punitive school discipline disproportionally affect children of color, where Black children are punished more frequently and more severely than any other racial group. The discipline gap has been the focus of many research agendas, in the pursuit of equitable educational opportunities for all students. Yet, it is clear that teachers differ from one another in their ability to establish caring classroom environments for their Black students. This dissertation attempts to add to the literature on effective teachers' perspectives and practices related to student behavior. Specifically, the study addressed the research question: How do effective teachers think about and work to transform behavior they view as challenging?

The literature related to student behavior and positive discipline is growing. However, studies that explore effective teachers, culturally responsive practitioners, and teachers of color are necessary to understand the racial dimension of student discipline. The present study was informed by culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) and culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC), which view culture, race, and teacher care as integral dimensions for interacting with Black children.

The study took place in one urban, high-poverty elementary school that indicated a discipline gap for Black students. Two effective fifth-grade teachers were chosen to participate in the study. They were nominated by the school's principal for obtaining repeated measures of high academic student performance, holding high expectations of students, and demonstrating successful approaches to working with student behavior. The study employed a constructivist approach that used interviews, observations, and

archival data to understand the perspectives and practices of the teachers. I followed

the teachers for two months to learn about their sense making and practice related to

what they perceived to be challenging student behavior. Constructivist grounded theory

methods (Charmaz, 2006) were used because they draw on shared experiences of the

researcher and participants as a means to understand teachers' perspectives and

practices.

The findings were presented in two case studies. It is important to remember that

the findings do not demonstrate how Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl worked to transform

behavior they viewed as challenging. This is because neither teacher framed student

behavior as challenging. Instead, I learned that the two teachers embraced their

responsibility to improve students' lives in similar, yet different ways. They assumed a

whole child approach to teaching by which they saw themselves as responsible for

preparing their students for their lives within and outside of school. The cases reveal

their commitment to students' academic achievement as well as their psychological

wellbeing.

Although she was nominated as an exemplary teacher, Mrs. Geller identified

herself as a former dictator who admitted to silencing students in her beginning years of

teaching. In the present study, I was able to capture how her teaching had evolved. Mrs.

Geller's teaching stance was centered on learning for life, and she enacted her stance

through five principles of practice which included knowing students and caring for them,

facilitating student engagement, differentiating instruction, assisting students to achieve

high expectations, and empowering students as collaborators of teaching and learning.

She established a classroom ethos characterized by respect, perseverance, comfort,

and urgency. Mrs. Geller was their life coach—committed to coaching students to achieve their maximum potential.

Similarly, Mrs. Pearl was committed to helping students to live successful lives. The explicit political clarity that informed her worldview acknowledged racism and poverty as students' lived experiences. Mrs. Pearl understood her students as racialized beings, and she believed it was her responsibility to prepare students to break free from society's chains that prevented them from access to successful lives. She enacted learning for liberation by transforming students' identities, othermothering, facilitating student engagement, and insisting on high expectations. The conditions that supported learning for liberation included comfort, intensity, modeling, and urgency.

In addition to providing an overview of the study, the purpose of this final chapter is to elaborate on conclusions drawn from the findings, to relate those conclusions to the extant research literature, and to discuss implications of the study's findings for practitioners and researchers. The chapter begins with a discussion of the major conclusions drawn from the study in relation to the previous research literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2. Then, the chapter concludes with implications for future practice and research.

Discussion of Findings

The study documents the experiences of two veteran teachers—one Black and one White—and focuses on Black children in high-poverty settings. The findings point to five noteworthy conclusions related to their work with students' behavior. First, the teachers thought about students' behavior within a larger mission of improving their lives. They expected students to need help learning a variety of skills and dispositions, and they embraced their responsibility to nurture the development of the whole child.

Second, Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl enacted teaching practices grounded in principles of CRCM. Third, the study extends previous findings from a small, but growing research base that highlights the significance of a particular kind of care for Black children. Fourth, the study sheds light on the purposes of helping students to gain access to the culture of power. Fifth, it reveals that educators may work more effectively with Black students if they reframe deficit and punitive views of student discipline.

Commitment to Improving Students' Lives

The stories of Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl reveal that they did not find behavior challenging. What I gleaned from the two practitioners was their commitment to improving students' lives. At the heart of Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl's practice is what Corbett et al. (2002) call an "it's my job" teaching approach. This approach insists that students can, will, and must succeed—and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure they achieve that success. In the literature, the "it's my job" approach is a defining characteristic of the warm demander—teachers who espouse values and enact practices central to their students' success (Bondy et al., 2013; Irvine & Fraser, 1998, Kleinfeld, 1975). The study revealed that Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl were warm demanders for their Black children; they embraced their responsibility of enriching their children's lives within and outside the classroom walls. Although Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl espoused similar commitments to improving their students' lives, they enacted these commitments differently.

