ABSTRACT

Supporting the RISE of Black Boys Through Alternative Education:
A Qualitative Case Study

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The American education system is one of the most important institutions of
learning on the global stage and provides a path to freedom and success for those who
embark on the journey. Despite the noble and idealistic aims of the American education
system, there is room for growth, improvement in academic achievement, disciplinary
action, teacher-student relationships, and mentoring imbedded during the school day for
Black boys. Black boys are in danger of returning to the streets because of high failure
rates in the schools they attend. The Black–White achievement gap and the school-to-
prison pipeline remained significant even with 21st-century advancements in
technological knowledge. Through this study, the researcher raises concerns that
challenge whether the ideals of equality and equity for Black boys exist in classrooms
throughout the U.S. educational system.

The general problem of low achievement for students of color highlights the
reality that Black boys who live in poverty and urban environments are the most
underserved student population and are doubly vulnerable to academic failure in
traditional U.S. classrooms (Sanders et al., 2018; Tate et al., 2014). This study examines
why Black boys fail in the traditional setting and why they succeed in the alternative

setting. Factors such as the achievement gap, implicit bias at school, and the school-to-prison-pipeline, could be contributing reasons to Black boys' continued academic failures. More importantly, the study evaluated which tenets of alternative education as motivation for success. More precisely, this research explored the systems at RISE Academy High School, an alternative high school in Tyler ISD, Tyler, Texas, that helped Black boys to be academically successful at higher rates than they experienced in traditional schools.

This study aimed to examine culturally relevant pedagogy and best practices such, as smaller class sizes and flexible scheduling as guiding tools to accelerate African American male academic achievement. Matriculation from the traditional school setting to the alternative setting for Black boys in the Tyler Independent School District in Tyler, Texas, provided a sense of calm to the emotional currents that Black boys have experienced in the education.

Supporting the RISE of Black Boys Through Alternative Education:
A Qualitative Case Study

by

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A Dissertation

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DEDICATION

To my three sons, Ke'Ovay, Ar'Darius and Malachi, I dedicate this work to you. I pray because of this study, you and your sons will ultimately experience what it feels like to be educated in a system that counts you as a viable asset irrespective to color.

To my best friend of 45 years, Christophor R. Timmons, you exited this journey January 23, 2021 and life has never been the same. I dedicate this work to you. You were and are a truly exceptional human being. Rest in His Love.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Introduction

The education system in the United States of America is one of the most critical learning institutions, as our country remains a global economic and social powerhouse. Education provides a path to freedom and success for those who choose to embark on the journey. However, what happens when a person's choice to embark upon the journey is no longer a choice?

Unlike other nations, the American education system, created to educate 100% of the population from kindergarten through twelfth grade, has trouble with its mission. In 1848, Horace Mann, an advocate for universal public education, viewed education as the great equalizer of men (Duncan, 2021). These ideals also capture the noted aims of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, which calls for a nation that guarantees domestic harmony and ensures the overall welfare of its citizens. Over a century and a half later, in his address celebrating the launch of the Mindset Network, Nelson Mandela (2003) asserted that education was a critical catalyst of change in society. Democracy considers both of these perspectives and evokes the idea that education is the key component in attaining true freedom.

Despite the American education system's noble and idealistic aims, there are gaps in the system that negatively affect a number of students—mainly students from low-income areas. Ta-Nehisi Coates correlates the U.S. schoolhouse and Baltimore's streets as one in the same (Coates, 2015). He claims that failure in the Baltimore school system

could directly correlate with loss of life for Black boys (Coates, 2015). Simultaneously, school suspension and/or expulsion could send some of these Black boys to the streets, potentially facing a similar fate—death.

Nasir bin Olu Dara Jones, an American rapper better known as Nas, in his song "Life is Good," writes to Black boys saying, "dark boy don't cry, there's too much life in those eyes … you've never been the same as anyone else, don't think the same as anyone else …" (Jones, 2012). The lyrical expression validates the uniqueness of Black boys. Nas, however, attempts to soothe the pain that comes with being a Black boy. He writes about the prejudice that Black boys face, which includes many other negative experiences coupled with the systematic injustices of society. Nas speaks about the resolve within these individuals to overcome the obstacles they face, if only they are given the chance to do so. His lyrics explore the mandate to Black boys to remain vital and vigilant although the odds are stacked against them.

Coates and Nas hold very different perspectives on education than Mandela and Mann's noble ideals. Generations separated Coates and Nas from Mandela and Mann. The educational experience and desire was different for Coats and Nas. The perspectives of Coates (2015) and Nas (Jones, 2012) offer unique insight into the reality of education in our country. Do students of color, precisely Black boys, have access to the same educational opportunities as other students? Black boys often seek to gain educational experience, but they are often hindered by an educational system premised on biased perspectives and unequitable circumstances. Before analyzing how to serve our Black boys in this country through education, it is important to consider the ways poverty, incarceration, and substance abuse threaten their propensity to live productive lives.

This study explores a dual focus: Why some Black boys fail in the traditional high school setting, and why they succeed in the alternative education programs. The research specifically focuses on students at RISE Academy, which is an alternative school in Tyler, Texas. The study investigates why RISE Academy High School has become a beacon of academic achievement for Black boys. This research intends to examine how RISE Academy High School provides additional opportunities for Black boys to succeed, despite the systemic biases ingrained in traditional public-school systems. Systemic bias most often materializes via school disciplinary infractions, the lack of authentic teacher-student relationships, and a lack of positive self-image.

This study begins by introducing the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. The tenets of CRP help to examine why and how Black boys at RISE High School are experiencing greater academic success than they did in traditional high school settings. Findings from this study can potentially shape the education of Black boys in all school settings by providing educators with a tool that helps guide discussion and self-reflection. More importantly, this study can serve as a guide for educators in their quest to make both educational equity and academic success a reality for Black boys.

Statement of the Problem

Black boys often operate at an academic deficit in the traditional educational system. Students of color raised below the poverty line are the most underserved student population in the United States. They are doubly vulnerable to academic failure in U.S. classrooms than many other subgroups (King et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2018). Black boys underperform on state and national achievement tests, suffer systemic underachievement in reading and math, struggle through lack of inclusion in the classroom, maintain declining academic statistics higher than other races, and suffer

systemic and structural inequities in and outside the traditional classrooms (Jenkins, 2006; King et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2018).

O'Connor et al.'s (2014) research explores the prominent factors directly affecting the education of Black boys. Their research explores how urban school deficiencies and socioeconomic factors serve as environmental stressors for Black boys, thus directly affecting their academic achievement (O'Connor et al., 2014). A few prominent components that affect the academic achievement of Black boys include the lack of physical and financial resources in urban school districts and the lack of out-of-school economic and supportive structures that are often the in urban neighborhoods (O'Connor et al., 2014). Black boys also face harsher discipline in school. They often attend schools without sufficient materials, and often read below their grade level (Lynch, 2015). These troubling truths affect the academic success of Black boys in the traditional school setting. Each of these discrepancies in the system highlight specific and overarching factors that contribute to the high academic failure rates of our Black boys in this country.

President George W. Bush and President Barak H. Obama both recognized the achievement gap and the work needed to address the inequities and disparities in the educational system (Peterson, 2016). In 2001, President Bush passed the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) to increase educator accountability as it pertains to student achievement (Peterson, 2016). During the next administration, President Obama approved the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to remove the federal red tape and by providing aid to help the reforms of Bush's NCLB law (Peterson, 2016). Regrettably, the academic achievement between Black and White students remained the same. Today, the achievement gap for Black boys remains unchanged.

As a country, the exploration of individual factors that contribute to Black boys continued academic failures and disparities in traditional comprehensive high schools is crucial. The amalgamation of fighting against the systemic problems that Black boys face and examining why alternative education works for so many students, specifically students of color, should be the nucleus educational reform.

As the principal of a dropout prevention, credit recovery high school in Tyler, Texas, I am fully aware of the environmental and systemic disparities facing our Black community. In Tyler ISD, we have a large Black student population. I have witnessed many students break the bonds of poverty to attain success, but many others could not.

In order to address the issues of the lack of academic success for Black boys in traditional education, we must first identify the specific elements impeding and affecting their academic achievement. Then, we must explore and refine impactful interventions that aid these students. Finally, we must figure out how we can provide these interventions throughout the country.

It is important to remember the Declaration of Independence's ideals that all men are considered equals. In the 18th century, men viewed African Americans as sub-human and later only classified as three-fifths of a person; our founding fathers coined this phrase as a pillar of our country. Systemic injustice has plagued our nation since its inception and now, we have the tools and resources to fight back. We must acknowledge the systemic and institutional inequities, which still exist, and work to discover tangible ways Black boys can adequately participate and achieve in a "rigged" system. This study examined factors that contribute to the high academic failure for Black boys in the traditional educational setting while simultaneously looking at the preponderance of factors that attributed to the success of Black boys in the alternative setting.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study explores the implicit factors that contribute to Black boys' high academic failure in traditional comprehensive high schools. Moreover, this study identifies the factors at the local alternative high school in Tyler, Texas, that contribute to the success of Black boys attending RISE Academy. Through this study, I explored the data regarding the achievement gap and examined the implicit factors that prevent Black boys from attaining academic success in traditional high school settings but produce great success in an alternative educational setting. The study explores the classroom culture and norms prevalent in traditional educational settings and examines the promise of culturally relevant pedagogy. Furthermore, the study investigates relational capacity as a catalyst in the success of Black boys in alternative education.

Historically, traditional classroom instruction did not include culturally relevant pedagogy and its practices. Howard contends that the development of culturally relevant teaching strategies is contingent upon critical reflection about teachers and their students' race and culture (Howard, 2003). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is designed to accentuate students' home culture while simultaneously bridging gaps and meeting the needs of the local district (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition, CRP creates a gateway to unlocking student success by providing educators with the opportunity to reflect on practices and strategies that actually engage Black boys. Implementing culturally relevant practices narrows the Black–White achievement gap by putting equity and equality at the forefront of pedagogy.

This purpose of this study is to identify and explore the root of the academic failure of Black boys in traditional high schools. The study also explores the ecological factors during the school day, after the school day, and in the home that influence or

impede Black boys' academic success. Finally, the study gathers insight about the systems and structures that are in place at a local alternative school that leads to greater academic success for Black male students.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do Black boys describe their experiences in the traditional educational setting?

2. How does the experience at RISE Academy differ from the experience in the traditional educational setting?

3. Why do Black boys believe they experience greater academic success in the alternative educational setting?

Theoretical Framework

This research project looks at myriad factors that serve as a conduit to the success of Black boys. Ecological and cultural indicators—such as single parent realities, parental academic capabilities, and familial higher academic achievement—negatively affect and influence Black boys' academic achievement. Each of these areas of inquiry for this research project provide insight into the implicit factors that affect Black boys' high academic failure rate at traditional comprehensive high schools.

By examining the processes of RISE Academy High School, a local alternative high school, the research highlights how positive relational capacity, or positive authentic relationships between teachers and students (Nelson, 2016); smaller class sizes (Shin, 2012); self-paced education (Farah, 2020); and evidenced-best practices for alternative education (Thomson, 2018) prove successful for Black boys in Tyler ISD. In short, this research study goes beyond generalities to analyze and compare the implicit factors that contribute to Black boys' failure in education and the factors that contribute to the success of Black boys in education.

The framework of this study is built on a foundation based on the concepts of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) expresses that cultural relevance means moving beyond language into a more robust aspect of school and student culture, while also "using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically" (p. 20). Geneva Gay (2015) summarizes culturally relevant teaching using cultural knowledge, cultural experiences, cultural references, and diverse student groups' learning styles makes education relevant and useful. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy incorporates all aspects of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy includes three key concepts that are salient to this study: relational capacity, cultural attestation, and validation.

Relational Capacity

Relational capacity, presented through the practice of mentorship and student–teacher relationships, further developed the importance of connectedness for Black boys. The first element of relational capacity, active mentoring, allows the mentor to redress a student's academic unpreparedness and social voids (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Brooms and Davis explains that effective mentoring aids Black boys' academic, social development, and coping skills (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

The second element of relational capacity is relationship building between teacher and student. Relationship building focuses on those meaningful interactions between the teacher and the student that help develop trust and comfort between both the teacher and the student (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Benard (2002) touts the power of a teacher, while Rita Pierson and Zaretta Hammond highlight the importance of student–teacher relationships. Pierson emphasizes that kids learn better from teachers they have an

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amicable relationship with, which focuses on building relationships in the classroom (Pierson, 2013). Benard (2002) indicates that every child needs a champion, someone who will push them and cheer for their successes no matter how large or small. Both parties indicated that relationships are essential in driving a successful classroom and school culture that steers students towards academic and social success.

Cultural Attestation and Validation

  The last concepts used within the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy framework are cultural attestation and cultural validation. Cultural attestation and validation—when exhibited by the teacher—affirms a student's cultural heritage (Thomas & Berry, 2019). Cultural attestation and cultural validation, as culturally relevant pedagogy products, add to the idea that all kids learn differently and students from all ethnic groups add their unique value to the classroom and the conversation (Gay, 2015). Gay also states that cultural responsiveness and culturally relevant teachers develop a myriad of comprehensive learning opportunities for the whole child. It is important to recognize that students are from different backgrounds and cultural upbringings. These individual perspectives have an intense impact on how they learn. Attestation and validation seek to identify these cultural differences and utilize the beauty of diversity to create a positive classroom and school culture for students. When a student feels validated and seen in their identity, they will feel more confident and comfortable in their ability to succeed.

  Mentoring, relationship building, and cultural attestation and validation are the essential concepts of CRP that inform this study. Each concept is imperative to classroom culture and classroom management. These components have proved to be methods that positively correlate with the academic and social success for Black boys. These tenets of CRP prove to be effective classroom methods to aid in successful student outcomes for

Black boys. There are factors that affect Black boys' high failure rates and equally contribute to their success. This research hones in on one specific question: What is alternative education such as RISE Academy doing differently?

Research Design and Methods

This study followed a qualitative case study approach. Qualitative research allowed for examination of the issues facing participants at the center of the phenomenon. This qualitative case study allowed for the acquisition of rich, in-depth data from Black boys that helped explore the implicit factors contributing to their high academic failure rates.

In this case study, the researcher examined the academic failure of Black boys at the two traditional comprehensive high schools in Tyler ISD and the academic success at RISE Academy, an alternative high school, in Tyler ISD. The participants included five Black boys who attended traditional public high school in Tyler but are now currently attending or previously attended RISE Academy High School. First, I analyzed archival data such as a transcript of grades and academic and behavior records from the traditional high schools before enrolling at RISE Academy. Then the researcher collected data through a participant questionnaire, semi-structured individual participant interviews, and a focus group interview. Participant experiences and voices were used in a cross-case analysis. All perspectives were considered. Multiple themes and patterns emerged across the various cases.

Definition of Key Terms

Academic Intervention: Actions taken to improve the academic outcomes of students.

Achievement gap: Refers to the performance differences of test scores and graduation

    rates between children of color and middle-class white children (Smith, 2005).

Cultural awareness: The teacher's knowledge of a set of students outside their lived

experiences and an understanding of how the teacher affects how the students behave

(Lynch, 2017a).

Dropout rate: Is the rate of students who do not earn a diploma (Lynch, 2017a).

Early Intervention: Is the time in the development of a child between the doctor's referral

and the start of services (Lynch, 2017a).

Inclusion or system of inclusion: Is a system that included Black male intellectual thought

and growth, their social and political commentary, reflections of their lived

experiences, and the expressions of rage against American power structures (Jenkins,

2006).

ISS: In-school suspension.

OSS: Out-of-school suspension.

P-20 Classrooms: Preschool to college classrooms.

SPED: Individuals who receive Special Education services.

Students with Disabilities (504): Are clinically diagnosed disabilities that require legally

mandated accommodations in the classroom (Sanders et al., 2018).

Urban neighborhood: Is a neighborhood with a disproportionate number of welfare

families, low birth rates, high poverty, unemployment, and crime, and lower cognitive

abilities (E. O. McGee, 2013).

Urban school: Is a school in an urban neighborhood without adequate resources,

advanced curricular opportunities, and low-quality teachers (E. O. McGee, 2013).

Conclusion

This research project explored the factors that contributed to Black boys' high

failure rates in traditional comprehensive high schools and factors that contributed to

academic success for Black boys in alternative education. Black boys who lived in poverty and urban environments are the most underserved student population and are doubly vulnerable to academic failure in U.S. traditional classrooms (Sanders et al., 2018; Tate et al., 2014). This qualitative case study is significant because it tapped explored the implicit factors that adversely affect the success of Black boys in traditional high schools and explored the reasons these students experienced success at an alternative school Tyler ISD.

The experiences of four Black boys highlight and narrate why the systems at RISE Academy High School helped each of the participants achieve academic success in the alternative school setting. This research also serves as a tool to help Tyler ISD identify practices such as authentic teacher-student relationships, faculty and staff, express, with intentionality, academic success is possible for all students of color and that Blacks boys feel a sense of belonging and relatability in the traditional setting in order to feel successful.

This study provides empirical evidence to assist in improving the academic and cultural climate at traditional high schools, specifically for Black boys in Tyler ISD. In addition, the research provides empirical evidence to validate the effectiveness of alternative education at RISE Academy for Black boys in Tyler ISD.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Statistics confirm that the achievement gap between Black and White students remains unchanged over the last fifty years (Peterson, 2016). More precisely, a 26-point reading gap and a 27-point math gap between Black boys and White boys persisted between the years 1966 and 2016. Peterson notes that the current reading gap between Black boys and White boys is as statistically significant as the reading gap between a fourth-grade student and an eighth-grade student (Peterson, 2016). Jenkins notes that 25% of Black boys drop out of school before graduation (Jenkins, 2006). The unmoved achievement gap and the high dropout rates of Black boys signal an educational crisis in the United States, a point on which both the 44th and the 45th presidents of the United States agreed (Peterson, 2016).

Much of the literature on the high academic failure rates of Black boys and the unmoved achievement gap merely serves to highlight the fact that a problem exists. Other academic literature continues to pinpoint the systemic inequities facing Black students, such as the lack of resources in urban districts and a host of other general structural diagnoses. Even after 50 years of legislative attempts, scholars continue to explore the long-lasting and unique challenges Black boys encounter in traditional comprehensive high schools to discover the implicit factors contributing to their low achievement and high dropout rates. The truths of why Black boys have not experienced as much success in traditional comprehensive high schools are subjective at best. In recent years, school

districts have offered alternative education, as one of many solutions as an additional vehicle of success for Black boys.

Low achievement and high dropout rates continue to exist for Black boys. Diverse and more modern cultural pedagogy has emerged since 1966, but the achievement gap remains unmoved, and dropout rates increased for Black boys. E. O. McGee's (2013) research exposes more of the systemic and structural challenges Black boys face, but it suggests that future research must unravel the real academic challenges of Black boys. Research must aim to discover the implicit factors at the heart of their low achievement and high dropout rates (E. O. McGee, 2013).