Mrs. Geller's whole-child orientation acknowledged that students had to learn many life skills to have successful lives. These skills included teaching them how to respond in challenging situations, perseverance when tasks became difficult, and learning how to work with others. Just as she would not send students to the office for

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their inability to interpret a passage from a classroom novel, neither would she send them to the office for talking while she was explaining an assignment. Mrs. Geller viewed it as her responsibility to help students learn many skills by constantly coaching them. As their life coach, her role was to support *and* push students to meet her high expectations. She could not simply insist on her expectations; she had to show them *how* to reach success. Ladson-Billings (1994) echoed this sentiment regarding effective teachers of urban students: "Effective urban teachers play the role of 'conductors' or 'coaches' who assume responsibility for their students' academic development rather than playing the role of 'custodians' who merely watch over students" (p. 23).

Mrs. Pearl also had the desire for students to live successful lives and believed it was her responsibility to help them accomplish that success. She spoke similarly to Mrs. Geller about teaching more than academics and, interestingly, she asserted that behavior issues simply did not exist in her classroom. Her own experiences with racism and living in poverty led her to cultivate students' voices and help them see themselves in new ways. In this way, she was liberating them from society's chains that limited their access to successful life paths. Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl were not trying to control students' behavior; they were trying to change students' lives.

These findings are important for three reasons. First, they reveal two teachers who believe that academic learning is one of the many dimensions that define success. This is noteworthy given the high-stakes environment that ties teacher salaries to their students' test scores. Second, the study shows how both teachers are teaching against the grain in a school environment that promotes punitive school discipline practices (i.e., zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion). The cases of Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl

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show us how they actively resisted macro-level school structures that promoted harsh

discipline. Third, these findings point to the varied yet effective approaches of two

teachers, one White, and one Black, to improving the lives of their Black students. For

example, Mrs. Geller continually worked with a particular student on his organization

skills. Staying organized was a skill he needed to be successful later in life and thus,

she assisted him in creating and executing an action plan to meet their co-created goal.

On the other hand, Mrs. Pearl sought to improve her students' lives by transforming

their identities. It was imperative for Mrs. Pearl to help students see themselves in new

ways because they "[wouldn't] have a chance" (TB-1031p1) if they continued to

internalize the deficit labels that had been given to them. The teachers' focus on

improving students' lives is consistent with the CRT literature (Gay, 2010; Ladson-

Billings, 1994). Moreover, the data support the conclusions drawn by others that teacher

insistence plays a vital role in establishing a consistent, caring, and respectful

classroom ethos for Black children (Bondy et al., 2007; 2013; Delpit, 1995; Ware, 2006).

Practices Grounded in CRCM

This study provides further support to the conclusion that CRCM is an orientation

to teaching that helps teachers create caring environments that bolster student learning.

The CRCM literature asserts that effective teachers understand the role of culture in

student behavior and in teachers' judgments of behavior. These insights help to create

classroom environments that affirm students' identities and nurture their wellbeing. Mrs.

Geller and Mrs. Pearl's management styles eschewed a behaviorist approach, one that

emphasizes rewards and punishments for behavior, in favor of an approach that

promotes self-regulation and moral responsibility. In fact, neither teacher had behavior

charts that are common in many elementary classrooms. By developing students' life

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skills, rather than attempting to control their behavior, the teachers were intent on preparing their students to thrive.

Recognizing one's ethnocentrism and biases are central in enacting CRCM. Mrs. Geller frankly revealed the prior assumptions she made when she began her teaching career. She admitted to thinking that she knew what was best for her students, assumed she had to fix their "deficits," and once blamed parents for their lack of involvement in their children's education. Mrs. Geller's shifting dispositions occurred by looking within, and examining the assumptions and biases that guided her interactions with students. Her critical consciousness, initiated by her graduate coursework, prompted her to think about how being a rigid dictator may have oppressed and silenced the very students she tried to help reach success.

As described in the literature, CRCM is a frame of mind that drives teachers to develop deep knowledge of students as cultural beings to meet their specific learning needs. Thus, suggesting predetermined strategies to enact CRCM would be misleading. This was evident for Mrs. Geller, who explained that the differences in her students meant that she could not respond to them in the same way. Knowing students' cultural backgrounds and their families prompted a situated learner-centered pedagogy, using several different strategies to help them succeed. Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl's understanding of the broader political, economic, and social context prompted them to think about caring for their Black students in relevant ways.

A Particular Kind of Care

The third conclusion that emerged from the findings is the importance of Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl's demonstrations of care for their Black children. The literature review pointed to care as an integral part of the teacher-student relationship (Bondy et

al., 2013; Brown, 2003; Gay, 2010; Ware, 2006) and the significance of teacher political clarity (Bartolomé, 2009) in the educational experiences of students of color. Bartolomé (2009) explained that "a number of possibilities exist for preparing students to deal with the greater society's unfairness and inequality that range from engaging in explicit discussions … to more indirect ways (that nevertheless require a teacher to be politically clear)" (p. 342). The study showed both teachers working toward political clarity in explicit and implicit ways.