Equitable access to education for all American students regardless of race, color, faith, or ethnicity has become the cry of parents around the country (West-Olatunji et al., 2006). However, the demand placed on educators is not only for equal access to education, but also for equity in education. An equitable approach to education confronts the idea that one size does not fit all. The approach calls for differentiation in the classroom and in the overall educational experience for all students. Approaching education from an equity lens involves seeking success for *all* students. Inequity shines a light on the systemic issues that lead to high failure rates and high dropout rates amongst Black boys, and it forces educators to change course in their practice in order to experience improvement.

There are several important questions to consider about the academic failure of Black boys. After years of research, why does the achievement gap still disproportionately affect Black boys and students of color? Why do Black boys account for 14.9% of public-school enrollments, but their suspension, expulsion, and corporal punishment rates are double that of their White counterparts at 50% to 21%, respectively

(West-Olatunji et al., 2006)? Why did only 47% of Black boys graduate on time compared to 78% of their White male peers (Harper, 2012)? Lastly, educators must ask themselves what other educational opportunities, besides the traditional comprehensive setting, are catalysts to successful outcomes for Black boys? The statistics and questions highlight the need for this research project and the need to explore the implicit factors contributing to the high failure rates of Black boys at traditional high schools. The research also provided a much-needed look at how and why the alternative education model works for Black boys at RISE Academy.

The purpose of this representative review of scholarly literature is to explore, simply put, why Black boys do well in alternative education and not so well in traditional education. RISE Academy High School, an alternative school in Tyler, Texas, is a paragon of success for Black boys. This literature review is not exhaustive, but it captures several of the major themes surrounding why African American male students fall short of their peers in one academic setting and soar in another academic setting.

This chapter begins by providing a historical context for the achievement gap. Next, the chapter explores the challenges Black boys face outside of the educational setting that could impede successful outcomes in traditional comprehensive high schools. The literature review then describes the educational systems and practices that contribute to additional challenges for Black boys including implicit bias, harsher discipline practices, high teacher turnover, and lack of cultural relevant pedagogy in every classroom. The literature review also describes how poverty and urban ecology, or where someone lives, affect Black boys' academic results. Lastly, the literature review examines the role of culturally relevant pedagogy and alternative education in helping Black boys achieve academic success.

A Historical Exploration

To sufficiently approach this subject matter and reveal the actual scholarly conversation, one must remember, for centuries, not every culture held value in education. In 1776, during the founding of this nation, Black people were viewed as an underclass of people, and Black culture was irrelevant. The primary value assigned to Black men, women, and children was labor, and more accurately, slave labor. Auctioned off as pieces of property, Black people had no value in society (Irons, 2004). The nation cannot forget the 1787 Compromise, where only three out of every five Black people counted for taxation and representation.

Fast forward to the 1930s and beyond when segregation, Jim Crow laws, and the prison industrial complex became prevalent institutions throughout our country. Considered a lower class of people, Black people were people in name only. Black people did not have equal rights and did not receive an equitable amount of necessary resources, opportunities, and access. Neighborhoods and schools went underfunded, opportunities for capital and wealth were nonexistent, and poverty was prevalent amongst Black families (Gershenhorn & Jones, 2020). Furthermore, Black children—and for the purpose of this literature review—Black boys, were caught in a war and expected to defend themselves, without adequate ammunition to fight.

Black Boys and the Achievement Gap

The academic achievement gap between Black students and White students is a phenomenon that continues to plague the education system in our country. According to a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), the achievement gap between Black and White students was 31 points; of those, 16 points were attributed to "in-school difference." The disparity between Black students and their White

counterparts is undeniable, as students growing up in lower-income; neighborhoods have less access to resources such as two-parent households, financial stability, a plethora of books in the home and a positive education experience. Despite much research, the achievement gap persists. Ansell (2011) states the achievement gap in education refers to the academic inequities between students of color and their racial counterparts. Despite the education system and our nation's continual fight to achieve academic equality among race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, the gaps were persistent (Barton & Coley, 2009). The gap sounds the alarm of concern that our education system is failing our children of color.

After the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government's focus was closing the achievement gap. Schools and districts were intentional and prescriptive in efforts of data disaggregation within racial and socio-economic comparison groups (Thomson, 2018). The focus-highlighted disparities between racial groups, but it also provided targeted intervention programs offered to students after school. The idea of "no child left behind" was new and fresh and educators hoped it would narrow the inequities between racial groups.

Federal regulations on educating students in poverty changed in 2008 with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA held school districts accountable for graduation rates of students in diverse, racial, language, poverty, and disability groups. According to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center's annual *Diplomas Count* report, although each racial and ethnic group graduated more students in 2008, substantial gaps remained between students of color and their White counterparts (Amos, 2013). The report cited only 57% of Black students graduated on time, while 82.7% of Asian students and 78.4% of White students graduated on time. In

addition, the report revealed 68% of male students graduated on time and 75% of female students graduated on time. Overall, only half of minority male students graduated on time.

The Obama Administration wanted to direct its attention to the gaps and disparities of college enrollment and the success of degree attainment. The administration wanted the United States to lead the world in college graduates by the year 2020. According to the American Council on Education's *24th Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education* (Kim, 2011), 38% of Americans ages 25–34 had earned at least an associate degree, while only 26% of African-Americans ages 25–37 obtained a two-year degree. During the same period, the percentage of Blacks ages 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher rose from 19.8 % to 26.1 %; Asians from 52.4 % to 58.1 %; and Hispanics from 13.9 % to 18.8 %. Unfortunately, the gap persists.

The implications of the achievement gap are multifaceted. It is impossible to disregard the correlation between educational failure and the poverty rates in the Black community. The less education one has, normally, the less money one is able to make. The less money one makes, the more likely one is to fall into poverty.

Ansell (2011) attributes achievement disparities to socioeconomic factors. While poverty is strongly associated with low academic achievement, the gap also breaks down along both racial and ethnic lines (Smith, 2005). According to the 2009 data from the Census Bureau, all children younger than 18 living in households of four or more people that make less than $21,947 a year (Ansell, 2011). This statistic includes one out of three Black and Hispanic children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Beyond the difference in job acquisition or earnings, the achievement gap for Black boys also contributes to a greater threat, the school-to-prison-pipeline. The education system has contributed to the overrepresentation of African American males in prison (Darensbourg et al., 2010). The school-to-prison pipeline is defined as "a metaphor for the process through which students are pushed out of public schools and correspondingly funneled in the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems" (Tate et al., 2014, p. 8). The school-to-prison pipeline is characterized as; the probability of students who do not complete high school will end up a part of the criminal judicial system (Lynch, 2017b). In addition, over half of the high-school dropouts end up in prison. The underachievement of Black boys in public education helps to exacerbate the school-to-prison-pipeline (Lynch, 2017b).

Research proved that a student's skin color, the number of office referrals received, and a student's judicial encounters, align with data that supports the school-to-prison-pipeline (Darensbourg et al., 2010). Excessive discipline policies in schools push many of our Black boys out of school and into the juvenile justice system or the criminal justice system. Additionally, African American males without a high school diploma represent up to half of the nation's unemployed workers. They are indirect recipients of the *Prison Industrial Complex*, which helped to define the school-to prison pipeline (Giroux, 2008). According to a report published by the U.S. Census Bureau concerning the *Educational Characteristics of Prisoners* over 90% of the prison population are men, half are Black, and data suggests that 40% do not have a high school diploma or a (GED) graduate equivalency degree (Ewert & Wildhagen, 2011). These statistics show the

correlation between educational attainment and incarceration, particularly for Black males.

Moreover, concern for Black males and their education did not receive support with action as "states traded funding for health care, childcare, and education for punishment, incarceration, and prison" (Giroux, 2008, p. 117). With the world seemingly against them, Black boys continue to make minimal strides towards success in education. Bruce Western, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, stated, the increase in criminal justice system was not solely about crime, but a myriad of social problems associated with the conditions of poverty in America. The communities dealing with those social problems were disproportionately minority communities (Walsh, 2017), which is a sad reality for many Black families. Researchers also indicate that the criminal justice system casts a shadow over all Black men and strengthens that association between Blackness and criminality in a way that affects that entire Black population, especially the entire Black male population (Walsh, 2017). How can Black boys succeed in education when society predicts that they are destined for the streets—or prison?

Ecological Factors That Impede the Success of Black Youth

As Black boys matriculate through life, they face many challenges both inside and outside of the school that lead to their lack of success at the traditional comprehensive high schools. The ecological factors impeding the success of Black boys provide a glimpse of why it is difficult for them to attain academic success. A myriad of ecological factors can influence a student's educational development. Many of the ecological factors students face in life are beyond their control. Educating culturally diverse Black boys is one of the most urgent issues to affect the United States' social stability (Smith, 2005).

Underachievement is a perpetual threat to the lives of Black boys (E. O. McGee, 2013). Urban neighborhoods are the natural starting point for underachievement, lower cognitive abilities, and hyper-masculinity (E. O. McGee, 2013).

Unfortunately, Black boys continue to navigate through negative stereotypes portrayed by the media, and maligned by overt racism. It is systemic. By default, Black boys in poverty and urban neighborhoods are underserved and typically underachieve in traditional school settings (Sanders et al., 2018). Research highlights the Black–White achievement gap as a severe educational crisis and poverty is at the heart of educations' racial academic inequities (Peterson, 2016). Poverty, environmental stressors, and lack of support system are all powerful determinants of the success of Black students, specifically Black males.

Living in poverty. Poverty is an incredible barrier to education in the United States and a key determinant of American schoolchildren's academic achievement. In 2016, the poverty rate in America was 12% for all families, but it was 22% for African American families (Batra, 2018). Poverty, by implication, confines low-income families to urban neighborhoods with higher rates of welfare, unemployment, and crime. Additionally, poverty confines Black boys to schools with inadequate resources, limited access to qualified and experienced instructors, and dismal per-student funding compared to more affluent communities (E. O. McGee, 2013). Research attributes achievement disparities to socioeconomic factors, suggesting that children in poverty have smaller vocabularies and lower language skills, while dropout rates tend to be higher for children who live in poverty (Ansell, 2011).

In addition, single-parent households also stand out as a contributing factor to the increase in poverty for Black children. Research finds that Black children in the United

States under the age of 18 live in single parent households (Prince, 2016). Women are 36% more likely to live in poverty than men are, but 20% of Black women live in poverty and of the unmarried women living in poverty, 38% of them are leading Black families (Fins, 2019). The trends are undeniable, and unfortunately, the gap persists.

Environmental stressors. Black boys face a number of environmental stressors, including substance use and abuse, dangerous living conditions, and self-protection. Substance use is very common among Black males. Research suggests that Black boys use marijuana socially when they get together with friends; others use it more frequently throughout the day and at night to help with insomnia (Rich & Grey, 2005).

Black boys, who become natives of the streets, understand that substance and street credibility go hand and hand. Street credibility, in essence, is equivalent to respect in a community. Respect is receiving the deference that one deserves (Baron, 1997). Baron (1997) explains that respect is survival for Black men. It helps to make sense of the world in which we live. Respect, also known as "street cred" is a key component of obtaining success in the streets. Acquiring "street cred," by default, provides self-protection for Black boys in a world that does not feel safe for people of color. Research shows that because of a lack of faith in the police, the judicial system and anyone who would champion their personal security, Black boys have adopted self-preservation as a cultural adaptation (Rich & Grey, 2005). Without external protection, Black men are forced to protect themselves physically with violence, while also maintaining and safeguarding their fragile personal identities (Rich & Grey, 2005). Black men cannot trust people. When one cannot trust people, one constantly lives in a state of fear and stress. When one lives in fear and stress, it is difficult to learn, mature, and succeed in society.

Family and home life. An additional hurdle for Black boys is their overall attitude toward education. As Black boys enter high school, the educational content becomes increasingly harder to navigate. Many studies document the academic disparities children face when they grow up in single-parent households. Research states that children from single parent homes do not score as high on tests as children who live in two-parent homes (Mandara & Murray, 2006). Furthermore, parental expectations, the number of books in the home and income to be important predictors of academic achievement of children in single-parent homes (Barajas, 2011).

Parental educational level is an additional factor in determining academic support. Parental educational attainment directly connects with student success. A study using National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data indicated, students whose parents had some college experience tended to have much higher than average test scores (Campbell et al., 2000).

The Black community shapes what is appropriate for Black boys. The community also helps to define and characterize a Black boy's personal-space rules, tone, rate of speech and pitch, and facial expressions (West-Olatunji et al., 2006). Oftentimes, Black household cultural norms and mannerisms lead to misunderstanding in professional settings and schools. Their teachers, simply due to their lack of cultural awareness, might label Black boys as disrespectful or aggressive. Furthermore, West-Olatunji et al. (2006) explain that learning institutions often fail Black boys when they encounter a cultural incompatibility in the school environment given their unique and legitimate mannerisms attained through their own familial and communal experiences.

Self-efficacy. Confidence or self-efficacy is another implicit factor of success for Black boys. Bandura states that self-efficacy is what raises a Black boy's vision of what

they are and who they desire to be. Self-efficacy enhances their motivational commitment to their endeavors, strengthens their resilience to adversity, and enhances group accomplishments (Bandura, 2006). How a Black boy feels about himself, his academic ability, and how he views himself socially, contributes to the overall range of success he believes he can attain. Research indicates the direct relationship between self-efficacy and achievement (Valentine et al., 2010). Bandura states there are four sources of self-efficacy: 1) mastery experiences, which include past successes and failures; 2) vicarious experiences are gleaning from the experiences of others; 3) social persuasions are persuasive messages from parents, teachers, and peers who strengthen or weaken their beliefs; 4) physiological and affective states, which are the physical, emotional, and interpretive internal beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Believing in oneself is difficult to do. If one does not believe in himself or does believe that he can achieve success, he will never achieve success. Unfortunately, Black boys often lack the self-efficacy due to the environment and culture of low expectation that surrounds them—in the media, schools, and community.

Despite the myriad of obstacles that Black boys encounter while growing up in urban Black America, the Black family and the Black community are still an intricate part of their identity (E. O. McGee, 2013). As previously stated, poverty, environmental stressors, and the lack of a strong support system to increase self-efficacy provides evidence as to why Black boys are not successful in traditional comprehensive schools. In addition to ecological factors that may impede the success of Black boys in traditional high schools, school-based practices and systemic issues within the educational system prove problematic to the success of Black boys.

School-Based Practices That Impede the Success of Black Youth

Black boys make sense of their personal and academic lives through maintaining a healthy racial–ethnic identity (Wright, 2019). Research indicates that the school is often a culturally incompatible environment. When educators subconsciously adopt stereotypical depictions of Black students, they may project low expectations, which ultimately marginalizes Black boys (E. O. McGee, 2013). Consequently, racial and ethnic expressions of culture, including articulation, special handshakes, met with misinterpretation, deemed culturally inappropriate, and often-considered defiant (E. O. McGee, 2013). Teachers and administrators often lack the training to understand that these displays and expressions are often coping mechanisms, used to obscure insecurities, internal conflicts, and self-doubt within these Black boys (West-Olatunji et al., 2006). The negative responses and excessive consequences aimed at culturally significant traditions are detrimental to a Black boy's self-esteem and scholastic achievement (Wright, 2011). Culturally suppressive rules and prohibitions convey negativity and exclusion that diminish the intrinsic motivation that Black boys need to achieve academic success in traditional high schools.

Tragically, Black boys are a misunderstood demographic group in the classroom. Teachers often misinterpret "misbehaviors, learning styles, and social skills as problems" and "lead to the most ineffective forms of discipline, unproductive lessons, and futile peer-interaction opportunities" (Lynch, 2017a, p. 1). The devastating outcome of such misinterpretation is that it impedes learning, resulting in many Black boys slipping through the achievement cracks (Lynch, 2017a). The consequences are underachievement, lack of inclusion, and regressive academic statistics for Black boys in school and society-at-large (Jenkins, 2006). With all that data reveals about Black boys

and their underachievement in education, teacher turnover exacerbates the problem for low performing schools.

High teacher turnover in urban schools. Urban communities often lack school-based resources, including experienced and highly qualified teachers. The lack of highly qualified teachers ultimately decreases the learning outcomes of the students served (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The lack of quality teachers in urban areas and lack of quantity teachers in rural areas produce large groups of students attending classes with mediocre to unacceptable instruction.

In addition to the challenge of quality instruction, teachers are simply leaving the profession. According to research conducted by NYU's Steinhardt College of Education, the number of teachers leaving the profession has been steadily increasing over the past decade, with many districts experiencing a higher teacher turnover rate than student turnover rate (Steinhardt, NYU, 2017). Administrators are trying to find ways to reduce teacher turnover in their schools. In addition, teacher turnover continues to concern K–12 educators who see teachers leave every year (Wang, 2019). Wang writes according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 8% of teachers leave the profession yearly, while another 8% move to a different school, bringing the total turnover rate to 16%. This means, on average, a school will lose three out of every 20 teachers each year (Wang, 2019). The implications of teacher turnover on students of color are undeniable. The consequences for Black boys and students of color provide context for low academic achievement. Research illustrates how increased teacher turnover rates are one of the primary influencers of teacher shortages, and how it detrimentally affects student learning in schools that serve mostly economically disadvantaged students of color (Carver-

Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Without quality, teachers who remain in the classroom, students, especially students of color, cannot and will not effectively learn.

Implicit bias in schools. The belief that schools are unfair to Black boys or any child is a point of contention for many educators. With implicit bias operating outside conscious awareness, it is often difficult to identify one's bias (Staats, 2016). Some theorists strongly argue that the current education system is not meeting the educational needs of African American students because it is too Eurocentric (Weber, 1993). They argue that the background of most Black students is so different from that of Whites that an identical educational approach will necessarily lead to failure (Weber, 1993). Due to pervasive societal stereotypes, teachers often have and set low expectations for Black males and academic achievement (Husband, 2012). This culture of low expectations correlates directly with the low self-efficacy in minority students. Research states that the underachievement of underprivileged, urban, ethnic, and linguistic groups is a significant and recurring concern today (Gay, 2015).

Gay further proclaims that underachievement encompasses more than academic performance. The underachievement of minority students, specifically male students, incorporates disciplinary approaches, resource allocation, curriculum design, and a teacher's professional preparedness (Gay, 2015). Critical components such as culture, ethnicity, race, disability, and a host of other concrete principles are decisive indicators of quality and success for Black boys (Gay, 2015). Furthermore, research indicates that "misguided perceptions of students of color are often demonstrated through… low expectations for underachieving students; poor teacher–student relationships" (Smith, 2005, p. 22).

Influenced by the attitudes and stereotypical beliefs, an individual's implicit bias holds subconsciously, even if they deny their conscious association with stereotypical behavior in daily life (Scialabba, 2017). Implicit bias appears in a myriad of ways; however, biases directed towards students of color begin as early as preschool. Dr. Rosemarie Allen, early childhood education expert, shares some alarming statistics concerning implicit bias in preschoolers, which could lead to the preschool-to-prison pipeline. African American children are 19% of the preschool population, but they comprise nearly half of the suspensions (Lonneman, 2020). The Implicit Association Test is a tool developed to help educators recognize and address any implicit biases they subconsciously harbor (Staats, 2016). Implicit bias continues to manifest itself in countless ways. Although high teacher turnover and perceived implicit bias contribute to the academic achievement gap in Black boys, the disproportionality of applied discipline in schools for Black boys is just as prevalent.