Getting to know students was one way Mrs. Geller convinced students that she cared for them. She established an ethos of care at the beginning of the year through getting-to-know-you-activities that communicated her deep interest in each student. Going beyond knowing students at the surface, she worked to know them on a personal level—knowing their families, struggles, and cultural backgrounds. From Mrs. Geller's perspective, she had to know students on a personal level if she was going to contribute to improving their lives. Most importantly, she conveyed care for students by refusing to give up on helping them achieve success. Expressing her care further, she actively removed small barriers (e.g., fixing a child's dilapidated backpack so that his materials would not fall out on his walk home) and large barriers (e.g., her willingness to become a child's foster mother) that could hinder their success. Her care aligns with Noddings' (1984) notion of engrossment in that she got to know students in order to understand what students perceived as care. Mrs. Geller understood that children, particularly Black children, must perceive teachers' actions, discourse, and instruction as caring (Delpit 1995; Noddings, 1984). Her engrossment determined the appropriate actions to communicate her unyielding care for them. Further, she worked to transform students'

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sociocultural realities through her commitment to improving their lives. Practices such as placing students in heterogeneous learning groups, creating a democratic learning environment, and removing barriers to their success were ways that she worked toward political clarity. Mrs. Geller improved her political clarity by recognizing the unequal power relations once present in her classroom, and by working to create a classroom community characterized by an ethos of mutual respect and comfort.

Mrs. Pearl's case also supports CRCTC (Roberts, 2010). Committed to helping her children navigate a racist society, Mrs. Pearl had to prepare them to take on the unavoidable challenges that lay ahead. One of the ways she demonstrated culturally relevant critical care was through her commitment to empowering students' voices to question the world around them. Mrs. Pearl instilled in her students the importance of caring for their peers by working together, helping one another, and encouraging their peers' progress. Mrs. Pearl was also concerned with uplifting students' families, and she expected students to use what they learned in school to educate their families at home. Thus, Mrs. Pearl enacted CRCTC to ensure the educational success of her Black children, but also to uplift the Black community at large (Roberts, 2010).

Mrs. Pearl's work to transform students' identities adds to the CRCTC literature that describes political clarity and concern for students' futures as ways that Black teachers enact care for their Black children. By helping students see themselves in new ways, she fostered identity reconstruction, which is crucial for children who have been placed at the margins of society. As their role model, she showed them what confidence looked like by exuding confidence herself. These manifestations of teacher care are

crucial for a racial group that has been subjected to disproportionate rates of punitive school discipline.

Experiencing the psychological effects as a member of a historically oppressed group, it is clear that Mrs. Pearl understood racism as far more than individual prejudice and stereotypes. Instead, racism is defined by systemic inequities that operate at the macro-level. Crucial in the perpetuation of systemic racism is the role of cultural capital and the advantages it brings. For years, many Whites have had access to social networks of White friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. These networks are crucial in that they provide access to important resources, such as information about openings for high-paying jobs, health care, and educational opportunities. In essence, cultural capital is accumulated knowledge that confers power and life status. By telling students, "do what I tell you to do and you will have success," Mrs. Pearl was explicitly teaching her students codes within the culture of power (Delpit, 1995). She viewed students as change agents; therefore, she prepared them to take action to challenge the status quo. Telling students not to slouch, showing students how she communicated with colleagues, and modeling professional dress, she made the culture of power transparent. For Mrs. Pearl, helping Black students attain success through the explicit teaching of the culture of power was the highest form of her care.

Acquiring Cultural Capital *For What*?

A discussion about acquiring cultural capital is significant because it helps us think more clearly about the aims of education for Black children and other historically oppressed groups. When teachers explicitly teach what Delpit (1995) refers to as the culture of power, why do they do so? That is, acquiring cultural capital, *for what?* The scholarship of Ladson-Billings (1994) helps us to consider these questions. She writes:

> There is some evidence to suggest more generally that when African American students attempt to achieve in school they do so at a psychic cost. Somehow many have come to equate exemplary performance in school with a loss of their African American identity; that is, doing well in school is seen as 'acting white.' Thus, if they do not want to 'act white,' the only option, many believe, is to refuse to do well in school. (p. 11)

Acquiring cultural capital at the psychic cost of losing one's identity is what Ladson-Billings and other critical race theorists refer to as an assimilation to Whiteness.