Discipline rates. The differences in why and how students of color are disciplined as opposed to their racial counterparts is worthy of consideration. Eliminating the achievement gap involves also addressing the discipline gap (Romero, 2018). The over-representation of African American males in disciplinary infractions have been extensively documented for nearly forty years, and the disparity of how Black boys are disciplined continues to increase (Skiba et al., 2014). Exclusionary school disciplinary practices, including expulsions, suspensions, and in-school suspensions, have dramatically increased over the last few decades, especially since the passage of the Federal-Gun-Free School Act of 1994 and wide embracement of zero-tolerance policies (Romero, 2018). Zero-tolerance policies are severe, with no deviation (Darensbourg et al., 2010). In addition to academics, there must be equity with disciplinary action.

Student behaviors vary between classrooms and teachers. Black boys experience more extreme disciplinary outcomes than do their White counterparts. Skiba et al. (2014) share that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are disciplinary tools given to schools, but in recent years, they have increased at an alarming rate (Skiba et al., 2014). Suspensions for Black boys are three times greater than that of White boys, and their discipline rates are four times greater (Bouie, 2017; Cokley, 2016). Furthermore, the racial disparities in discipline appear for Black boys from preschool to their college years, despite identical Black or White behaviors; Black boys are deemed more dangerous, and their behavior is criminalized at a higher rate than White boys (Cokley, 2016). Black boys' belief in a system that is fair and equitable erodes daily with the current method of education.

Most of the behaviors students' exhibit are a result of their lived experiences; however, the behaviors, unaddressed appropriately in schools through restorative disciplinary action intensifies the problem. Lynch (2017a) states, Black boys are simply not receiving the most effective forms of discipline, lessons, and peer-interaction opportunities. As a result, ineffective disciplinary reform, leads to a much higher dropout rate, assures greater rates of poverty and higher chances of incarceration for Black males (Lynch, 2017a). In addition, the media plays a significant role in society's unhealthy fear associated with Black boys (Henfield, 2012). Society characterizes Black boys as angry, hostile, and defensive. All of these factors lead to Black boys struggling to assimilate into a school environment, eventually leading them to classroom disengagement or becoming a high school dropout.

Literacy rates. There are visible and tangible issues that affect the success of Black boys in schools every day. The research reveals high teacher turnover, the

disproportionate application of discipline, and perceived implicit bias as the detailed descriptors contributing to the lack of success for Black boys at the comprehensive high schools. Literacy is an issue as well. The ability to read and comprehend what one reads is fundamental to all learning and is a building block for all academic achievement and life-long learning (Lynch, 2017a). Ultimately, literacy is a foundational building block. To assist in literacy education, Black boys need "mirror" books that depict their communities, cultural norms, and themselves in positive ways (Wright, 2019). In the twentieth century, 57% of Black males were illiterate, and over the last 100 years, the rate of illiterate Black males only decreased by 13 points (Jenkins, 2006). These statistics depict that 44% of Black males are illiterate in the twenty-first century.

The lack of literacy exposes many Black boys to academic failure and has severe implications for academic success. The Common Core standards established in 2010 attempted to establish shared national K–12 reading and math standards (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). Although Common Core implementation was developed to help close the Black–White achievement gap, there has been minimal advancement in the academic progress of Black boys.

The lack of culturally relevant instruction. Black boys face many challenges as they enter school, including curriculum and instruction that are not culturally relevant. The varied learning styles of male students of color demand more diversity in instructional approaches and often non-traditional delivery methods to enhance student learning (Moradi & Alavinia, 2018). The classroom should provide more than academics. Relational capacity is key. Relational capacity, in education, is salve for a wounded soul. Culturally relevant teaching is a balm addressing the feelings of distressed Black boys who crave inclusion. The sanctioning of caring relationships allows teachers to help

students build skills academically, socially, and culturally (Williams, 2018). Unfortunately, CRT is not a reality for many classrooms.

Establishing positive student–teacher relationships is critical when nurturing high academic expectations for Black boys. Some schools, however, fail to recognize how critical relational capacity is to student success. In 2013, Rita Pierson shared in her TedTalk that, "Students do not learn from teachers they do not like" (Pierson, 2013). Werner and Smith state that a favorite teacher is among the most frequently encountered role models for a child and that the power of a teacher tips the scale from risk to resilience for children (Benard, 2002). J. E. Ford (2016) adds that the ability to connect with students is what gives students a safe place away from the fear of discipline disparities. Gay adds that multicultural responsiveness helps students know more about their own cultures and other cultures as a part of their personal development, community membership, civic engagement, and social transformation (Gay, 2015). By understanding and catering to the culturally diverse needs of Black boys, educators ultimately must create a learning environment that fosters a positive sense of self, increases academic resilience, and promotes a sense of ownership for one's own learning.

Nelson shares a popular message of how defiance and pathology are clear: Black boys are dangerous, at risk, and they are in need of rescue from themselves (Nelson, 2016). When people are not familiar with a particular culture or race of people, they take it upon themselves to form their own opinions. The media has helped to shape the narrative concerning Black people at large. Nelson goes on to say, that narrow perceptions are destructive, although not intentional, and it still alters teachers' perception and aides in minimizing teachers' efforts to meet the boys' unique needs

(Nelson, 2016). Sadly, many educational institutions are still unaware of the power that lies in relational capacity and the relationship between teacher and student.

Relationship building does not require legislative action but a change of heart and a unique approach inside and outside the classroom. Relational capacity becomes the catalyst for positive student behavior in the classroom. Based on his years of classroom experience, J. E. Ford claims, strong but empathetic classroom management grounded in relationship building is an essential tool to respond to the behavioral and academic challenges and realities faced by Black boys (J. E. Ford, 2016). Building relationships through social and familial connections can lead to a holistic approach toward Black boy success in the classroom. Relationship building extends beyond the classroom to those familial and communal support systems that Black boys require in order to build the self-efficacy needed to attain success. Relational capacity is essential for success; however, relational capacity is just one part of a greater framework—Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Educators should engage in instructional practices that are culturally responsive and congruent to the identity of their students. Culturally relevant pedagogy honors and values the cultural and personal identities of all children—and Black boys in particular (Wright, 2019). Teaching requires educators to divorce old ideologies but calls for teacher preparatory programs that develop educators who can teach and address the diversity in all children (Durden & Truscott, 2013).

Many scholars have long argued that American public education has the capacity to relieve the opportunity gap for students of color, improve social conditions, and reduce the poverty rate, especially those of low socioeconomic status and diverse backgrounds

(Kinloch et al., 2017). Although this idea of equity and equality for all students remain the driver of education in this country, it will be impossible to reach all students—specifically students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students of color, if the curriculum and pedagogy is not relevant to their lives and experiences. In essence, if the curriculum and pedagogy does not meet students where they are, the system is failing them. Geneva Gay argued for culturally relevant pedagogy, stating that content must have a real-world component and be relatable to the student (Gay, 2015). Cultural connections and relational capacity are rewards for the implementation of these strategies. Moreover, W. E. B. Du Bois adds that education and educators must not forget they deal with souls and not dollars (Dill & Du Bois, 1912).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is a term coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings goes on to explain that, "culturally relevant teaching empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 384). Culturally relevant pedagogy utilizes the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform a teacher's instructional practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students and teachers is important because the nation's student body is growing in diversity. In fact, 30% of students in our public school system are students of color (Esposito et al., 2012).

It is important to assess and understand the criteria for effective culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) contends that culturally relevant pedagogy must do three things: "produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who develop and/or maintain cultural competence and develop students who can understand

and critique the social order" (p. 474). Based on her research of exemplary teachers of

African American students, Ladson-Billings recognizes that exemplary teachers met

these criteria through different avenues and approaches. However, Ladson-Billings

identified three underlying propositions that informed these teachers' practice.

First, culturally relevant teachers believe that they themselves are part of the

community, that teaching was a way to give back to that community, and that all students

are capable of academic success. Ladson-Billings (1995) noted, "Students were not

permitted to choose failure in their classroom" (p. 479). Teachers did not allow "not"

mediocrity. Students did get to choose if they would turn in an assignment or participate

in a collaborative exercise. Culturally relevant teachers assist the needs of their students

until the task is complete without penalty.

Second, culturally relevant teachers "consciously create social interactions that

help them meet the three previously mentioned criteria of academic success, cultural

competence, and critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 480). They do this

through the maintenance of fluid student–teacher relationships, connections to students,

the development of a community of learners, and an ethic of care for others. Culturally

relevant teachers believe that students are experts on their own experience and bring

valuable assets to the classroom. In addition, culturally relevant teachers cultivate a

community of learners that is cooperative and encouraging while holding all students to

high expectations.

Finally, culturally relevant teachers conceive of knowledge to be dynamic, shared,

and co-constructed. These teachers are passionate about knowledge and learning and

build scaffolds and bridges to help facilitate student learning. Culturally relevant teachers

believe that students possess rich funds of knowledge that is essential to incorporate into

classroom instruction (Moll & González, 2004). Culturally relevant pedagogy also requires students to maintain cultural integrity as well as achieve academic excellence while also developing a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to analyze the cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Cultural competence and critical consciousness are imperative to the success of Black boys.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Similar to culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy also centers on cultivating congruence between the lived experiences of students of color and the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching is a phrase coined by Geneva Gay in 2002:

> Culturally responsive teaching, defined, is using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

Culturally responsive teaching focuses on effective ways to educate students of color, including Black boys (Gay, 2015). To prepare for culturally responsive teaching, educators must first have a culturally diverse knowledge base. This knowledge base guides the planning process and aids in the development of a culturally relevant curriculum. By demonstrating a genuine interest and respect for the diverse cultures of students in the classroom, the educator builds a culturally tolerant learning community that emphasizes cross-cultural communication (Gay, 2015). A culturally diverse knowledge base lends itself to contributions that diverse ethnic groups made to particular

subject areas in multicultural education; teachers should strive to keep education interesting and stimulating for ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002).

Second, designing culturally relevant curriculum is essential in teaching cultural diversity. Gay writes:

> There are several recurrent trends in how formal school curricula deal with ethnic diversity. Culturally responsive teachers could aid in the correction efforts. Among them are avoiding controversial issues such as racism, historical atrocities, powerlessness, and hegemony; focusing on the accomplishments of the same few high-profile individuals repeatedly and ignoring the actions of groups, giving proportionality more attention to African Americans than other groups of color. (p. 108)

Gay insists that in order to begin the process of curriculum reform and transformation, teacher-training programs must teach educators how to perform a deep cultural analysis of all instructional materials complete with revisions that highlight cultural diversity (Gay, 2002).

Third, in preparation for Culturally Responsive Teaching, a teacher must show an understanding of cultural caring and know how to create a learning community and climate that is filled with strategies and activities for ethnically diverse learners. Caring is moral. Gay (2002) suggests, "Culturally responsive caring also places teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence" (p. 109).

A fourth element in implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching is educating teachers about cross-cultural communication skills. Communication is key to the success of any endeavor. Gay (2002) states that "determining what ethnically diverse students know and or are capable of knowing, what they do and are able to do is often a direct result of how well educators communicate with them" (p. 110).

Lastly, the ability to deliver culturally congruent classroom instruction is paramount in culturally responsive teaching. Teaching ethnically diverse students begins with instruction. The teaching of ethnically diverse students must be "multiculturalized", meaning that it is accessible to every person from every background who is present in the classroom (Gay, 2002, p. 112). Because math, science, reading, and writing provide the highest areas of trouble for student success, teachers must learn how to multiculturalize each subject area. It is important that educators be properly trained in how to do this. Teachers must also monitor for student progress and mastery in order to determine the effectiveness of their own teaching practice. In addition, teachers must remain flexible and adaptable, as students might need remediation or further explanation.

Culturally Responsive Teaching utilizes cultural awareness, student's prior knowledge, and diverse learning styles to make learning suitable and sufficient (Gay, 2015). For instance, Coffey (2008) discovered that one successful teacher connected her love of poetry with the students' love of rap music to establish cultural competence. The students in this study performed their rap while discussing the literal and figurative meanings and characteristics of poems. The activity was designed to help ensure and develop cultural competence among students, and it proved to be accessible and relevant to all learners in the classroom.

Gay (2015) explains that Culturally Responsive Teaching calls for a new approach to develop a more productive learning space. Cultural responsiveness in the classroom involves differentiating instruction for all learners. This being said, culturally responsive instruction is likely to increase academic success for Black boys in K–12 classrooms if implemented correctly. The aim is to shift instruction from a "sit-and-get" model of learning to a student-lead learning dynamic. The instructor coordinates, plans,

analyzes, and oversees the instructional process while continuously reviewing and refining the learning process to ensure greater academic success for Black boys (Işman, 2011). Culturally responsive teachers analyze, evaluate, and reflect through student satisfaction, how students connect to the curriculum, and, overall, how students use the applied system for problem-solving (Czerkawski & Lyman, 2016). Lastly, when implemented correctly, Black boys can achieve academic independence that was not previously available to them (Czerkawski & Lyman, 2016).

The traditional comprehensive high schools in Tyler, Texas, are fine institutions. The high schools serve many students in the community and provide adequate instruction to students from all areas of the city. Black boys, however, are not always successful in those schools. The literature review documents potential factors that could produce great failure from Black boys in the traditional educational setting. In contrast, the review also explores the protocols and systems utilized in alternative education settings that yield great success for Black boys.

Relational Capacity

Positive relationships are not just educational jargon. The relationships created ultimately help to shape the culture and climate of our schools. Relational capacity, in simple terms, refers to the ability to relate (Duffy, 2018). Ginott (1993) writes, "As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration" (p. 15). Relational capacity is a foundational component of successful implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in any educational setting but especially in alternative education.

Alternative Education

The literature underscores several factors that contribute to high school failure for Black boys in the traditional comprehensive academic setting. More importantly, the research draws attention to alternative education as a potential paragon of success for Black boys in Tyler.

Alternative education covers a wide range of educational activities such as home schooling, GED preparation, charter schools, special programs for gifted students, etc. (Aron, 2006). Alternative education serves students who require or thrive in an environment other than a traditional educational setting (J. J. McGee & Lin, 2017). In addition, alternative education strives to deliver equitable access to students through innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Alternative education provides students the opportunity to meet graduation requirements, prepare for post-secondary experiences, and participate as productive members of their communities (Varghese & Püttmann, 2011). Princiotta and Reyna (2009) note that true alternative education is identifying those at risk of dropping out, getting them excited about education again, and offering a myriad of opportunities for them to receive a high school diploma. Alternative pathways toward success, in education, assist with early intervention strategies (Aron, 2006). The research focuses on specific areas that work well for Black boys in alternative education and the specific elements and components that contribute to their academic success.

Smaller Class Sizes

Alternative education should use a myriad of interventions to foster academic success for all students. In addition to positive relational capacity, smaller class sizes provide a catalyst for additional one-on-one support for our struggling students. Minority and low-income students benefit greatly from smaller class sizes (Mathis, 2017). Class

size reduction, by design, can increase academic achievement (Graue et al., 2007).
School culture and climate are just as important as curriculum and instruction concerning alternative education. Research suggests that African American students tend to benefit more than White students do from attending smaller class sizes (Krueger & Whitmore, 2001).

Self-paced Education and Blended Learning

Self-paced education and blended learning are key factors to success in alternative education. With self-paced models and blended learning models, students are able to work at their own pace, which is paramount to their success. J. Watson (2008) suggests that online learning provides a wide variety of opportunities to succeed to all students. In addition to individualized attention and personal supports, highly qualified teachers provide the instruction through technology and other digital resources. Online learning combined with teacher–student face-to-face interaction allows for student support in real time. Blended learning encompasses traditional lectures with electronic notes, charts, graphs, even online learning with face-to-face teacher–student interactions (Picciano, 2019). Not only does increasing student use of technology equip students with a skillset, it also provides them with the opportunity to learn materials from multiple channels. The more channels that are provided to a student depicts the likelihood that one of those channels will work.

Evidence-Based Best Practices

Alternative education has proven its ability to create and foster success and academic achievement in Black boys. Some of the evidence-based best practices include smaller class sizes, self-paced instruction, targeted interventions, and culturally relevant pedagogy with relational capacity as the nucleus. When implemented consistently and

intentionally, these practices become a part of campus culture. Alternative education campuses have the ability to attain more money, such as Title I funds. With more money, schools can explore and utilize best practices to aid their staff and student body.

Parents are an essential part of the school culture. Fostering parental involvement is best practice. Mertens and Flowers (2003) consider parental involvement as a theory of best practice for schools. When parents are engaged in their child's learning, they invest in their child's performance and the performance of the school. Parent involvement fosters a sense of community.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) arrange time in the master schedule for teachers to collaborate with one another to align teaching practice and student support. Teachers meet every day to create activities, strategies, and lessons for blended learning. In addition, teachers integrate curriculum so that learning can be coordinated through multiple disciplines. Research proves curriculum coordination, integration, and integration of interdisciplinary practices are evidence-based best practice (Mertens & Flowers, 2003). When teachers work together and have time to collaborate, it builds a strong sense of teamwork among the staff. When the staff feels supported, they are more likely to perform better. When staff performs better, students succeed.

Conclusion

Research acknowledges many of the visible, explicit factors that explain the underachievement rates of male students of color (Ferguson, 2020; Howard, 2014; Whiting, 2006). Historically, Black males withstand the worst of social injustice; although legislation has attempted to solve the problems plaguing Black boys, it has failed repeatedly.

Black boys face issues that no other sub-population must face. Explicit factors such as ethnically charged discipline disparities, poverty, safety, and common environmental stressors are potential causes for academic failure in the traditional setting. In addition, some implicit or unspoken factors include underprepared or untrained educators, high teacher turnover, biases, and discipline practices that are proven to send Black boys back onto the streets. Culturally relevant pedagogy, the lack of relational capacity, and other CRP tenets could redirect academic failure to academic achievement in Black boys. Those realized and unrealized internal biases prevalent in individuals and systemic in educational structures diminish the likelihood that Black boys will build the self-efficacy needed to be successful.

Conversely, literature does not precisely expose why Black boys are not successful in the traditional comprehensive high schools. There is reason to believe that these factors contribute to the problem. The data provides intentional evidence-based best practices that work for Black boys in the alternative education setting. Therefore, further exploration would draw out the implicit factors that contribute to Black boys' failure in the traditional setting as well as deeper exploration of strategies used at RISE Academy High School that foster academic success for Black boys.