Rather than assimilate, teachers who enact culturally relevant critical care expect their students to excel, and they affirm students' cultures as a significant dimension of the learning process. They help students *choose* success without losing their identity as they work to do so. We must ask ourselves, when educators teach Black students the culture of power, are they helping them assimilate Whiteness, further perpetuating White supremacy? Or, are they helping students gain access to the culture of power with the ultimate goal of critiquing and transforming it? In order to reduce the discipline gap, teachers should consider the difference between obtaining cultural capital for the purposes of fitting into the culture of power versus obtaining cultural capital in order to challenge the culture of power. The culture of power points to the relationship between those who make the rules and those who are expected to abide by them. When teachers instruct their students of color to critique and thereby transform the culture of power, they are not only affirming their students' identities, they are also working to eradicate the racism that fuels the discipline gap.

Not surprisingly, Mrs. Pearl's desire for students to break the mold led her to explicitly teach society's implicit codes so students could gain access to the culture of power with the aim of transforming it. Evidence also reveals that Mrs. Geller was interested in students becoming change agents in their communities. For example, she

alluded to the desire for students to "be strong contributors to society" and "challenge scenarios" so that they could enact "some type of action" (S. Geller, personal communication, March 3, 2013). Although Mrs. Geller did not describe the strong social justice commitments of Mrs. Pearl, her work provides some evidence of her desire for students to become change agents in society.

Reframing Discipline

A discussion about the research question is necessary here. The research question was based on the assumption that the teachers found certain student behavior troubling or difficult to manage. By asking the "wrong" question, the study revealed that Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl refused to label their students as deficient, deviant, or bad. They did not see their students in this way. Indeed, the teachers challenged the deficit thinking ideology (Valencia, 2010) about the capabilities of their Black students. Instead of viewing students as deficient, Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl focused on success, students' strengths, and improving students' lives.

As the study concludes, it is noteworthy to observe that much of the discourse about discipline is framed in a deficit perspective (this very discourse helped frame my research question). That is, students' behavior is viewed as problematic and, therefore, it must be "fixed." Viewing students as deficient has long been deeply embedded in the culture of urban and high-poverty schools. Deficit thinking blames the student or the student's family rather than examining the larger systemic inequities (Valencia, 2010) that lead to the positioning of some students as good and others as bad. Rather than trying to fix what is "wrong" with a child, educators might scrutinize their assumptions about behavior. Educators who become vigilant about their own blindspots may be able to dismantle deficit thinking and work to provide equitable opportunities for all students.

Implications

In addition to building on the existing literature about Black children and the discipline gap, the study offers implications for future practice and research. Implications for practice will be explored first, followed by implications for researchers.

Implications for Practice

Currently, less than 16% of teachers are of color, whereas 42% of students in public K-12 schools come from minority backgrounds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). By the year 2035, demographers predict that the majority student population in public schools will be made up of students of color (Hodgkinson, 2001). As U.S. schools become increasingly diverse, the teaching force remains considerably White, monolingual, and middle-class (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). As a part of the dominant culture, White preservice teachers in particular enter teacher education programs unprepared to teach students of color, particular those in high-poverty settings (Sleeter, 2008).

Many preservice teachers begin their preparation programs with little cross-cultural experiences and adopt a colorblind mentality, claiming they do not see race. Some view their Black students from deficit-based perspectives and their assumptions about the way things are or ways of behaving are "the norm to which others should aspire" (Valli, 1995). If teachers view the world through a White middle-class lens, they may be unconscious of how schools perpetuate racist practices, such as interpreting the behaviors of their children of color as defiant and removing them from the classroom. Disregarding students' cultures can leave teachers to interpret student behavior from a White middle-class lens, which fails to understand that behavior is culturally influenced,

and what may be culturally normal to a student of color may be inappropriate to the White teacher.

Although some preservice teachers enter preparation programs with little cross-cultural experience, it is important that teacher educators do not assume their White preservice teachers are deficient. Lazar (2004) writes that teacher educators should not assume that their students from affluent communities are colorblind and that students from culturally diverse or urban communities are culturally sensitive. Instead, he contends that teacher educators should "spend some time finding out about the views and attitudes that all of our education students bring to the university" (Lazar, 2004, p. 148). Reconceptualizing preservice teachers as learners who seek to enter a profession to make a difference in the lives of children may be how teacher educators begin to coach teacher candidates to be successful.

While White teachers are capable of teaching their students of color well, this does not happen without diligence. Connecting students' school learning experiences with their home environments, or what Irvine (1990) described as cultural synchronization, is a promising approach for teachers to close the racial discipline gap. Teacher educators must be responsible for helping novices develop cultural competence related to the students in their care (Sleeter, 2008). Helping teachers to build on students' assets and use CRCM strategies may help them create classrooms in which students of color can thrive. Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl are models of teachers who act with political clarity to facilitate the development of their students as self-determining and resilient people.