Educators in the public system can remedy the inequity and inequality of opportunity, help reduce high poverty disparities, and improve social conditions through Culturally Responsive Teaching, Relevant Pedagogy, and high-quality instruction (Kinloch et al., 2017). In addition, alternative education programs with smaller classes, self-paced learning opportunities, parent involvement, and Professional Learning Communities for teachers prove to be a successful means of providing equitable education to minority students, specifically Black boys.

Without a high school diploma, the possibilities of success become fewer. There is a great need for this research. This study highlights the stories of Black boys who have not found academic success in the traditional educational setting, but who have found success in an alternative educational setting. This research explores the reasons behind those discrepancies.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to explore these research

questions, including a description of the researcher perspective, research design,

data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, and limitations. This study

utilizes culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) as a theoretical framework, to explore

the opportunities needed to help participants to overcome academic barriers to

success in the traditional comprehensive educational setting. The current problem

of practice focuses on the need for specific interventions through the

implementation of CRP in the alternative setting to improve educational outcomes

for Black boys and help them graduate from high school. This qualitative case

study documents the experiences of four Black males who were students at RISE

Academy High School in Tyler ISD, Tyler, Texas. The research explores, through

the voices of the participants, if alternative education provides greater academic

success for Black boys.

To gain a more in-depth understanding, I formed interview questions around my

research questions, which allowed me to help the participants relate their personal

experiences as Black males in the public school system. Specifically, this study explores

the implicit factors that contribute to Black boys' high academic failure rates at

traditional comprehensive high school and the factors that lead to their success at the

alternative high school. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do Black boys describe their experiences in the traditional educational setting?

2. Does the experience at RISE Academy differ from the experience in the traditional educational setting?

3. Why do Black boys believe they experience greater academic success in the alternative educational setting?

In addition, this study highlights research that suggests that culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and alternative education may be catalysts of success for Black boys. Over the last two decades, education has evolved to place with more value and emphasis on the culture, language and life experiences students bring with them to the classroom. The phrase 'culturally relevant pedagogy' was coined by Ladson-Billings to describe a learning environment where students feel empowered, engaged and connected through the use of "cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (de Silva et al., 2018, p. 27). The goal in creating culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is to build a bridge from students' social and personal experiences that connects directly to the scholarship. This approach engages students through its relatability to their own lives and they become more confident in their ability to learn (Hill, 2012). Alternative education offers a response to teaching young people who require a different approach to learning than is offered in the standard education system. Studies have shown that the alternative education system allows teachers to streamline the curriculum and modify it in a way that feels authentic to the student and enhances their academic success (Dimick, 2012).

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

The researcher's perspective is a significant part of the methodology of the research project. Research indicates the importance of describing the researcher's

perspective in qualitative research studies. Such positionality reminds the reader that the researcher's perspective is evident and reflected in the writings (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

As the principal of RISE Academy High School for the past five years, I have seen Black boys enter the credit recovery and dropout prevention program weekly. I often wonder what circumstances led them to RISE Academy. What processes or behaviors at the traditional comprehensive high schools contribute to their academic failure and feelings of personal failure? As a Black man, I share the same skin color and some of the same struggles as many of my students. I also share, at times, their feelings of marginalization and voicelessness in a system that has seemingly silenced their existence.

My perspective adds interpretive value to the research and my worldview as a Black man can provide clarity regarding my participants in their academic struggle. For instance, I attended the Tyler Independent School District as a student and have that intimate, shared experience in the same school system. I served as a teacher for seven years and an assistant principal for five years in Tyler ISD before my current tenure as the Principal of RISE Academy. My history with the district adds value to this research project because I can reflect both on my experiences as a student and as an educator. Although every student's educational, experience in Tyler ISD is uniquely different, that intrinsic need for validation in education binds us together. As a scholar, I can appreciate different voices and perspectives and still search for the common themes that we share. This familiarity with the journey of my participants allows me to ask relevant questions and culturally decode the answers they present. My aptitude in understanding and relating to my participants' frustration and anger at the current system allows for a more precise and accurate inference and interpretation of the data collected via interviews and focus groups.

As a principal in Tyler ISD and the principal of a dropout-prevention credit recovery high school, I work regularly with Black boys who benefit from being a part of the RISE Academy family. As a young Black boy growing up in the Texas public school educational system, I had to sink or swim. I did not have mentors. Nor did I have a host of caring teachers or the RISE Academy model as an option if things were tough. A confluence of concerns mounted during my high school years regarding my ability to succeed in college. Because of these experiences and challenges, my goal is to ensure that no other Black male in the Tyler community experiences this sense of hopelessness.

Throughout my research, I remained conscious of my biases. My primary goal is to provide untainted data. Maxwell (2012) suggests I, as the researcher, should set aside his values, beliefs, and philosophical perspectives, making sure the participants' values, beliefs, and philosophical perspectives are on display when entering into research projects. I have a commitment to these young men to get to the truth, to share the findings in their entirety, and to march steadily towards the goal of mending the current, broken system. Through this research study, my unique perspective can provide a blueprint to the educational leadership of Tyler ISD that may inspire systemic and structural change. Eventually, this change can positively affect the academic success of Black boys in our community and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally relevant pedagogy served as a theoretical framework that informed the research questions, data collection, and data analysis of this study This study explores the implicit factors that contribute to the high academic failure rates of Black boys, while also looking at which systems are in place in the alternative setting that ultimately produces great success for Black boys. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is the

primary theoretical framework that guided this qualitative case study. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is essential because it positions culture at the center of education and the educational reform landscape (Gay, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), according to Ladson-Billings (1995), focuses on producing students who are academically successful while also culturally competent. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), utilized in educational settings, emphasizes the importance of authentic relationships and encourages educators to meet students where they are from a "funds of knowledge" approach (W. Watson et al., 2016). Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests the infusion of culture and education would be a catalyst for academic achievement among students of color. Smith (2005) considers meeting culturally related academic needs as the most urgent educational need. The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) informed the three research questions that ground this study as well as the data collection and analysis procedures.

Culturally relevant pedagogy informed the primary and secondary research questions, which focused on exploring the experiences of Black boys in the traditional, and alternative school settings. Particularly, I was interested in exploring what elements of culturally relevant pedagogy were not present in the traditional setting, but were identified in the alternative setting. The participants believed certain tenets of CRP contributed to their academic success.

Beginning the research questions with "what" and "how", the participants could engage in the critical allowed thinking process. Their experiences in both traditional and alternative school settings are the nucleus of the study. The theoretical framework also informed the data collection process, particularly the interview questions. Each interview allowed me to collect information about the participants' experience with culturally

relevant pedagogy and explore how CRP may have served as a vehicle of success in the alternative educational setting. Through the individual and focus group interviews, the participants provided an authentic perspective concerning culturally relevant pedagogy in the alternative, as well as the lack thereof in the traditional setting.

In the data analysis process, I used the theoretical framework to analyze what elements of culturally relevant pedagogy were present or not present in the two educational settings and how these elements informed participants' sense of academic success. Data analysis, through individual and cross-case analysis, revealed that in the traditional educational setting, participants did not often encounter CRP. However, tenets of CRP, such as relationship building and cultural validation, were a part of the campus culture in the alternative school under study. Below, I describe the research design and rationale.

Research Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative, case study research design to explore factors that contribute to Black boys' academic failure in the traditional high school setting and their subsequent success in an alternative education setting. Staller states that qualitative approach allows for in-depth stories that reflect intricate social interactions (Staller, 2018). Qualitative research is utilized to "gain a complex, in-depth understanding of an issue by talking directly with those involved with the issue" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 45). They note, "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 45). This study used a qualitative design to explore and illuminate Black boys' lived experiences in both the traditional comprehensive and alternative high school in Tyler

ISD. The qualitative method allows the researcher to describe how people give value to social phenomena in their everyday lives (Reeves et al., 2008). This study sought to give voice to the experiences of Black boys, empower them to share their stories, and open up about the disparities faced to collect data pertaining to the research questions. Thus, qualitative research was an appropriate research design.

Specifically, this qualitative study employed a multiple case study. A case study is appropriate when researchers aim to provide a clear understanding of a case with "identifiable boundaries" (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A case study is defined as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 18). The case study approach enables one to determine an appropriate and purposive sample to draw out and define data known about the phenomenon based on careful analysis of the multiple sources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). In a multiple case study, the researcher "purposefully selects individuals, groups and settings for this phase that increases understanding of phenomena" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242).

This multiple case study draws on the experiences of four Black boys who were part of both the traditional and an alternative high school setting. Case study research is appropriate for this study because it allowed the opportunity to explore the multiple perspectives and experiences of Black boys in relation to their academic success in various settings. This study positioned Black boys to use their voices to describe their lived experiences through in-depth interviews. In analyzing and interpreting the data, I was able to uncover themes and patterns that highlighted the factors that contribute to the high failure rates and academic successes of Black boys in Tyler ISD. In an environment

where the participants felt valued, enjoyed authentic teacher-student connections, and were able, to work at their own pace, all of them received a high school diploma.

Site Selection

RISE Academy High School in Tyler, TX. RISE was the site of the study. RISE Academy has approximately 150 students enrolled in grades 9–12. At the time of the research, the school had 90% minority (non-White) enrollment and 80% of the students were economically disadvantaged with 75% of students on the free and reduced lunch program. RISE Academy had fifteen faculty and staff, including the principal, the counselor, a student outreach advisor, a special education teacher. The core teaching staff consisted of two Math teachers, two science teachers, two social studies teachers, two English language arts teachers, an instructional para-professional, a campus administrative assistant and the campus receptionist. The student to teacher ratio stood at 12 to 1.

RISE Academy is a dropout prevention, credit recovery high school for Tyler ISD students who struggle academically, behaviorally, and with their attendance at the two traditional comprehensive high schools for the district. RISE Academy serves on average, 200 students of various racial, ethnic, and gender demographics. Black boys, the focus of this research project, make up one-half of the RISE student population. The school's primary intent is to improve the academic positioning, occupational outlook, and personal skillset of at-risk Tyler ISD students ages 15 to 21. RISE aspires to reduce the dropout rates and prevent future dropouts. The qualifications to enroll in RISE Academy are set forth by Tyler ISD. They include the following criteria:

1. Student failed two or more subjects

2. Student was retained at least one year

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3. Student may be a fifth-year senior

4. Student may be a pregnant or parenting student

5. Student in jeopardy of not graduating with their senior class

6. Any dropout for over a semester.

RISE Academy is not a student's last chance, but rather a new and different educational success opportunity. In order to understand how the RISE Academy differs from traditional public school, one must first look at the practices used by teachers and administrators. For example, teachers who works at RISE Academy must attend the AVID Summer Institute, which equips them with skills needed to reach all learners. Each teacher must participate in the "Culturally Relevant Teaching: Transforming Educators" strand. The training highlights the importance of relational capacity by teachers for students of color and students of poverty. Relational capacity highlights the importance of relationships in student learning and is comprised of curriculum knowledge, behavioral knowledge, flexibility and coaching to help students achieve academic success.

Furthermore, RISE Academy adheres to a maximum of 10 students per class. This smaller class size allows for greater teacher interaction with individual students. Research shows that struggling pupils benefit more from smaller class sizes (Schwartz, 2003). The alternative education programs in Tyler ISD have the autonomy to enroll as many or as few students as needed to ensure that small class sizes are maintained as a key component of the school's culture.

Finally, the dropout prevention program and credit recovery school served as the focal point of this research. The school operates from a half-day model in which students come to school in the morning or the afternoon only. This model has proven effective,

particularly for Black boys. Less time in school and smaller class sizes are ideal compromises for these struggling students.

Participant Sampling

The participant sampling for this study was purposeful. Purposeful sampling is used because it "intentionally samples a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 148). With respect to Black boys, I wanted to display the range of diversity that existed in this group dynamic. I chose participants who reflected various stages of the educational journey within alternative education at RISE. Participant sampling is a vital part of the research process. As the researcher, I utilized criteria-based purposive sampling for this qualitative case study. Criteria-based sampling means participant selection was based on a pre-determined set of criteria (Suen et al., 2014). Purposive sampling provided distinctive information that gave meaning to the research problem and purpose (Suen et al., 2014).

For this study, I selected four Black boys, all at least 18 years old and all at different stages of their dropout prevention credit recovery journey. Participants met the requirements of RISE Academy, and they were either former or current students. The researcher chose one participant representative from each of the following categories:

1. One student currently on track to graduate RISE without any additional academic labels.

2. One student labeled Special ED (SPED) or 504.

3. One student who will be 21 years old or older at graduation.

4. One student graduated from the program and currently works at RISE.

I sent official recruitment letters that included all the research parameters. I used email and an in-person notification to contact the participants. Each participant, being

18-years old, signed a consent form allowing participation in the study. Purposive

sampling for this research provided a broad range of rich, in-depth information in the

participant stories that addressed the implicit factors that influenced high academic

failure rates.

1. Participant A graduated at age 19 from RISE Academy and currently works as an instructional aid for RISE Academy.

2. Participant B will graduate this year from RISE Academy. He is currently on track to graduate on time.

3. Participant C graduated from RISE Academy last year. He was labeled special education while attending RISE.

4. Participant D graduated from RISE in the summer of 2020. He was 21 years old when he graduated.

Tyler High and Legacy High are the two traditional comprehensive high schools

in Tyler ISD. Two of the participants were from Tyler High School, and two of the

participants were from Tyler Legacy High School. Participant selection was intentional

and due to their variety of backgrounds and experiences. This point was pertinent in data

collection and analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection consisted of three phases. This study involved questionnaires,

one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and a focus group interview to explore the

primary research questions. The principal aim of this data collection method was to

obtain information about the lived educational experiences of Black boys in the Tyler

ISD school system. Questionnaires provided a broad sense of each participants' view of

education. Individual interviews allowed me to dig deeper into the participants' view of

education, their teachers, administrators and the role they played in their educational

journey. The interviews focused more on the traditional setting. The addition of focus

groups provided a corporate view of alternative education. The focus group allowed the participants to speak freely about the subtle and real differences between the traditional and alternative setting. This section describes each phase of data collection.

Phase One: Questionnaire

The research focused on the educational journey of Black boys from the traditional school setting to their final journey into alternative education. The questionnaire provided a glimpse into the participants' primary years in school. This step allowed me to compile information about students' holistic educational journey. The questionnaire was administered to each participant prior to the one-on-one interview.

Participants answered 15 closed-ended questions regarding their elementary, middle and traditional high school experience. I chose closed-ended questions because I did not want the participants answering the questions succinctly. Close-ended questions provide narrow insight but are easily examined in qualitative data. The questions gauged the participants' perception of their educational experience in the traditional setting prior to alternative education. The answers to these questions provided a solid foundation for phases two and three of the research. The questionnaire responses provided opportunities for me probe for more nuanced answers in the personal interviews and the focus group. In the closed-ended questions, participants shared if they liked elementary school by answering yes or no. Phase two and three encouraged the participants to share "why" they did not like elementary school.

Phase Two: Personal Interview

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with each participant. Qualitative interviews are the dominant form in qualitative research (Yin, 2018). In addition, qualitative interviews should follow a conversational juxtaposed to a structured

(Yin, 2018). The individual and focus group interviews allowed the student participants'

narratives to drive discussion. I utilized semi-structured interview to afford the

participants the latitude and openness to formulate and clarify their experiences. This

technique gave each participant the ability to emphasize the most relevant and important

aspects of their own personal journey in education. It further allowed me to dive deeper

into questioning and extract answers, which could arrive at conclusions and reconcile

inconsistencies and ambiguity in the discussion.

I conducted the interviews at RISE Academy. The interviews, on average, lasted

30 minutes. The questions uncovered the lived educational experiences of each

participant in the traditional and alternative setting. The questions outlined participant

perceptions and attitudes towards former teachers, administrators and the role, the

participant played in their own success. In addition, the interview discussed the overall

climate of the comprehensive high schools as well as the alternative high school. The

interview evaluated how race possibly affected their educational journey.

Phase Three: Focus Group

The final phase of data collection involved a focus group interview. The role of a

focus group is to facilitate discussion among individuals who have a shared life

experience. A key characteristic of the focus group, according to Cameron (2005), is "the

interaction among members of the group and the researcher's capacity to generate a

copious amount of data from a single meeting" (p. 159). The focus group followed the

same semi-structured format as the personal interview. This focus group allowed the

participants to reflect and speak candidly as group and not as an individual. The personal

interviews were more nuanced. The interviews provided insight into the traditional

comprehensive campuses and offered individual data regarding student struggles in the

regular high school setting. The focus group interview highlighted the participants' course in the alternative setting. It provided insight as how the participants felt about RISE Academy. The participants felt comfortable sharing their stories with their "brothers."

The questions allowed participants to compare and contrast their experiences at RISE Academy with their experiences at the comprehensive high schools through the lens of being a Black male in the Tyler, Texas public education system. The focus group allowed the researcher to speak with the participants currently enrolled at RISE and the participant who was a current employee at RISE Academy. The driving topics of conversation included:

1. The participants' perception of skin color in education;

2. Why alternative education, in their opinion, produced greater success in Black boys;

3. What made RISE Academy different from the traditional campuses

I captured each student interview and focus group discussion through video and audio recordings, all while preserving student confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the study. In addition, the participants could opt to have the camera shut off during the interview for an added layer of confidentiality. The recording was essential to preserving the wealth of information collected from the participants. It allowed me to revisit the data for participant tone and inflection points in the analysis process. After the participant interviews and focus group, I transcribed each session to establish a written document of the participants' narratives through rev.com. Once I downloaded and verified the video transcripts, I deleted them.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data, "coding, and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 181). Although data analysis is important to research, Creswell and Poth (2017) concluded, "processes of data collection, data analysis and report writing are not distinct steps in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (p. 183). Data analysis allows the researcher to determine and apply meaning to codes derived from the participants' narratives. When analyzing a case study, it is important to make detailed descriptions of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 206).

The research shared that, "Each step in the data analysis progresses towards meaning making and understanding of the phenomena being studied" (Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012, p. 165). This spiral of investigation and assessment allowed me to make new connections that continued to deepen and expand with new information and insight. The process of data analysis is a spiral of activities that "involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 181).

Data analysis in qualitative research also "consists of preparing data for analysis: the reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes; and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 182). Data collection and data analysis in qualitative research go hand in hand. For this qualitative case study, Creswell and Poth's assertions guided the data analysis process.

Deciding how to represent the data in tables or other forms adds to the challenge for qualitative researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data analysis in qualitative research represents an ongoing continual analytical process designed to answer the research questions through participant narratives. Figure 3.1 gives a visual representation of the data analysis spiraling process (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Data management begins the process of data analysis. I organized the data into digital files. In addition, I used a password-protected flash drive and an iPad for data organization. I organized the participant interview transcripts, the audio and video recording, and other documents with a file naming system. The system included the type of document and the date of the data collection. I logged the participant interview details and transcripts on a separate spreadsheet. I was the only person with access to the spreadsheet. I had a list of real names and pseudonyms on the spreadsheet in order to maintain organization.
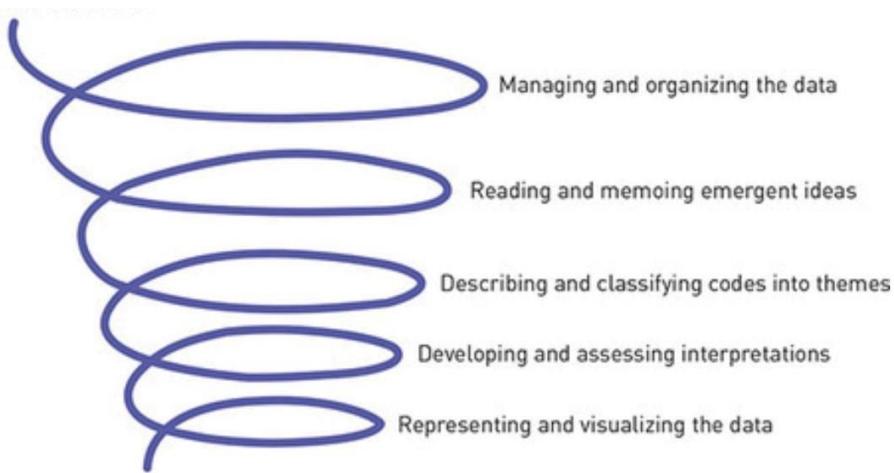
Figure 3.1 The data analysis spiral (reprinted with permission from Creswell & Poth, 2017, p.185).

Reading and memoing emergent ideas is next in the data analysis process. I reviewed the interview and focus group transcripts multiple times and made notes or

memos to help understand the data and to form initial codes. Memos are short phases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the reader or researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 187). Memoing gives credibility to the research process. Creswell and Poth (2017) conveyed that the researcher should begin memoing as soon as possible and continue through the writing of the findings. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) share that memoing helps to analyze materials, reflect, and code in a way that aids subsequent data collection and helps clarify accounts and details.

The next step entailed the description, classification, and interpretation of the data. I documented the description of the individual, educational experiences of the participants in the traditional school setting and the experiences at the alternative school setting. The process of coding is pivotal to qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I uncovered congruent codes from the data. I organized the codes into categories. Through categorical aggregation, I noted relevant trends that emerged from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I identified an emergence of themes related to Black boys' experiences in education.

Lastly, I used direct interpretation and generalizations to compare and contrast the lived educational experiences of the participants as students in the traditional high school setting and at RISE Academy High School. Interpretation involves making sense of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I strove to maintain interpretative consistency in the findings by engaging in multi-layered analysis, utilizing each data set for clarification. Yin (2018) discusses generalizations as replications of logic. Where multiple interviews offered a firm basis for generalization, I referred to the logic of each participant that underscored the generalization when making a determination. Where I found divergent opinions or confusion, additional insight was gained through deeper reading of

interviews, questionnaires and in the recordings of the focus group. Through these

interpretations and generalizations, I was able to make some correlation between the use

of the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy and the tenets of the alternative educational

setting as methods of success for Black boys.

Data Validation Procedures

The use of multiple validation strategies improved my ability to evaluate the

accuracy of the qualitative case study's findings. Creswell and Creswell (2018) mention

eight strategies for validation. For this study, I used four of the eight strategies to

establish validity: member checking, the use of rich descriptions, clarifying researcher

bias, and the presentation of negative or discrepant information. The use of multiple data

sources can provide meaning to the participants' experiences and help to connect the data

by establishing themes through the participants' perspective (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). Moreover, member checking is designed to establish trust by using ongoing

discussions to allow participants to review the descriptions or interpretation of themes of

the study for accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, member checking opens

further dialogue for the participant feedback to express their views about how the

researcher captured what the participant wanted to convey. In late January, I met with

participants and allowed them to review their individual transcript and the focus group

transcript for clarity. I wanted to make sure what they conveyed during the interview

process and my assessment accurately represented their thoughts.

Throughout the study, I attempted to discover the underlying meaning of the

participants' language. I also worked to guarantee that the language used in data analysis

was that of the participants. Chapter Four allowed me to provide an overview of these

findings. As their current or former principal, I was careful to address my own

preconceived notions and biases, identifying the root of these biases, and intentionally making certain the biases did not present themselves in the research, and understanding that the close relationship with the participants had the capacity to influence data and the findings. I worked to ensure that I played a non-partisan role in administering the interviews and focus groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I utilized probing questions if clarity was needed in the discussion. Finally, all findings were reported accurately and without reservation.

Ethical Considerations

"Among the challenges researchers encounter during the data analysis and representation process are ethical issues related to participant protection from harm" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 182). This research project's ethical considerations fell into two major categories: legal and ethical requirements. The primary participants of this project were between the ages of 18 to 21 years. For the protection of participants, I masked participant names as soon as possible to avoid situations where participants may be identifiable (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Hancock and Algozzine (2017) list four primary legal and ethical responsibilities, including adhering to protection from injury, informed consent, anonymous and confidential, and the fundamental interviewee's rights. Tyler ISD and the Baylor Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this case study.

My responsibility was to ensure that each participant remained free from mental, physical, and emotional injury (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The mental and emotional injury could occur at the end of the research if their identity was revealed or their story was not accurately shared. I was mindful of how the readers received the research and how it could affect the participants and site under study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The safeguards included communication of the study objectives verbally and in writing.

Safeguards also included written permission from participants. I informed participants of all data collections devices. A video and audio recording, as well as transcripts of all interviews, and the focus group were available to the participants.

Hancock and Algozzine (2017) state that it is my responsibility to provide informed consent to the participants about the risks and benefits of the study. Once the participants agreed to be a part of the research, they received the consent form. The participants read the form and decided if they wanted to participate. The participants were encouraged to convey their thoughts and ask any questions about the form or the research. The participants had the autonomy to consult with parents, family members, or peers regarding their participation in the study prior to their agreement. The informed consent notified all parties of the purpose and research problem, the interview requirements, and the research data's outcomes and limitations. Participants did not sign the form until the day of their initial interview. I wanted to reaffirm that participants understood their rights as subjects in the study. The interviewees were aware that they could end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time for any reason or no reason at all.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are elements that could shape the research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). One limitation of this research project is the sample size. Due to the small sample size and the project's exploratory nature, the study may limit a generalization to the entire population of Black boys who attend the other two traditional high schools in Tyler ISD (Ali & Yusof, 2011). The initial intent of this research was to collect very specific data from a group of 75 Black boys in Tyler ISD. The sample size used for this study allowed the researcher to extract "thick, rich data" (Onweueguzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242).

Increasing the sample size to the original population could have altered the research findings. In qualitative research, the aim is not to generalize or oversimplify but to collect extensive about each individual or site studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 158).

I conducted data collection during COVID-19. Although COVID-19 was prevalent, I was able to use the conference room at RISE Academy for the personal interviews and the focus group. I acquired district permission to use RISE Academy for data collection during the pandemic. COVID-19 protocols were enforced and followed. In addition, because of the established rapport between the participants and the researcher, it is possible participants did not provide candid answers because of the relational capacity. Although this limitation may exist, these specific limitations do not necessarily affect the reliability, validity, and transferability of the data.

For this research project, there are clear delimitations because of the unique population and location of the participant population and sample. Delimitations are restrictions to research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). As the researcher, I purposely selected some participants who were current students at RISE Academy. The sample also included a few participants who had graduated from RISE Academy. Although some of the participants were not current RISE students, I interacted with them daily. Second, although the participants' parents and staff could offer rich data concerning participants' behavior, attendance, and personal feelings about the traditional high schools, it was essential to hear the participants' voices as the only source of data. Lastly, RISE Academy, because of age, allows some students to matriculate from middle school directly into RISE. The study focuses solely on students who attended a traditional comprehensive high school prior to attending RISE Academy.

Conclusion

In summary, this research study's primary purpose was to explore Black boys' narratives at RISE Academy High School, identify possible implicit factors that influence Black boys' high academic failure rates in traditional high school classrooms, and explore why they are more successful in the alternative program. This research project was unique because the study population and location are under-researched.

As the principal of RISE Academy, I witnessed Black boys enter the credit recovery and dropout prevention arena every day. I became interested in the factors that led students to my school over the last five years. Specifically, I reviewed the circumstances that pushed these boys to the point of failure and their desire to quit school altogether. The end goal of the study was to illuminate the reasons for their success at RISE Academy High School.

The juxtaposition of Black boys' failure in traditional high school and their success at RISE served as the impetus for this qualitative case study. The study explored factors such as implicit bias in the traditional school setting, the effect of high teacher turnover, the achievement gap, and discipline rates help to validate high academic failure for Black boys. Specifically, this study allowed participants to discuss those struggles that affected them individually, such as poverty, lack of familial academic support, negative stereotypes, and a lack of self-confidence or self-efficacy in order to answer the research questions. Additionally, the study shared research for evidence-based best practices, CRT relational capacity, self-paced education, targeted interventions, and accelerated instruction as intentional methods of success for Black boys at RISE Academy. Lastly, the research uses qualitative data to find the trends that produce answers to the question why are Black boys succeeding at RISE Academy High School.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

Introduction

This study used a multi-case study research design to examine the factors that contributed to Black boys' failure in traditional educational settings. In addition, the study examined the factors that contributed to Black boys' success at RISE Alternative High School. Data collection involved a questionnaire, personal-interviews, and a focus group interview to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Black boys describe their experiences in the traditional educational setting?

2. How does the experience at RISE Academy differ from the experience in the traditional educational setting?

3. Why do Black boys believe they experience greater academic success in the alternative educational setting?

The theoretical framework used in this study, as described in Chapter Two, was based on Ladson-Billing's (1995) and Gay's (2002) work on culturally relevant pedagogy and relational capacity.

The chapter begins with a brief description of each participant. After the individual participant description, I provide each participant's answers to the research questions as well as themes that emerged from each case analysis. I then present the findings from the cross-case analysis, addressing the research questions based on the responses of all four participants and explore the themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis.

Case Description

The researcher identified four participants who were current or former students of RISE Academy High School for this study. The table 4.1 provides an overview of each participant.

Table 4.1

Participants

Pseudonym	Age upon Enrollment	Grade Level Classification upon Enrollment	Age at Graduation
Craig	18 years old	Junior	19 years old
Clay	18 years old	Senior	19 years old
Terrance	18 years old	Junior	19 years old
Dewayne	19 years old	Freshman	21 years old

For this study, participants completed a close-ended questionnaire before their individual interviews. The questionnaire provided insight into the participants' primary, middle, and high school years in the traditional school setting. In addition, the questionnaire helped to structure the questions for the participants' personal interviews. Table 4.2 provides an overview of these attributes.

Analysis of the questionnaires showed that the participants shared many common experiences such as playing sports and having discipline issues in traditional education. However, only two of the participants only experienced some of the attributes such as being bullied, having attendance issues, and failing classes. While common experiences tend to define boys as they struggle in traditional environments, individual experiences also affect their success. The fact that each boy's story is different, yet they all struggled in traditional environments and thrived at RISE indicates that components of the

alternative environment can benefit all Black boys allowing them to achieve high-school graduation. The interviews with participants investigated this phenomenon.

Table 4.2

Questionnaire Responses

Attribute	Craig	Clay	Terrance	Dewayne
Liked School	X	X		
Liked Teachers	X			
Bully/Bullied			X	X
Played Sports	X	X	X	X
Failed Classes			X	X
Attendance Issues		X		X
Discipline Issues	X	X	X	X
Color of Skin Contributed Experience	X		X	X

Individual Case Analysis

In the section below, I provide descriptions of the individual case participants. The four participant descriptions below follow the same format: (a) sketch of the participants' physical attributes, (b) depiction of the participants' family background, (c) summary of academic success in the alternative setting, (d) present position and future plans.

Description of Craig

Craig came to RISE Academy wanting better. He was already 18-years-old and if he graduated during the 2017–2018 school year, he would be 19 by graduation day. Craig

was six-foot three-inches tall with hazel eyes and blonde dreads. His look was uncommon, mainly because hazel eyes were unique for Black boys. He weighed a solid 240 pounds with a distinctive smile. He had a gap between his two front teeth. It was his signature. Facially, he was clean-cut. You could tell he thought he was a "pretty boy." He was the Denzel Washington of today. He often spoke of how good he was in football. He also took pride in how well he played basketball. The students who knew him, prior to RISE, were very vocal about Craig's arrogance. I first became acquainted with Craig in September 2017. It was my second year as principal of RISE Academy. He completed an application for RISE, met the criteria and my administrative team interviewed him. He seemed unapproachable during the interview. Craig mentioned in the interview that he did not want to come to RISE. His family knew RISE would be his only way of graduating.

Craig's parents divorced when he and his brother were in elementary school. The boys and their mom moved to Dallas. His family struggled financially and he and his brother struggled academically. He mentioned they were homeless for a few months after the divorce. When asked about his high school journey he said,

> It was a rollercoaster ride. Uh, we moved, uh, from a lot of different areas. Me, coming from a very young boy growing up to being a full-grown adult ending my journey at RISE, I went to four or five different high schools.

Craig never spoke of his mother during his senior year at RISE. She was still living in Dallas Texas with her new husband. Craig worked at Texas College in the cafeteria most afternoons and on weekends. Texas College is a Historical Black College and University (HBCU) in Tyler Texas. His father, although had not been in his life for over 10 years, was the head cook for Texas College. After a few weeks at RISE Academy, Craig acclimated to the system and began to experience success.

Craig did not do well in the traditional setting. Some students who attend RISE attend because they want to graduate early, while others attend because it was another opportunity to graduate and be successful after experiencing hardships at the comprehensive high school. Craig was the latter. During the interview, I asked him why he felt he was not as successful as he could be in the traditional high school setting. He replied,

> It was parental support. With me moving out of my mom's house at about 15, and living with my grandmother, having to do that whole situation on my own. Her not helping me as much as my mother and father would have, had I been living with them. I appreciate my granny because she didn't have to let me live with her. But I still believe things would be different if I lived with my momma or my daddy.

His explanation further underscores why ecological factors, such as a student's home life, are important for success. His first few weeks at RISE, he did not like anyone telling him what to do. He said he was accustomed to doing things on his own. His grandmother was living in the home, but he still recognized the lack of parental support he needed to be successful. Craig, through a lot of personal mentoring from the faculty and staff of RISE Academy, did graduate in 2018 with his high school diploma.

At the time of the study, Craig was working as a classroom instructional aide at RISE Academy, but he aspired to go to the air force. He is starting Tyler Junior College in the summer of 2021. Ironically, he wants to be a fashion designer if he does not enlist in the military. Craig explained why he had not enlisted in the military despite the fact he graduated in 2018.

> Mr. Floyd, you know my love for fashion. But I really wanna to go to the military. I passed my test for the air force and I even cut my dreads! This is why I lost all that weight. Once I lost the weight, I was unsure if that was what I really wanted to do. (He laughs) I know I'm all over the place. I'm still making up my mind about going to school or the military.

Craig, like many of the students at RISE Academy, graduated high school and did not follow through with his post-secondary plans. The high school diploma was the goal. Once they achieved the diploma, many, like Craig, do not set additional academic goals.

Craig's experience in the traditional setting. Craig detailed his experience in the traditional setting and his answers provided a unique perspective. His responses during the interview and the focus group were different from any of the other participants. He possessed a level of maturity that was distinctive. His dialogue was richer. Unlike some of the other participants, he felt as though teachers and administrators contributed to him having a good experience, at times, in the traditional setting. He also shared how he felt being the only Black boy in Ellis County. He considered it a different experience. Craig said,

> They were a good experience for me. Because, uh, a lot of my, um, teachers, like, I remember a specific teacher from my sixth grade whose name was, uh, Bishop Giddings. And we had a very good, uh, relationship outside of school. For instance, him being my teacher, I knew him outside of school.

Craig expressed how important it was for him to have this relationship with his teacher beyond the classroom. He seemed to suggest their connectedness provided a foundation for authentic relationship building. It enhanced his experience in the traditional setting.

> Me going to Ellis County, I, I was the only black boy my freshman year at my high school. I think I had a graduating class of about 100, and I was the only one. So it was a very, very different experience. Just being secluded out from your normal crowd. Being looked at differently, being held in a certain way, or being spoken to a certain way than your normal student would.

Craig mentioned Ellis County as a different experience. He felt the pressure of being the only Black boy in his class. In his interview, he did not consider this negative, but more as a learning process.

Craig expressed the importance of relational capacity as a driving force to ensure a positive experience in the traditional setting. Craig attended several high schools. Some of the high schools had a positive experience and others did not. Craig stated his high school experience in Dallas County, although attending several high schools, was positive and a different experience.

> I believe all of them had a positive impact on me being in very different places. Uh, one being at Ellis County High School in Palmer. I went to school in Ferris too. I ended up going to John Hollis after those two. Both very different areas and the scenery and people who lived there. Being able to pick up different, uh, qualities and traits, just from those aspects and areas. Being able to put them into my own character. High school was the best for me. And the reason for that, I was maturing, uh, finding out who I really am mentally, emotionally, physically. All those things.

Craig embraced the idea of difference. He viewed the experience at each individual high school prior to coming to Tyler, as an opportunity to acquire the knowledge he needed to move himself forward and build character. He celebrated the diverse qualities the high schools offered. He was able to gleam from that experience the ability to capitalize on his own originality.

Craig's experience at RISE. Craig was cognizant of why he was successful at RISE Academy. He was articulate in tone and very measured in his responses. It was apparent RISE Academy afforded him unique opportunities he would not experience in the traditional setting.

> The experience here is different. It is more beneficial if you have other things going on outside of school like a job. Somebody may not have a ride to school in the morning so they come in the afternoon or they may not have a ride in the afternoon so they come in the morning. At the other school, I feel like they aren't actually wanting you to succeed.

Craig shared his feelings of thinking success was not an option for him at the comprehensive schools. During the interviews and focus group, each participant

expressed similar perceptions such as feeling marginalized, their inability to relate to their teachers, and their contempt regarding their experience in the traditional educational setting.

Craig exhibited a strong ethnic identity as an African American male. Craig was "all things black." He loved Black Lives Matter. He embraced the idea of "Blacks" actually having a voice. He grew dreads as a sign of his Black identity. When initially asked about joining the armed service Craig expressed, "It me too long to grow my dreads just to cut them for Uncle Sam. It ain't like he understands what they mean." He was grateful for RISE Academy allowing him to express his authentic self through appearance and through his voice. He had four Black male teachers in each subject area and a Black male principal. Craig often said, "RISE is a different place. No other school has what we have. It's just different here." RISE Academy inspired him. He was keenly aware of the new opportunities, and as a result, he acquired his high school diploma.

Craig's success in the alternative setting. The alternative educational setting provided a climate and culture of success for the participants. Although each student dealt with their own issues, alternative education was still the best place for them to flourish. In the focus group, participants had the opportunity to reflect on who they were as students prior to coming to RISE Academy and to express why they felt like RISE Academy is a school all Black boys should attend. Craig responded to the inquiry about the differences between RISE and the traditional setting.