In addition, teacher educators may want to focus on the notion of culturally relevant critical care and how that differs from a universal conception of care to help

novices focus more on establishing strong teacher-student relationships and how students perceive their care. It was imperative for Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl to demonstrate their care, and most importantly, it was necessary for their students to perceive their care as genuine. For the two teachers, telling children they cared was simply not enough. Furthermore, teacher educators must communicate the difference between expecting high-quality work from their students and sympathizing with their students' plight as low-income and/or Black. The latter pities students and does not help them reach success. Despite students' obstacles, Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl refused to lower their expectations, instilling the belief that all of their students could succeed.

The literature on teacher beliefs indicates that teachers are ill-prepared for learning *how* to learn from someone else's community (Sleeter, 2008). One-shot workshops, which continue to be common in multicultural education, have little to no effect. Similarly, teacher preparation that attempts to teach about diversity using didactic presentations are more likely to teach preservice teachers stereotypes than improve teaching (McDiarmid, 1992). A promising approach to help preservice teachers learn about various racial, cultural, and class groups is through community-based learning connected with professional coursework. Community-based learning provides opportunities for preservice teachers to learn through real life experiences along with course assignments that emphasize reflection (Sleeter, 2008).

Several studies have documented the learning of teachers in communities that may be unfamiliar to them (e.g., Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Nordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1993) and although longer experiences tend to yield the deepest learning, shorter immersion experiences can also be valuable. Perhaps what is most crucial is not the

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duration of the community-based learning experience, but the reflection and guided conversations teacher educators have with preservice teachers regarding these unfamiliar experiences. It is essential that teacher educators create the conditions for potentially uncomfortable conversations so that White preservice teachers are able to reflect on their own biases and assumptions and have a greater awareness of systemic inequity.

Developing teachers' political clarity is likely to require a reconsideration of preservice teacher education. An equity-oriented approach must be at the center of teacher preparation programs; that is, a social justice stance must be woven throughout teacher preparation programs if teacher educators are to work on behalf of Black students and other historically oppressed groups. With greater insight into teachers' beliefs and their experiences with learning how to learn from someone else's community, teacher educators and school leaders can be better prepared to challenge ingrained beliefs about the capabilities of Black children and cultivate in teachers the deep commitment to the wellbeing and success of the children they teach.

In addition to university-based coursework, the literature reveals that novice teachers' knowledge about teaching is also influenced by their cooperating teachers (Anderson, 2007). Therefore, teacher preparation programs should work more intentionally to place preservice teachers with cooperating teachers like Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl. By doing so, preservice teachers can be provided with the opportunity to use their university-based conceptual tools and implement them in an environment that supports and affirms students of color. While this may sound like a lofty goal, placing

prospective teachers with skilled, culturally relevant caring pedagogues who act on behalf of their students of color may be beneficial for closing the discipline gap.

Furthermore, many urban school districts have adopted restorative practices as a means to narrow the discipline gap. Restorative practices, which emerged from the restorative justice movement, are used by educators to help students express their opinions, build relationships, and problem-solve as a group (Wachtel, 1997). When a rule has been violated, students join together to play an active role in addressing the harm and restoring the community. Restorative practices are concerned with fixing problems *with* people rather than doing things *to* them (Sawin & Zehr, 2007). These practices may be a promising approach to reduce the discipline gap and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline because they focus on repairing the wrongdoing and building relationships rather than punishing offenders. This may be particularly effective for Black children whose culture places a significant emphasis on the community at large. As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, Treitman Shores did not have an schoolwide approach for addressing student behavior, which led to many of the same students sitting in the office. Restorative practices might be an effective means for keeping students engaged and helping them to learn how to build community to prevent wrongdoing.

Implications for Future Research

In addition to implications for teachers and teacher educators, this study provides implications for the researchers who investigate issues related to student discipline. Several implications for future research directions are examined here.

First, improved measurement of the racial discipline gap will likely advance areas of further inquiry. Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010) pointed out several

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methodological issues in the measurement of disproportionality, including the gauge for determining a significant level of disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2008). Improved reporting of punitive disciplinary infractions would also help future research efforts. In my attempt to collect information on discipline in MDCPS, I was able to find discipline data for Treitman Shores with ease. However, when I asked the MDCPS for districtwide student discipline data for all elementary schools to ascertain whether Treitman Shores had large disparities compared with other elementary schools, they were unable to provide this information. This information would have helped me to access suspension and expulsion rates across the county.

Second, additional research that highlights the work of effective teachers of Black students is still needed. In the most recent report from The National Center for Education Statistics (2011), stark gaps exist between White and Black children in achievement, high school graduation rates, and educational attainment. Despite these findings, empirical studies have demonstrated the potential for Black students to succeed in school (e.g. Cooper 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The educational community is in need of strong empirical research that demonstrates how students' cultural backgrounds and teacher care inform classroom life.

Third, future studies may focus particularly on how the teachers set up their classroom communities from the beginning of the school year. The data collection for the study began in late October and concluded at the end of December. Initially, the project was to begin at the start of the academic school year in order to capture how the two teachers established the classroom environment. Issues with obtaining access from the school district prevented me from beginning on the first day of school. In the future,

researchers may want to observe during the first few weeks of school to understand how teachers created environments grounded in CRCM and CRCTC.

Fourth, research might move beyond individual teachers' classrooms and look at the culture of entire schools. What are the characteristics of schools that embody the "it's my job" approach? How might schools communicate CRCTC? What are their discipline policies? And how do they differ from schools that emphasize control and practice zero-tolerance? How do educators in schools that have reduced the discipline gap describe their transformation? To effect change on a larger scale, additional research is needed on the kinds of approaches schools use to reduce the discipline gap.

Fifth, it is necessary that future research efforts address student views about discipline and race. This study examined effective teachers' views and practices, but it did not include the voices of their students. To date, there are no known studies about Black elementary students' perspectives about discipline. Focusing on Black boys, additional research may answer the questions: What are the experiences of young Black boys who have been persistently disciplined? How do they construct disruption? How do they understand their own and their teachers' behavior in school? Future researchers may want to interview individual boys or conduct focus group interviews to understand their collective voice. Focus groups with young Black boys may provide important insights into what they consider to be helpful and hurtful teacher and school practices.

Conclusion

The study described two effective teachers who elicited cooperation from the same Black students who were perceived as disruptive by other teachers and school

personnel. How did Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl engage their students? They developed caring teacher-student relationships with the very students that others perceived as unruly and hopeless—students whom other teachers dismissed to the office at any opportunity.

This study adds to the current knowledge base related to reducing the discipline gap and how effective teachers perceive student behavior. The study demonstrates the teachers' unwavering commitment to improving students' lives. Further, it confirms the practices of CRCM and expands knowledge about a culturally relevant kind of caring for Black children. In Mrs. Geller and Mrs. Pearl, researchers and practitioners have models of the perseverance and urgency that are central to developing ways to narrow the racial discipline gap.

Table A-1. Length of interviews

Participant	Interview	Length in minutes	Pages of transcription
Mrs. Geller	1	76	21
	2	62	23
	3	64	24
	4	email	email
Total		202 minutes	68 pages
Mrs. Pearl	1	68	24
	2	41	16
	3	62	22
	4	email	email
Total		171 minutes	62 pages

APPENDIX B
OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Weeks 1-3

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	G		P	G	
Afternoon	P	G		P	

The rotation allows for each teacher to be observed during different times of the day.

Each teacher was observed three times per week.

Weeks 4-6

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning		G	P		
Afternoon				G	P

The rotation allows for each teacher to be observed during different times of the day.

Each teacher was observed twice per week.

Weeks 7-8

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning		G	P		
Afternoon					

As the observations came to an end, each teacher was observed for half of the day,

once per week.

The schedules above provide an example of how frequently I was in the teachers'

classrooms. According to this schedule, each teacher should have been observed 17

times. However, because of teacher planning days and holidays, I observed each teacher 14 times. Approximately 35 hours were spent in each teacher's classroom.

*Note: G=Mrs. Geller, P=Mrs. Pearl

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Teacher Interviews

Formal interview 1: Rapport building and background information

1. Personal demographics:

Let's start with some basic personal information about you. How would you want me to describe you in my dissertation (I'll ask for some professional information in just a moment)? Use prompts as needed, such as:

- Tell me about where you were born and raised.

- How do you characterize your racial and cultural background?

- Tell me about your family.

- How would you describe the community you live in?

- What do you do when you're not at school?

2. Employment related demographics:

- What degree(s) and certifications do you hold?

- How long have you been a teacher at this school? In total?

- What grades and subjects do you currently teach? What have you previously taught?

- Please describe the student demographics of your school.

3. Tell me about your class this year. (Probe for: culture, race, SES, interests, family backgrounds).

4. How is this year's class similar to and different from last year's class?

5. Tell me about the relationship you have with your students. Are some relationships easier to cultivate than others? Why do you think this may be?

6. How would you describe your relationships with students' families? Are there things you do to build and/or maintain these relationships?

7. Of the many things you do as a teacher, which do you consider to be the most important?

8. What are your greatest strengths as a teacher? What are some things you've done that you are particularly proud of? Can you give me an example?

9. As you know, you were nominated as a teacher who is effective with student behavior. What are your thoughts about this? Why do you think your principal nominated you?

10. Tell me about school-wide policies and procedures/district-wide policies and procedures in place for student behavior.

   • What is your overall feeling about these policies and procedures?