> Before coming to RISE, I was hostile. I feel like if I would have been here starting out, probably my freshmen year surrounded by my peers that look like me and who I can relate to, I would have been more successful.

Craig disclosed his sense of personal growth in relation to RISE. He expressed if he would have attended earlier, his academic achievement could have taken a different

route. In fact, the prescriptive and intentional goal focus of acquiring a high school diploma at RISE is at the helm of each day. Craig went on to say,

> Oh yeah for sure Black boys should come here. I feel like I know my teachers on more of a personal level. I really can't do that with 30 plus students. There's more accountability on the teachers. If there are 30 plus students in a class, obviously all of them aren't gonna pass, but if it's only eight of us, you're going to make sure all of us pass. It feels like a win-win situation when you are here.

Although Craig was conscious of structural inequities in society and in education, it did not hinder his progress. Craig's comments indicated that RISE Academy's relational capacity with his teachers was key to his success. Craig loved RISE. He was clear in his descriptions of the differences between RISE and the traditional campuses. Craig expressed, "Smaller class sizes are always a plus."

At the time of the study, Craig was finishing his first year as a teacher's aide RISE. After Christmas break, Craig resigned from RISE Academy. He wanted to pursue other avenues in life. He expressed his gratitude for the opportunity and continued to share how his experience as a former RISE Academy High School student served as a catalyst for change in his life. Craig wants to join the military. He made an indelible mark at RISE Academy both as a student and as an employee.

Description of Terrance

Terrance was a very independent young man. He worked well with others, but if he could put his headphones on and just do his work, life at RISE would be fine. Terrance was an 18-year-old, 180-pound, dark-skin African American male with an athletic build. His hair was always uncut in a natural style. It was his signature look. He wore it with pride. You could easily picture him in a baseball uniform starting for a major league team. His walk was unique. His junior year of high school, he injured his knee and was unable to play sports anymore. He has surgery and pins put in his knee. I interviewed

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Terrance in August of 2020 as a candidate for RISE Academy. His attendance during his

junior year at the comprehensive school was not ideal for RISE students, but he owned

his mistakes and was adamant about "getting back on track" and graduating on time. He

seemed sincere.

Terrance and his girlfriend lived in an apartment in Tyler. His family, which

included his mother, grandmother, sister and his brother, lived in Longview, Texas. In

addition, he had two older half-brothers by his father. Terrance never had a personal

relationship with his father. His family was very close. Even though he was 18-years old

at the time of his interview as a potential RISE student, his mother attended with him.

Terrance worked two jobs in afternoons and attended RISE in the morning. At 18, he was

responsible for an apartment, a car note, and helping his family financially when he

could.

Terrance's dislike for school began in elementary school. As a child, he felt

teachers were looking to hurt him in some fashion. He had very vivid memories of how

the traditional setting, in his opinion, harmed him.

> My least favorite time in school was elementary. We stayed in Ore City. That's
> where I'm really from originally. It's not real racist but those White people didn't
> really like me and stuff. They made me get on medicine and stuff, like ADHD
> medicine because like, I couldn't really control myself and all that. So, I didn't
> like being out there.

Terrance associated his ADHD diagnosis with White people not liking him. He

recognized that he could not "control" himself at times in school, but the association, for

him, was still racism. Unable, as an elementary student, to understand some diagnoses are

a benefit to a student's educational progression, it felt harsh and altered his relationship

with his teachers. In his comments, he embraced the importance of relational capacity for

Black boys.

There was only like one teacher I liked. She actually helped me as I grew up until we moved up here. She helped my family out cause we was like, going through bad stuff. But yeah, part of elementary was my least favorite time in school.

Terrance shared positive memories of only one teacher in elementary school. From his perspective, she was present through his elementary years and she provided support for his family during their troublesome time. This research highlighted the work of Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1995) concerning the magnitude of relationship-building in education for Black boys. Terrance's middle school years seemed to be better.

I liked middle school. We lived in Kilgore and I was with people that I actually liked and grew up with. I knew everybody around there, and the teachers were all cool. They all knew me because of my brothers. They played sports at Kilgore and all that. That was pretty good.

He expressed a sense of belonging and familiarity. Those attributes, in harmony, helped to provide a smoother transition for him during his middle years.

Terrance was a fifth-year senior, and his focus was on graduating in May 2021. He did not have attendance issues at RISE. He was on track to graduate. He only needed to complete his coursework. Terrance did not have things figured out beyond high school. When asked what he was going to do after RISE he said, "I just wanna graduate, to be honest, and then see what happens after that." At the time of the interview, Terrance worked only one job. He was living with his girlfriend and unsure if he was going to college after high school.

Terrance's experience in the traditional setting. Terrance always spoke with passion. He felt very strongly about his experience at the comprehensive traditional high schools. Terrance recalled with animus, his experience in the traditional setting. He was very vocal about his dislike for White teachers. Again, it is important to note his elementary experience with White teachers.

I did not like that school because of the teachers. They were, like, always trying to get me on stuff. I know I talked a lot in class, but they overacted every time about that and about a lot of stuff. I didn't like any of them.

Terrance connected his view of the traditional comprehensive setting with the negative experience he had with his teachers. Real authentic teacher-student relationship building was missing. He felt as if teachers were always looking for a way to "get" him. He expressed,

Before I came here (RISE) I just didn't like them. If you do something to make them mad, it was automatically your fault. They not gonna listen to you. Like, you really didn't have a say so. I was tired of being done like that. Nobody would believe these teachers were racist so I just didn't say nothing.

He associated his positive experience in high school with sports. However, after the knee injury, he could no longer play football.

When I first moved up here, I was doing all my work. My first year was probably my favorite year because of football and stuff. And um, that's the only thing I really liked about high school was football. All my friends, the football boys and all that. It was really okay then.
Terrance realized sports made him feel successful. It was the one thing he loved.

Terrance lost his academic focus after he could no longer play sports. He explained why he struggled academically at the traditional high school campus. Terrance remarked, "I don't know how like, outta all my years like, I don't know how my senior year was the hardest. And plus, I really started like, playing around and really stopped caring about school." He related his success academically and socially in the traditional educational setting to athletics.

Because like my senior year I didn't get to play football. So, I didn't really have nothing to pass for, and so that's another reason why I failed my senior year. I didn't get to play football and football was the only thing that made me wanna pass.

The district celebrated high school athletes. He was no longer a part of the celebration. The loss of his ability to be a part of athletics affected his motivation to excel in school beyond athletics.

Terrance's experience at RISE. Terrance benefitted from the smaller class sizes and the teacher-student relationships. RISE Academy allows a maximum of 150–175 students divided between two half-day schedules. Each of the comprehensive schools has a minimum of 2400 students and a faculty of 200 teachers. Terrance shared his thoughts about RISE. He commented on what made the biggest difference for him.

> The teachers here care about you. They cool and stuff. At the other school, how I see it, they don't care about you. They are just doing they job trying to get their money. They don't care if you succeed or not.

Terrance mentioned a sense of belonging at RISE. Unlike the traditional setting where Terrance implied teachers would do enough just to receive their paychecks. In his opinion, his academic achievement was not critical to his teachers. He believed he was valued at RISE. Terrance was explicit in his comparison of the two experiences.

> At those other schools, they don't care about giving you a failing grade or nothing, don't care if you succeed. But here, y'all are actually pushing somebody to finish so you can get out of here and do better in life. It ain't many of us in class. I like that.

Throughout his personal interview and the focus group interview, the lack of positive student-teacher interaction was something Terrance contributed to not feeling successful at the comprehensive schools. This lack of relationships was a reoccurring theme in his narrative. The success he experienced at RISE superseded the emptiness of not playing football.

> I'm not a negative person Mr. Floyd but those other schools are just not good for us. They don't have our best interest at heart like y'all do here. When you here, you don't really think about sports at all.

He was equally as passionate about his success at RISE Academy. He quickly

bought into the culture and climate of RISE Academy. RISE focused on making sure

each student graduated. Sometimes it was to their discomfort, but academic achievement

was the nucleus. Terrance identified a sense of belonging and relational capacity with his

teachers as components of his success. He felt valued by his teachers, thus removing the

need to find his self-worth through athletics.

> I like the fact that we git out for half a day here. At Lee, we couldn't do that. In
> my US History class, it's only nine or ten of us. Can't beat that. All of us passed
> our STAAR make-up in December. You know Mrs. Ford ain't letting nobody fail.

In addition, he recognized if smaller class sizes, specialized scheduling and a culture of

success were present, sports was no longer an excuse to not be successful.

Terrance's success in alternative education. Terrance' attitude towards schooling

and academics, as a student at RISE, significantly affected his ability to be successful and

graduate. The personal attention he received motivated him to want to do better. He often

joked about being 20 minutes late to school.

> All y'all in here know if you 20 minutes late, just know in about another 30
> seconds you gone get a text from Mr. Floyd asking where you are. God forbid if
> you oversleep twice in one week. I mean legitimately over sleep. (Laughs) We
> will never hear the end of it. But what's real about it, is we know you do it
> because you care.

It is customary for students to have the cell numbers of their teachers. If they were

running late, they would call the office. If something happened over the weekend or the

night before and it would affect their attendance, the students could call or text their

teachers. Students attend school for three and a half hours a day during each session.

Because of the small number of students per session, if a student was 10 minutes late, out

of care, the teacher would call or text to see why the student was late. The personal care

provided at RISE helped to reshape the narrative concerning teachers and their ability to

care for students. Terrance thought about his journey through education and ultimately

becoming a RISE graduate. He commented, "I wonder sometimes what I would be doing

if I didn't get accepted at RISE. Real talk. Do yall ever wonder that?" This small phrase

was an impactful retrospective look at the scope of his life if he would not have been

accepted to RISE.

Terrance knew that he had other options in life. Terrance expressed a heartfelt

sentiment about having access to opportunities. Black boys need to have access to

success. The culture and climate at RISE Academy, and the hands-on approach from the

faculty and staff, kept students from squandering their chances of graduation. Terrance

confirmed the value of RISE for Black boys when he explained, "RISE is a place all

Black boys should go. No cap. Man you feel like you can make it here. I'm not saying

I'm gone be something big and great but at least I have a chance too."

Terrance shared that before coming to RISE he wanted to drop out of high school

and just work. His counselor suggested RISE as another opportunity for success.

Terrance stated even though his academic motivation had declined, it was not gone. He

still wanted to be something in life. RISE Academy was the perfect place for Black boys

like him. He said, "We just go off track and needed somebody to help motivate us.

Family couldn't do it because my folks got they own problems." Terrance has maintained

his grades and will graduate in May 2021 with his high school diploma.

Terrance was a true role model for the students at RISE Academy. He was present

at school every day. He worked two jobs to help support his family and his current living

conditions. He was always in competition with himself to be better. RISE was his

extended family. We treated each other like family. His no nonsense attitude about

success catapulted him to graduation. Hard work, perseverance, and a tenacity for greatness proved to his motivators for success.

Description of Clay

Clay was a cross between the young men one would find on the covers of Sports Illustrated and GQ magazines. Clay was five-feet, ten-inches tall, perfectly straight White teeth, a round face, about 230 pounds, always "dressed" from head to toe, and wore the best cologne. He was clean-cut and was always the center of attention in his classes. His smile was infectious. He was a great motivator. Students commented daily on his fashion choices. He was proud of his wardrobe. Clay graduated from RISE Academy in the summer of 2020.

Clay had several defining qualities that caused his personality to be infectious. Clay was a fifth-year senior identified as a special education student when he applied to RISE. He was the youngest of three siblings who lived with his mother and sister. He was considered a "momma's boy." Clay did not have a relationship with his father. His older brother was in prison awaiting parole. As a child, Clay was in a car accident. He suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and for several months, he was in the hospital. He has a scar down the center of his scalp as a reminder. The TBI did not alter his sense of self but it did hinder his academic cognitive ability. It was evident during the interviews. Clay's answers were very short. Even when I would probe, the answers remained short. Clay processed cognitively at a much slower pace than the other three participants did.

He was successful at RISE with only inclusion support. Inclusion support generally means the instruction of special education students in the same classroom as general education students. The special education student receives help from an inclusion teacher within the general education classroom if needed. Clay was determined to

graduate. At the time of this research, Clay was working at a local grocery store and working on his music career. Clay was adamant he did not want to attend college. He stated, "I don't like school, I'm never going to school. It's just not for me." Clay's responses were distinct. He struggled during the interview despite reassurance. He commented, "Mr. Floyd I know that don't make sense do it." Clay was brilliant in his own right. He was working on music because he wanted to be a rapper. He rapped about the struggles of life and demonstrated a gift of lyrical expression. In addition to music, he was an artist. His drawings were very personal and expressive. He sketched several paintings of his mother. Clay was an exceptional young man. He was a high school graduate.

Clay's experience in the traditional setting. Clay answered the research questions to the best of his ability. His responses were not as in depth as the other participant responses. His responses were very measured and full of enthusiasm. Clay reflected on his experience, and at times, he was unclear with his answers. In his first quote, He mentioned having a good experience in the comprehensive traditional setting.

> I had a good and bad experience. I feel like it was positive side and I say it because, um, they're willing to work with you and they wanted, uh, to see you successful. So I feel like it was positive sometimes.

I probed Clay about his good experience. I quickly assessed his good experience was the special education department. He loved his inclusion support teacher. She made sure he completed all of his work. He felt as if she wanted him to be successful. His "bad" experience in the traditional setting referenced his general education teachers.

> Sometimes the teachers would come at you because they was having a bad day. I didn't like that. I started to just stay to myself and take care of my business. But them teachers always had a attitude.

Clay seemed ambiguous about his experience in high school. He recognized the teachers, at times seemed to want him to "succeed,"—but when they were "having a bad day," he felt as though it was projected towards him. When probed about the phrase "come at you" he said,

> Mr. Floyd I thought you knew what come at you meant. (He laughs) It's by the way they approach you when you come in the classroom. Like, um, when you come in the classroom they should be like, "Hey how are you doing? My name is this." And such and such. They'll come at you in a rude way, like if they're having a bad morning.

Clay's perception of his teachers' attitude in the classroom is acutely associated with how he viewed school. Clay did not acknowledge other systems, only what he perceived to be his teachers' attitudes. In his narratives about school, Clay expressed a connection between his perceived teacher attitude and his like or dislike for school. Clay believed his inclusion support teacher wanted him to be successful; therefore, school was a positive experience. It is important to note, Clay's view of school was a direct correlation to the connection he had with his teachers. His general education teachers, in his opinion, were not as personable as his inclusion teacher. He had a different experience at RISE Academy.

Clay's experience at RISE. Clay described his RISE experience in contrast to his experience in the traditional setting by how teachers treated the other students. His initial focus was not on himself but on the idea that everyone felt a part of the RISE community. Clay expressed his gratitude for RISE in a subtle way. He shared, "If people have babies or family issues, RISE is a good place to be. You don't have to worry about people looking at you funny. Sometimes girls who get pregnant in high school get talked about."

Clay expressed how important it was for a student not to feel ashamed because of pregnancy or because of family problems. Having a healthy view of oneself and abilities

is paramount to success. RISE was inclusive of all students. He further celebrated how much teachers cared about the students.

> Did y'all hear that last year, Mrs. Ford bought this girl a car seat for her baby? No other teacher at no other school would do that. I'm just saying. What other school you thank a teacher gone spend her own bread to buy a girl a car seat? I don't know one.

Clay, again, recognized what he perceived to be another unique connection between teachers and students. It was unfathomable to him that a teacher would buy a student a car seat for her baby. The two previous quotes concerning how teachers spoke to Clay at the traditional campus, in comparison to the way a teacher (Mrs. Ford) used her own money to support students, help with the students' self-efficacy in their quest to feel success, and a connection to their teachers at RISE.

Clay's success in the alternative setting. Clay voiced his sentiments about Black boys and RISE Academy. At times, he vented about the traditional setting, at other times he articulated his admiration for RISE. Clay's discipline experience was different at RISE than it was in the traditional setting. Clay shared his discipline and academic history.

> I was bad. I was skipping. I was fighting. I was bout it. I came here for a better opportunity. Them streets really didn't have nothing for me. The trip part is I don't even know why I was fighting all the time.
> Clay's discipline in the traditional school was a red flag in the application process.

Normally RISE does not allow students who have multiple disciple infractions for fighting as candidates for enrollment, but Clay's situation was different. After further probing, Clay fought a lot due to students making fun of the gash down the center of his head from his traumatic brain injury. He had not instigated the fights but was lured into the altercations when bullied about his appearance. Clay never had an altercation at RISE.

Sooner or later you gotta decide if you wanna change or not. It's not gone be easy but it was still my choice. I'm not doing everything I wanna do, but at least I'm doing something. If I wouldn't have came here and got my diploma, I'm not gone lie, I would probably be dead. Mr. Floyd y'all care about us. Not just because we black. You do the same for Mexicans.

Clay's responses are not unique to how students felt who enrolled and graduated from RISE Academy. He recognized that RISE provided every student with the tools and motivational support to achieve academic success if the students were willing to work. He realized, for him, it was life or death. Clay found success at RISE Academy. The traditional setting did not work for him.

For many special education students, school is a struggle. Clay was no different. Clay's traumatic brain injury severely hindered his academic ability. A smaller school population, fewer students in each class, and a plethora of teachers who understood his struggle, were ingredients to Clay's success. In June 2020, Clay graduated high school. Shortly after graduation, Clay's mother contracted Covid-19 and died three months later. The faculty and administration continued to support Clay after graduation. After the death of his mother, Clay spiraled out of control. I kept in contact with him. He is currently living with his grandmother.

Description of Dewayne

Dewayne was one of RISE Academy's biggest success stories. Dewayne was a 19-year-old, very quiet young man. He was five-feet, eight-inches tall, weighed about 165 pounds, straight White teeth and a large afro. At first glance, his self-esteem appeared to be low. He never looked up when he spoke. It was obvious he was broken. He was a 19-year-old high school freshman who had never passed a STAAR test. He was not a candidate for RISE.

After reading his application and attempting to talk to him, it was apparent his mother filled out his application. Dewayne was an only child who still lived with his mother and grandmother. He did not interact with his dad and had not spoken to him in years. He worked at a local restaurant as a dishwasher. He did not meet any of the criteria as a candidate for RISE. His mother wanted this opportunity for him. The RISE interview committee was apprehensive. With so few students, and STAAR accountability, Dewayne would be a major gamble. As a committee, we recognized some students would not meet our criteria but were still in need of support.

The traditional setting shaped Dewayne's idea of school. He did not like school. Although he was 19, he was in his mother's home, and she wanted him in school. He did not experience much success in the traditional high school. The committee explained if we accepted him, it would be a two- or three-year commitment. He agreed.

Dewayne had a negative perception of is experience in the traditional setting. His interpretation of what he perceived to be "negative" was different. He stated,

> Negative. That was my first year. It was really this, it was, the students ran everything, and so it was more popular to be outside skipping than in class. It was mostly, a lot of gang stuff going on, and so it was like, 'Oh, I'd rather be with somebody that I know outside of school than go be with somebody that I don't know.'