Formal interviews 2-4: Talking about student behavior

(Note: Interviews two, three, and four began with questions related to specific classroom observations and teacher comments based on ongoing review of the data. These questions included but were not limited to the five examples provided below.)

First I'd like to thank you for participating in this study and allowing me to sit in on your classroom. Now that I've spent X weeks with you and your students, I'd like to ask you some questions about your classroom:

1. I notice that you frequently (name a practice observed repeatedly). Tell me more about this. [Repeat as needed]

2. I notice that (student's name) frequently (describe what student does/says). What do you make of this? Are there things you need to do to follow up on this? [Repeat as needed]

3. It looks to me like (name something teacher appears to value) is very important to you. Tell me about this. [Repeat as needed]

4. I noticed that you call (student's name) a lot. Tell me about him/her. What are you working on with him/her? [Repeat as needed]

5. You frequently tell students (state what teacher often says). What is your reasoning behind this? [Repeat as needed]

Now, I'd like to ask you more general questions related to student behavior.

Interview 2:

1. As you know, I'm interested in the ways you think about student behavior. Tell me about your approach to student behavior. What "works" in your classroom?

2. What expectations do you have for classroom behavior and responsibility? How do you communicate those expectations to students?

3. What do you consider to be challenging student behavior? How do you define student disruption?

4. Whose behavior are you concerned about? What concerns you? What do you think you might do about it? Are there other things you've tried?

Interview 3:

1. Do you think about student behavior now in the same way as you did when you first began to teach?

- What is the same?

- What is different?

- Why has your thinking changed?

2. Are there special things teachers should know about student behavior as related to student demographics [Probe: race, culture, gender, SES]?

3. Whose behavior are you concerned about? What concerns you? What do you think you might do about it? Are there other things you've tried?

4. What would be important to have in a discipline policy or program?

Interview 4:

1. What kinds of experiences have you had that have shaped the way you view student behavior?

   - Probe: Let's talk a bit more. Does anything stand out to you as an "aha" moment? Tell me about that.

   - Probe: Does anything stand out to you that has directly impacted what you do or how you think about student behavior? Tell me more about this.

2. Include questions related to archival data as needed. For instance, "I've received minutes from meetings of the school discipline committee. I noticed that [indicate a particular action taken by the committee]. What do you make of this action? Does it affect your practice?"

3. Whose behavior are you concerned about? What concerns you? What do you think you might do about it? Are there other things you've tried?

4. Are there things you are still working on related to student behavior? If so, what are they?

Formal interview 5: Member checking

Now that you have read about my emergent findings, please take a minute to think about how your perspectives about student behavior have been represented.

1. What is your general reaction to the material I've given you to review?

2. Are there any places where I misrepresented your words?

3. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your views and approaches to working with student behavior?

Possible questions for informal interviews

(Note: Although these informal interactions with the teachers will occur often, they will necessarily be brief. Some of the questions may be used during formal interviews.)

1. I noticed (describe a specific teaching practice or an incident during the observation). Tell me more about this. Why did you make that decision?

2. How did you decide to (name what teacher did) instead of doing something else?

   - Was it effective?

   - Why not?/How do you know?

   - Are there things you need to do to follow up on this? Please explain.

   - Might you handle this differently next time?

3. I noticed that student ---- did (describe what student did). What was your reaction to this? What caused you to react in the way that you did? How do you think the student perceived what you did?

4. Why did you group students the way you did?

5. Imagine that (describe a different turn of events in the lesson) had occurred during this lesson. What would you have done?

Other possible questions related to specific instances that occurred during the class observation, or probed further about answers to the above questions.

Behavior Support Personnel Interview

1. Let's begin with some basic information about your job description.

   - Tell me about some of the things you do related to your job.

   - How long have you been a [insert job title] at this school?

2. Please describe the student demographics of your school.

3. Tell me about school-wide policies and procedures/district-wide policies and procedures in place for student behavior.

   - What is your overall feeling about these policies and procedures?

   - Who decides what these policies and procedures will be?

   - Are these policies and procedures consistently implemented?

   - If not, why not?

   - If yes, what facilitates their implementation?

4. Do teachers receive support with student behavior? If so, tell me about this.

5. What happens for children who exhibit particularly challenging behavior?

6. Include questions related to archival data as needed. For instance, "What documents should I be sure to look at so that I can understand how teachers work with student behavior at this school?"; "What else do I need to know or do in order to understand how teachers work with student behavior at this school?"; "I've had an opportunity to read the school discipline handbook and noticed that this school has an In-School-Suspension program."

- What is the process for getting sent to ISS?

- What are some reasons why students are sent there?

- Do some teachers use ISS more than others?

- What do you do, if anything, about students who have been sent to ISS on multiple occasions?

- What does the school do, if anything, about students who have been sent to ISS on multiple occasions?