As a freshman at the traditional high school, Dewayne felt the pressure of wanting to fit in. He believed the "kids" were in control of the campus. His friends, the popular people, were skipping class. Dewayne based his participation on the idea of school popularity. I asked Dewayne why his missed so many days of instruction at the traditional high schools. He replied, "It was my high school freshman year. Cause Dewayne, I ain't go to class, Dewayne was fighting and getting suspended." Although Dewayne had attendance issues as well as academic issues, the administration wanted to give Dewayne an

opportunity to be successful. In his interview, Dewayne mentioned he fought a lot in the traditional setting. In Tyler ISD, each time a student fights, it is a three-day suspension. For each fight, Dewayne got further behind academically. In contrast, Dewayne was asked to share a time when school was positive or fun.

> Middle school. Seventh grade. It was sixth grade and seventh grade cause of Jeremy Diamond. He was my math teacher. I hate math, but him, when in seventh and sixth grade, I loved math because of him. It was, like, he'd say, "Bro, what's wrong with you?" But he, he was a White dude, so it was different than a Black dude coming to say, "Hey, what's wrong with you?" Like, he actually cared though a lot, other Caucasian people didn't. Jeremy Diamond was a great guy. Yeah that's my dude. That's my dude.

Mr. Diamond met Dewayne's expectation of a caring teacher. Daily salutations of concern made the difference. Mr. Diamond redefined the image of White teachers. Dewayne shared that his approach towards math changed because of his relationship with Mr. Diamond. Although his middle school years were a positive experience, I think it is worth noting Dewayne did not have a positive association with school again until he was 19 years-old.

Dewayne expressed how he felt about the traditional high school he attended. He disliked his principals and teachers but admitted his actions played a huge role in his freshman classification.

> Yeah, I'm finna get in this fight, get suspended for four days, get suspended for three days, and go outside of school and what...Cause your momma, she finna go to work. Your daddy, I mean, I don't really talk to my dad, but you know, your dad, he gone, so you're gonna be at the house by yourself suspended.

Peer pressure, limited supervision, street credibility, fighting and attendance issues equally played a part in him not being successful. Dewayne's reputation for fighting provided him with the acceptance he needed with his peers. Dewayne shared, "But if you

go to school, and you already got that reputation for beating up so many people, you ain't taking no stuff from nobody. It's, like, I gotta be that for them."

Graduating was not Dewayne's focal point at the traditional high school. He did not have parental supervision during the school day. He lived in a single-parent home and his mother worked. As a fifth-year senior, Dewayne realized he needed a fresh start. RISE Academy was another option for him to be successful. At the time of the research, Dewayne was still working at the restaurant as a dishwasher. He and his girlfriend were expecting a baby.

Dewayne's experience in the traditional setting. Dewayne described his experience in the traditional educational by describing his views of teachers and administrators. He thought their treatment towards Black boys was unfair. He sensed teachers already had preconceived notions about him as a student. His reputation for behavior preceded him. He believed his teachers did not hear his voice because of his behavior. He stated,

> The teachers have their favorite picks on students, and so if their favorite student come and say, 'Oh, that this person is a bad kid,' they're already looking at you like you a bad kid. I could come tell you stuff about him, but you don't wanna hear my side. You already done heard what he got to say, and so he just gonna ride with you cause that's your favorite student, and so... I come in your tutorials, you already got in your head, 'Oh, he finna act up.'

Dewayne's perception of teacher favoritism became his reality. He believed his teachers silenced his voice. His absolute reality does not mean it is the absolute truth, but it destroyed his chances of having positive experience in the traditional setting. He was nonchalant about his daily existence in school. He did adhere to the school's systems and structures that governed the culture. He stated,

> I really did whatever I wanted to do. The principal didn't care. He knew my name. So it was like, I would be walking behind him and he'd be like 'Ain't you

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supposed to be in class?' He would keep on walking. They didn't care, so I kept on with.

Dewayne saw the lack of supervision in his traditional high school as a lack of concern for his wellbeing. He felt if they were indifferent then there was no reason for him to care either. This led to bad decisions, which ultimately resulted in him falling behind academically. As a result, he ultimately applied to RISE.

Dewayne's experience at RISE. Before coming to RISE Academy, Dewayne was not successful on his state-mandated tests and only acquired enough credits to be a freshman. Even if he completed his credits, he needed to pass five tests to be a candidate for graduation. RISE was a two-year commitment. Dewayne passed three STAAR tests his first year as a student. Positive teacher interaction was a key to his newfound success. Dewayne was very clear in his expression about the differences between his experience in his traditional high school and his experience at RISE. He was adamant about his previous teachers having a vendetta against him. Dewayne explained,

> Before coming here, it was stressful. The teachers there made me feel like you gonna be in jail. And I feel like that's all they do. Like, I mean, you don't know about my backstory. It's not like that here. Everybody care about everybody. I never had that at a school. It made me wanna learn and graduate. Do what I needed to do to make my momma proud.

Dewayne felt as if his teachers at the comprehensive high school judged him. In his quote, he concluded his teachers' ideas about him were ill informed because they had no knowledge of his "backstory" or his daily struggles. RISE was different. Just as Mr. Diamond's caring demeanor in middle school made him want to learn math, RISE pushed him to graduate.

Dewayne's success in alternative education. The idea of "alternative education" had a singular meaning to the participants in the study. I asked if the participants

recognized the term alternative education. They all responded, "A place for bad or troubled kids." Dewayne said, "I was on board for coming, just to see what it was about but I knew they were sending me here because I was bad." He did not know the different areas of alternative education. RISE is a school of choice for academics, not discipline. Again, he touted his disdain for, what he perceived to be, racial inequities expressed by his teachers on the traditional campus. Dewayne communicated his beliefs about Black boys and RISE.

> The other schools look at you and wish you were White. At least if you can talk like you know what you're talking they wanna hear you. They could be the dumbest person that never had an education but talk like them. At this school, you feel like you can be you. You feel like everybody equal.

This was a powerful sentiment. Dewayne felt as though his teachers looked at him and wished he were White. He explained if a person, presumably a Black boy, could change their articulation and sound more "White," then the teachers would want to hear what you have to say. He believed your intellect did not matter as long as you could "play" the part for your teachers. RISE allowed him, and other Black boys, to express who they were without apprehension. Dewayne continued by saying,

> Honestly, if y'all still be around, hopefully it will be something bigger than this by then. It's small but we still a highway. I want my kid to come here. I know my kid would be successful here. I learned so much more coming here.

Dewayne desired the idea of "RISE" to continue to get bigger so more students are able to experience what he experienced. Wanting his unborn child to have an opportunity to attend RISE was an indication of his feelings. He expressed that his teachers' willingness to help him was the catalyst for success.

> There, I just did whatever I wanted to. But here, I'm coming in here like, "Hey tell me what we doing," and when I'm working on my stuff teachers are saying, "Hey you need some help with that." We are four Black boys that made it from coming here. A lot more gone make it.

Dewayne attributed his motivation to want to achieve at RISE to the fact that he believed his teachers wanted him to succeed. It was apparent he had family support. During the course of his two-year journey, the mother was a constant. Dewayne insisted he excelled at RISE because of the love and care that was shown to him daily. He was unsure of his path in life but was grateful his high school diploma was "in the bag."

Dewayne is one of RISE Academy's greatest success stories. He did not meet the pre-requisites for consideration as a candidate for RISE. He had never passed a state mandated test. He was a 19-year-old freshman. With those odds stacked against him, there was no way he would graduate. Two years later, he defied the odds. The culture and climate of RISE, his support from his mother, and his desire to graduate made it possible. He and his girlfriend are expecting a baby. He says he is excited about the opportunity to be a father to his daughter. He never had any contact with his dad. His father's absence motivated him to be present for this daughter.

The individual case analysis allowed a glimpse into the lives and thought processes of each participant. Their distinct ideology concerning the traditional setting as well as the alternative setting expressed itself in explicit detail. No matter how participants responded to the questions or engaged in the conversation, their responses, although nuanced, the similarities had clarity. The participants were keenly aware of their individual experiences but were able to articulate their overlapping of ideas of distress in the traditional setting and their success in the alternative setting. The cross-case analysis reveals the overlapping of ideologies.

Cross Case Thematic Analysis

As part of the data analysis, all four cases in this study were compared as part of the cross-case analysis. I utilized constant-comparison analysis to compare the individual

case for themes and commonalities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, I addressed each research question by individually comparing the responses from each participants' personal interview and focus group interview. The analysis concludes with a comparison and a narrative of emerging themes for each research question.

Cross-Case Analysis of Research Question One

   The investigation of how Black boys describe their experience in the traditional educational setting revealed three main themes. First, participants expressed a lack of belonging to the school they attended. Second, participants noted they did not have a strong rapport with their teachers. Third, they felt no motivation to succeed. This section provides, a description of these three emerging themes (See Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Emergent Themes Related to Research Question One

Participants	Lack of Belonging	Lack of Teacher-Student Rapport	No Motivation to Succeed
Craig	X		
Clay	X	X	X
Terrance	X	X	X
Dewayne	X	X	X

   Lack of a sense of belonging. All four participants expressed, at times, feelings of isolation. Craig felt his appearance and attitude made his peers in the traditional setting believe he was arrogant. Due to a cognitive delay stemming from a traumatic brain injury, Clay expressed that school was hard and simply "not for him." He did have much academic success in the traditional setting. He expressed the scar down the center of his head from his accident always made him feel like an outsider at school. He felt teachers were always having a bad day or an "attitude." As a result, Clay would isolate himself.

Even in his primary years, Terrance did not like school or his teachers. Terrance's feelings of isolation amplified, when teachers recommended, in his opinion, ADHD medication to help modify his behavior. He felt they wanted to control him. As a child, he could not understand his teacher's recommendation was in his best interest. He even expressed in his interview he had a difficult time focusing when he was in elementary school. Lastly, the pressures associated with earning street credibility with peers contributed to Dewayne's feelings of abandonment among teachers in the classroom. To achieve street credibility, Dewayne would fight regularly in the traditional setting. Dewayne mentioned in the traditional setting administrators would see him walking the halls during designated class time and would not address him. He felt as though they did not care about him or his well-being. Although each reason for their lack of a sense of belonging was uniquely different, participants shared a similar feeling of isolation in the traditional setting.

Lack of teacher-student rapport. Three out of four participants shared how they felt no connection with teachers at their previous schools. The ability to relate to students is paramount to their success (Duffy, 2018). Clay felt teachers projected their racial biases onto him. At times, Black boys feel as if they have a scarlet letter attached to their existence—the color of their skin (D. Ford, 2010). Terrance felt teachers were more interested in trying to get a paycheck instead of getting to know him personally. Although the class-clown, Terrance felt as if teachers punished him for some of the same things they would allow White students to do. At times, it seems inequalities in how Black boys are punished remain (Skiba et al., 2014). Dewayne felt teachers had preconceived notions about him stemming from past disciplinary incidents. Teachers knew him as a fighter and he felt the "fighter" tag kept teachers from wanting to help him succeed. Craig

established relationships with some of his teachers in the traditional setting. However, even Craig did not indicate that teachers worked to build meaningful relationships that would help him succeed academically. Nelson (2016) notes, "Positive learning relationships between Black boys and their teachers, are vital given the vulnerabilities and hardships associated with urban life in America for Black boys (p. 3). The intentionality of positive student relationships provide a vehicle of success for Black boys. Teacher should be aware of the role they play in providing a "feeling" of success for Black boys. The participant's responses highlight how the lack of a positive relationship with their teachers, in some form, redirected their ability and desire to be successful in the traditional setting. Success is not solely measured through academics.

No motivation to succeed. Three out of four participants expressed a lack of motivation as one of the most influential factors contributing to their low academic performance at traditional schools. Many times students are bored in traditional classes. Astin (1984) explains, "Student learning and development depend primarily on exposure to the right subject matter" (p. 520). Terrance felt the structure and notoriety that came with being a student-athlete was a contributing factor to his academic success. However, when a debilitating sports injury rendered him unable to play, his motivation for school diminished. "I didn't get to play football and football was the only thing that made me wanna pass," he revealed. Clay, on the other hand, felt that his academic struggles meant school was "not for him." Dewayne felt the campus climate did not promote success, but it encouraged chaos instead. "Anything you wanted to do outside of school, anything you would see outside of school was also in the school," he confessed. Craig knew he was off track academically, but he was still motivated to finish school.

Cross-Case Analysis of Research Question Two

The investigation of how Black boys describe their experience at RISE Academy in comparison to their experience at the traditional high school provided three main themes. First, participants expressed their appreciation for how RISE would accommodate them if special circumstances would arise. Second, participants noted they developed strong relationships with their teachers. Lastly, participants stated RISE had a positive campus culture that aided in their desire to be successful. This section provides a narrative on each of the themes and interprets their meaning (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Emergent Themes Related to Research Question Two

Participant	Accommodates Special Circumstances	Relational Capacity	Positive Campus Culture
Craig	X	X	X
Clay	X	X	X
Terrance	X	X	X
Dewayne		X	X

Accommodates students with special circumstances. Three of the four students interviewed revealed that, unlike the traditional education setting, RISE Academy accommodates students who have varying, unique circumstances. Craig expressed that RISE Academy benefits those who have special situations beyond the school. He spoke from experience because Craig juggled the responsibility of attending school and working as a senior. For him, the school's flexible schedule contributed to his ability to provide for himself financially while he obtained academic success simultaneously. Clay expressed that RISE Academy benefits those who have special issues. He added, students with babies, those with family problems, pregnant girls, and minorities alike felt safe and

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free from judgment while at RISE. Finally, Terrance stated that RISE is ideal for those who have to work in order to pay bills or support their families. Terrance remarked, "If you work nights you can come to the afternoon session or if you needed to come to the morning session instead, you could."

Relational capacity. All four of the students agreed relational capacity was a key component in the culture and climate at RISE. Strong relationships between students and teachers were visible, experienced, and appreciated. Each candidate expressed their belief that relationships were crucial to their success. Craig explained that prior to his enrollment at RISE; he established a meaningful relationship with his sixth-grade teacher. The teacher provided support for him beyond that classroom. However, with him being the only Black boy in his ninth-grade classes, he felt isolated. When he enrolled at RISE Academy, he experienced positive interactions with all of his teachers, and this ultimately led to his graduation and return to RISE as a teacher's aide. Before coming to RISE, Terrance felt racial tension between himself and his White teachers. He felt targeted by his teachers. At RISE, Terrence felt a though teachers cared about him, pushed him, and sincerely desired authentic success for him. Clay discussed how he valued the teachers and principal at RISE. He mentioned how much support he felt from teachers and his peers; he revealed that he saw teachers spend their own money to help with certain student expenses. Dewayne expressed how he felt judged as his previous high school. He shared one teacher told him he would probably end up in jail. His initial hopes in education were a direct result of his middle school math teacher who doubled as his coach, and made him feel successful. Dewayne was unsuccessful in high school on all of his state-mandated tests. In his first year at RISE, through relational capacity and intense work, he passed three state tests. With each participant, the respect for their teachers

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proved instrumental in building bridges of success, trust, and relationship with teachers at RISE Academy. The relationships proved to be enough motivation for the participants to remain in school and to acquire individual levels of academic achievement.

Positive campus culture. All four of the students expressed that RISE's positive campus culture had a positive impact on their lives. For Craig, RISE not only helped him graduate, but RISE inspired him to want to go into fashion and the military. Terrance expressed that RISE kept him from dropping out of high school, motivated him to achieve success, and changed his perspective about school. He explained, teachers and the principal hold students accountable at RISE. He felt others schools did not care about Black students. Clay stated the culture at RISE pulled him away from a life in the streets. "If not for RISE," Clay said, "I would be dead." For him, RISE Academy literally saved his life. Dewayne shared he felt he was somebody at RISE. He felt like "a nobody" at his previous schools. The stigma of being a troubled young man was no longer a part of his self-perception or daily academic struggles. The racial inequalities, for Dewayne, disappeared at RISE. All of the students discovered their own identity at RISE Academy. They felt a sense of belonging and personal achievement, inspired by a campus climate that celebrated their differences and preached their success.

Cross-Case Analysis of Research Question Three

The investigation of why Black boys believe they experience greater academic success in the alternative educational setting provided three main themes. First, participants expressed their appreciation for how RISE maintained a smaller class size. Second, participants noted the ability to relate to their peers. Lastly, participants stated

RISE allowed them to develop a positive identity and self-perception. This section

provides details about each of these themes (See Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Emergent Themes Related to Research Question Three

Participants	Smaller Class Sizes	Relatability to Peers	Positive Identity & Self Perception
Craig	X	X	X
Clay	X	X	X
Terrance	X	X	X
Dewayne		X	X

Smaller class sizes. Three of the four participants mentioned smaller class sizes

as an advantage for Black boys. Craig admitted smaller class sizes contributed to his

relational capacity with his teachers at RISE. He said, "You really can't do that with 30

plus students in a class." Clay mentioned smaller class sizes were a plus for him. He said

struggled in larger classes. Terrance did not give a specific reason he loved smaller class

sizes but mentioned them as a bonus for Black boys. Dewayne did not mention class size.

Black boys profit academically from smaller class sizes (Mathis, 2017). At the

comprehensive high schools, most class sizes are large. The participants struggled

academically in larger settings. Smaller class sizes allow for more one-on-one

instructional time between teachers and students.

Relatability to peers. All four participants believed relatability was one of RISE

Academy's assets. The participants did not feel judged because of prior attendance issues,

academic failures, or past discipline problems. The participants knew if you attended

RISE, everybody was working on their next opportunity to be successful. If Black males

can encounter a system where people view them as an asset rather than a liability or a novelty rather than a hazard, success is inevitable (Noguera, 2009). Each participant shared a brief synopsis of why there was a connection at RISE Academy not obtained at the comprehensive campuses. Dewayne mentioned not having to pretend. He could be himself and it was ok. He said, "When kids get to RISE everyone knows that we are all on the same page. Everyone here has made some mistakes but wants a diploma." Clay expressed in his opinion everybody at RISE was equal. No one acted as if he or she were "better" than the next. Terrance shared it was more black students at RISE. He did not feel like an outsider. Craig shared he could relate to all kids. He was glad RISE was diverse.

Positive identity and self-perception. All four participants felt as though RISE contributed to a new positive self-perception, with regards to academics and personal feelings of self-worth. There is a correlation between a person's self-perception and their motivation towards success. Dewayne said RISE staff understood many of the students have many responsibilities. Because RISE was willing to work with a student's work schedule, or a student's personal problems, it makes them feel good. It made them feel appreciated. Terrance said, at the other school, he felt as if teachers wished he were White. They wished he "acted" White or "talked" White. He said RISE accepts him for who he is. Although Craig agreed with the other participants, he said RISE helped to enhance the positive self-image he already possessed. Clay expressed he already had a positive self-image, but any Black boy that attends RISE, will leave with a positive self-image. A positive self-image, perception, or identify can be critical to success in education. Woodson (2006) suggests, "The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (p.