APPENDIX D
CODE REPRESENTATION

Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory methods guided the data analysis process. Below is an example of extracting initial codes taken from interview and observational data, conceptualizing them into larger focused codes, and forming a larger core theme. This example is one of the four conditions that described Mrs. Pearl's teaching.
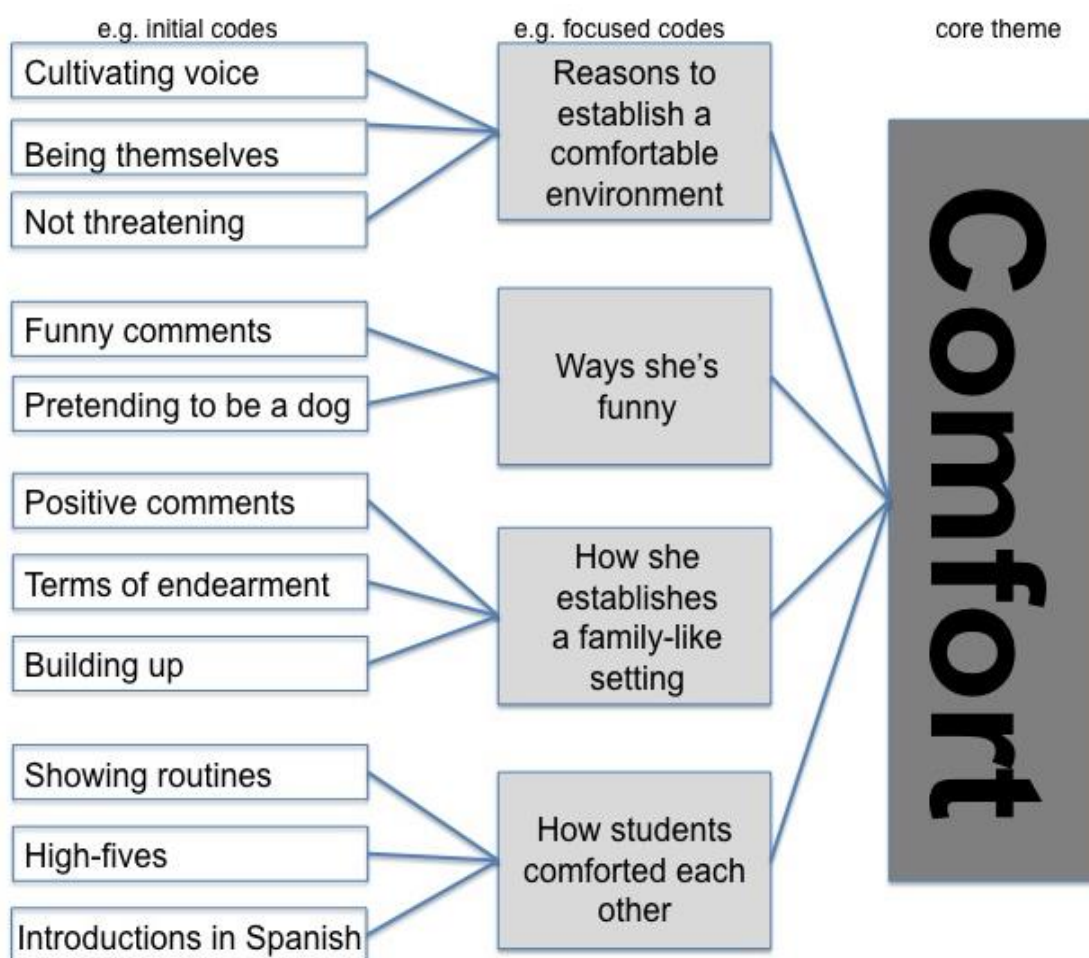
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elyse Hambacher was born in Miami, Florida. She has a younger sister, Evette Hambacher, both born to a Chinese mother and a German-American father. She grew up in Miami and attended years of Mandarin Saturday school, at her mother's insistence. She refused to attend when she became a rebellious teenager and regrets it ever since. She graduated from the International Baccalaureate Program at North Miami Senior High School in 2001. She then continued to earn a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education at the University of Florida and a master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University in New York.

After graduating from Columbia, Elyse taught fourth grade in south Florida. She later joined the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme and taught English to K-8 students for the Kumamoto City Board of Education in Japan. A year later, she returned home to teach Kindergarten in the same school where she began her teaching career. Elyse began to pursue her Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Florida in 2009.

Upon completion of the Ph.D. degree, Elyse will begin a position as an Assistant Professor of Community and Culture in Education at the University of New Hampshire. She will relocate to the seacoast of Portsmouth, NH with her chocolate lab-weimeraner, Aubrey. She plans to continue traveling the world, eating good food, practicing Bikram yoga, and loving life.