23). Carter G. Woodson believed this statement to be true. If Black boys believe this statement as well, it is our duty to help provide them with the tools to acquire a positive self-image.

Discussion

The participants in this study attended school in the traditional as well as the alternative educational settings. In addition, they graduated or will graduate from RISE Academy, an alternative high school in Tyler ISD, Tyler, Texas. Participants told their stories in a personal interview and a focus group interview. Through individual case analysis and cross-case analysis, common themes emerged across all cases. In this section, I provide a discussion of the study's findings as they relate to the theoretical framework and the literature. Additionally, in the next section, I provide implications and recommendations of the study to help educators understand the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and to provoke policymakers to mandate culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy at every level of education to affect positive change for Black boys in the education system.

Finding One—Teacher Influence

Teachers are a huge influence in education. For the participants in this study, teachers were a contributing factor in their ability to feel successful in school. All four participants felt as if teachers at the comprehensive schools were not interested in their success. They believed teachers thought they were just troubled teens. Teachers often lack the training to understand that certain attributes on display are often coping mechanisms to hide insecurities, internal conflicts, and self-doubt within these Black boys (West-Olatunji et al., 2006). Black boys often feel misunderstood.

Misinterpretation of the students' cultural identity by teachers impedes learning, resulting in many Black boys slipping through the achievement cracks (Lynch, 2017a). Positive teacher-student relationships are paramount, but unfortunately, they are the exception and not the rule for Black boys in education (De Royston et al., 2017). Dewayne mentioned Mr. Diamond was his beacon of hope in middle school. He was his math teacher and his coach, but he shared that Mr. Diamond, a White teacher, provided a level that superseded his "thoughts" of White people. Mr. Diamond was unique. The participants shared, the teachers at RISE were "different." They believed the teachers cared about them as a student. They allowed them to be Black. They were not concerned about what they wore or how they spoke. The participants felt as if RISE teachers were more concerned about their success. Critical components such as culture, ethnicity, race, and a host of other concrete principles are decisive indicators of quality and success for Black boys (Gay, 2015). Teachers of Black boys and students of color indicate that caring are critical aspects of culturally and politically relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Frelin (2015) suggests teacher-student relationships create trust with each student in an effort to repair the student's self-image so they can see themselves successful in the educational setting.

Finding Two—Sense of Belonging

In the second finding, all of the participants shared that RISE gave them a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging does not require legislative action but a change of heart and a unique approach to make students feel successful. A sense of belonging can become a catalyst to promote positive student behaviors. Cultivating a sense of belonging often requires a teacher to go above and beyond their required school duties to identify and meet the unique learning style or to even meet the students' social-emotional need

(Nelson, 2016). The students will adapt to the climate of the school. When students feel connected, they are capable of academic success. "Students were not permitted to choose failure in their classroom. Teachers did not allow mediocrity. Students did get to choose if they would turn in an assignment or participate in a collaborative exercise" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 479). All four participants said that no one judged them at RISE. Gay (2002) proposes when students feel like they belong, teachers are usually ethical, sometimes emotional, and they develop an academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is respectful and honorable.

Finding Three—Need for Cultural Relevance

All four participants agreed that a culturally relevant alternative school setting can positively encourage the academic achievement for Black boys. Alternative education covers a myriad of educational entities such as GED preparation, charter schools, special programs, and home schools for students (Aron, 2006). Factors that put students at risk of dropping out, such as ongoing disciplinary problems, academic remediation, struggles or disorder in the home, and chronic nonattendance, are designed to be addressed in the alternative education setting. This term is used to describe "educational activities that fall outside the traditional K–12 school system (Aron, 2006, p. 3). RISE Academy High School is a school of choice under the alternative educational setting.

RISE Academy provides a culturally responsive atmosphere. Wright (2019) contends that educators should engage in instructional practices that are culturally responsive and relevant to better identify with their students. Culturally relevant pedagogy honors and values the cultural and personal identities of all children—and Black boys in particular (Wright, 2019). Culturally relevant pedagogy provided a lens, by which, the faculty were able to see and better serve the students, and the students were

able to appreciate their cultural differences. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is a term coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings goes on to explain that, "culturally relevant teaching empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 384). Culturally pedagogy suggests that students can academically achieve. Ladson-Billings (1995) contends that culturally relevant pedagogy must do three things: "produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who develop and/or maintain cultural competence and develop students who can understand and critique the social order" (p. 474). All four participants excelled academically at RISE. All of them graduated or will graduate in May, 2021with their high school diploma. High school diplomas seemed impossible at the comprehensive high school.

Finding Four—Small Class Size

Smaller class size aids with one-on-one classroom help for students who struggle academically. Class size reduction can increase academic achievement (Graue et al., 2007). Research suggests that African American students tend to benefit more than White students do from attending smaller class sizes (Krueger & Whitmore, 2001). Class size can be a key component to student achievement in the alternative setting.

In addition to class size, the alternative setting implements a plethora of evidence-based best practice strategies for Black boys which include self-paced education, blended learning, targeted interventions, culturally relevant atmosphere and positive student-teacher relationships (Mathis, 2017; Mertens & Flowers, 2003; Picciano, 2019; J. Watson, 2008). All the participants loved the ability to work at their own pace in a blended learning setting. They were not bound by an eight-hour a day schedule or a six-week grading period to demonstrate academic success. J. Watson (2008) suggests that

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online blended learning provides a wide variety of opportunities for success. Online learning combined with teacher-student face-to-face interaction allows for student support in a variety of ways. Alternative education has proven its ability to create academic achievement in Black boys at RISE Academy.

<div align="center">*Implications and Recommendations*</div>

The results of this study provide new insights about the experiences of Black boys in both traditional and alternative educational environments as they seek to achieve academic success, which would result in a high school diploma. Additionally, the study reveals both culturally relevant pedagogy and a culturally relevant environments are catalysts for successful student outcomes. The following is a discussion of the implications with recommendations for future stakeholders.

Implication One—Relational Capacity

Positive teacher-student relationships are essential to Black boys' success. The participants in this study all identified teacher support and relationship building as a primary condition to their success. The literature supported this conclusion (Williams, 2018); therefore, relational capacity appeared to be a factor in the retention of Black boys. Educator support in the retention of Black boys is well known and generally considered one of the contributing reasons Black boys succeed. Nelson (2016) states, "Relationally resistant boys, who struggled academically, even noted how breakthroughs in their relationships with teachers came on the heels of thoughtful efforts to see the students' personal strengths" (p. 15). Often, teachers fail to recognize their importance in the success of Black boys.

The importance of success goes well beyond the walls of the classroom. Black boys shared how important it was for teachers to know them outside of their scholastic

achievement or behavioral issues (Nelson, 2016). If teachers do not form positive relationships with their students, Black boys suffer. Black boys without a high school diploma contribute to about a third of the nation's unemployment, which helps to define the School-to-Prison-Pipeline (Giroux, 2008). Teachers who are skilled with diverse learners also help students embrace their identity and find their individual voices.

The ability for Black boys to utilize their voice in academic spaces is vitally important. Two of the participants expressed they believed the teachers from the traditional high school wanted them to be White. The term White referenced an action, a sound, or a behavior. "Racial identity is especially important for African American students in White schools and White neighborhoods" (Ransaw & Green, 2016, p. 12). The concept of "acting White" is offensive. Curnutte (1998) suggests "acting White" is not only articulation, but it is the classes you choose in traditional high school—including theater or choir. "Acting White" is selling out to Black boys (Curnutte, 1998). When educators do not take the time to develop a healthy knowledge of the students they serve, the students attempt to make meaning of what they believe teachers are feeling. Communities of color are inexplicably dealing with this problem (Walsh, 2017). Strong relationships with students will help curtail this problem.

Recommendation One

When teachers have a narrow perspective of Black boys, the result can be damaging (Nelson, 2016). Teachers should be intentional about creating a counter narrative of Black boys and their academic achievement. As a system, we should move beyond quantitative measures as a means of identifying success but seek to humanize Black boys in education by creating opportunities and practices that promote authentic relationships.

The district should provide mandated professional learning that centers on the culturally relevant mindset of teachers. Bias training and self-reflection tools are the prerequisites for authentic relationships with Black boys. Although stereotype threat, at times, is inevitable, teachers should recognize hit it influences their interactions with Black boys. Reviewing and mirroring successful programs of practice for Black boys as a campus and a district can accelerate success.

Implication Two—Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is critical for the success of Black Boys. In some instances, Black boys first experience with success in school is via athletics. Ransaw and Green (2016) share Black boys' success in sports creates an avenue for cultural validation and personal achievement. Validation and achievement are ingredients for feeling connected. All four participants remarked that they felt sense of belonging at RISE. They felt validated and they acquired personal academic achievement not previously attained at the traditional high schools. Du Bois (1903/1989) believed that Black boys deal with a double consciousness. They continually have two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, and two wars in their Black bodies. In an inherently White educational system, RISE provides a sense of belonging through teacher interactions, students with similar struggles, students with similar celebrations, and a staff that is majority teachers of color.

Recommendation Two

Adjusting the definition of success to reflect individual growth and provide authentic celebrations for Black boys when they attain "success." Campus culture should have a consistent rhythm of highlighting successful people who look like the students they serve. Campus improvement plans should reflect intentionality in adjusting culture

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to ensure all stakeholders feel wanted and are capable of success. We should actively involve our community partners with initiatives centered around student success.

Implication Three—Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When incorporating CRP, it is important that implementation varies in every grade level and each content area. When students can relate and engage with a curriculum that is culturally relevant and motivating, student discovery increases. Culturally responsive teaching spotlights valuable ways to reach students of color (Gay, 2015). The participants in this study indirectly identified culturally relevant pedagogy as a critical influence of their academic performance. This study revealed that focusing on students' academic success, developing their cultural competence, and facilitating their understanding of critical consciousness helped address educational inequities in academic achievement as well as social injustice (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ransaw and Green (2016) states, "Not all African American males can successfully balance their social capital and their educational capital" (p. 12). Research contends 30% of the educational setting is composed of children of color (Esposito et al., 2012). CRP builds relational capacity in the classroom and encouraged students to take greater ownership of their learning.

Recommendation Three

Teachers who lack the knowledge and skills concerning diverse learners (Black boys) should attend mandated professional development opportunities to increase their knowledge. Campus administration will conduct routine curriculum audits via lesson planning to ensure the implementation of culturally relevant activities. School

administrators and teachers should include diverse texts in the lesson delivery and in the campus library with justification of its importance.

Implication Four—A Culturally Relevant Environment

Culturally relevant pedagogy was the theoretical framework for this case study. Revealing the positive attributes CRP, as well as, what could be perceived as the areas of development (weaknesses) that need to be addressed, is paramount to the success of the study. Culturally relevant pedagogy, coupled with, what I now know to be transformational leadership, was the catalyst for success in the study. RISE shifted from CRP to a nuanced culturally relevant environment, which included teachers who understood the diverse backgrounds of their students, understood the role they played in creating an atmosphere of achievement, the implementation of practices, academic and disciplinary, that were equitable, combined with the tenets of alternative education. Culturally relevant principles were the nucleus however; transformational leadership was a core component in the success of RISE. The students needed leadership that would raise their level of motivation and be attentive to the needs of the followers (Northouse, 2015). The participants needed a complete and thorough transformation from their old ideologies of teachers and education as a whole. Northouse (2015) says transformative leaders are charismatic, visionaries, able to communicate and have the ability to innovate and create change. The teachers at RISE had to be transformational leaders, or change agents, in their classrooms. Northouse (2015) also suggests that transformational leaders intrinsically motivate their followers. Intrinsic motivation for the participants was a task. Teachers worked overtime to ensure students were being successful. When an organization is in need of transformation, change needs to be established. Leadership is pertinent in facilitating the process.

Recommendation Four

The administration should create a campus committee dedicated to the implementation and sustainability of a culturally relevant environment and transformational leadership development. The administration will create a working document (elevator speech, power point presentation etc.) to solicit district level support and board of trustee buy-in. Tiered leadership development, mentor and coaching programs, and student leader development will be the core tenets of CRE.

Conclusion

The lack of Black male academic achievement is a constant issue in public education. This problem continues to grow as the student population shifts to the majority-minority in our traditional classrooms. Identifiable barriers to success in the traditional educational setting, which include a lack of positive authentic relationships between students and teachers, Black boys feeling isolated, and the lack of a culturally relevant environment, all help to impede success. Although the barriers are present, research, which clearly defines how Black boys acquire academic success in the traditional setting, remains undiscovered. Research, to date, has not demonstrated the effectiveness of the traditional educational setting for students of color. This study has furthered the research through an investigation of both the barriers created in the traditional setting and the factors in the alternative setting that led to participant success.

Using a qualitative case study, I explored the traditional and the alternative educational setting through the voices and lived experiences of the participants. Qualitative research allowed for examination of the issues facing participants at the center of the phenomenon. This qualitative case study allowed for the acquisition of rich, in-depth data from Black boys that helped explore the implicit factors contributing to

their high academic failure rates. I examined the academic failure of Black boys at the two traditional comprehensive high schools in Tyler ISD and the academic success at RISE Academy. I collected data through a participant questionnaire, semi-structured individual participant interviews, and a focus group interview. Participant experiences and voices were used in a cross-case analysis. Multiple themes and patterns emerged across the various cases.

The findings of this study will inform decision-makers on how to provide levels of success for Black boys in any educational setting. Culturally relevant pedagogy, components of alternative education, and the campus culture of RISE Academy High School proved to be effective in limiting the impact of barriers to Black boys' academic success. The need to feel love, transform old ideologies of defeat, and embrace a sense of belonging were crucial in the development of systemic change for Black boys at RISE Academy. Furthermore, the creation of a more nuanced approach to the word "success" will provide the genesis to better support Black boys on the RISE.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

Black boys and their lack of academic achievement in the comprehensive traditional setting has critical implications for schools. In an attempt to address the issue of academic success for Black boys in education, some researchers have called for the improvement of Black boys in school by focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy and the alternative educational setting as viable options for success. The study highlighted participants' narratives and identified the conditions and experiences that contributed to their academic failures and successes through the application of the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Problem Identification

Black boys often operate at an academic deficit in the traditional educational system. Students of color raised below the poverty line are the most underserved student population in the United States. They are doubly vulnerable to academic failure in U.S. classrooms than many other subgroups (Sanders et al., 2018; Tate et al., 2014). Black boys underperform on state and national achievement tests, suffer systemic underachievement in reading and math, struggle through lack of inclusion in the classroom, maintain declining academic statistics higher than other races, and suffer systemic and structural inequities in and outside the traditional classrooms (Jenkins, 2006; King et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2018).

Systemic injustice has plagued our nation since its inception and now, we have the tools and resources to fight back. We must acknowledge the systemic and institutional inequities, which still exist, and work to discover tangible ways Black boys can adequately participate and achieve in a "rigged" system. Low achievement and high dropout rates continue to exist for Black boys. Diverse and more modern cultural pedagogy has emerged since 1966, but the achievement gap remains unmoved, and dropout rates increased for Black boys. E. O. McGee's (2013) research exposes more of the systemic and structural challenges Black boys face, but it suggests that future research must unravel the real academic challenges of Black boys. Research must aim to discover the implicit factors at the heart of their low achievement and high dropout rates (E. O. McGee, 2013).

The disparity between Black students and their White counterparts is undeniable, as students growing up in lower-income; neighborhoods have less access to resources such as two-parent households, financial stability, a plethora of books in the home and a positive educational experience. Despite much research, the achievement gap persists. Ansell (2011) states the achievement gap consists of inequities in academic performance of students of color and their racial counterparts. Despite the education system and our nation's continual fight to achieve academic equality among race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, the gaps were persistent (Barton & Coley, 2009). The gap sounds the alarm of concern that our education system is failing our children of color.

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative case study explores the implicit factors that contribute to Black boys' high academic failure in traditional comprehensive high schools. Moreover, this study identifies the factors at the local alternative high school in Tyler, Texas, that

contribute to the success of Black boys attending RISE Academy. This research answers the following three research questions: How do Black boys describe their experience in the traditional setting? How does the experience at RISE Academy differ from the experience in the traditional educational setting? Why do Black boys believe they experience greater academic success in the alternative educational setting? To answer these questions, I utilized culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical framework.

A multiple case study allowed me to explore each participant's unique story while also drawing connections across the various cases. The data collection process consisted of three phases: pre- interview questionnaires, one-on-one interviews and a focus group interview. Using multiple forms of data in a qualitative case study allowed me to present an in-depth understanding of the problem and research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study has the potential to alter the academic trajectory of Black boys in education by acknowledging the obstacles they face in traditional education but direct the attention towards the tenets that culturally relevant pedagogy and alternative education offer as vehicles to their success. Data analysis allowed me to establish emergent themes connected to the participants' experience in traditional and alternative education.

Key Findings

Common themes emerged in the research as I worked to understand and define the problem. These themes developed into key findings. Specifically, the research highlights four key findings including:

- The importance of teacher influence

- The need for a sense of belonging

- The importance of cultural relevance

- The need for smaller class sizes

The first key finding was teacher influence. Teacher influence played a pivotal role in the success of the participants. The participants expressed the importance teachers played in their academic achievement. The participants agreed that strong, positive teacher-student relationships were essential in their development. All four participants expressed their relationships with their teachers at RISE motivated them to stay in school. Positive teacher-student relationships are important for students' academic success (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 407). In contrast, the lack of the relationship in the traditional setting produced feelings of animosity towards the educational system. The participants expressed an early disdain for school based on their eroding faith in teachers. The participants' believed teachers in the traditional setting did not care if they were successful. Some Black boys are successful in the traditional educational setting. Intentional and targeted professional learning for teachers on the importance of relational capacity with Black boys is essential. The district should provide training on culturally relevant lesson planning and the importance Black boy relevance and relationship building.

As teachers become skilled at infusing cultural relevance in their lesson plans, we will see an increase in student academic success and student teacher relationships. Black boys need to see themselves in education. Teachers must provide a nurturing environment where Black boys "control" the narrative. Culturally relevant lesson plans allow the culture of Black boys to be front and center in the learning process. Culturally relevant lesson plans can normalize success. A culturally relevant teacher understands the power of relationships. Relationships help to promote classroom self-discipline and academic success.

The second key finding was the need to help cultivate a sense of belonging for students. The participants highlighted the importance of feeling accepted in an educational setting. They needed a sense of belonging. All four participants, in their interviews, referenced how being a student at RISE pushed them to success. They remarked how they never felt success was possible in the comprehensive schools. They noted that RISE, for each of them, was a "judge-free" campus. Every student attending RISE possessed struggles, which ultimately served as fuel for their success. A sense of belonging at RISE Academy contributed to the retention of Black boys in school and a desire to be successful. Black men represent 60% of the faculty and staff at RISE Academy. It was an intentional layer in the hiring process to solidify a sense of belonging for the Black boys. In addition, we were intentional with our campus climate. Students knew teachers would not belittle or yell at them. In return, students understood they could not be combative with teachers. Respect was earned but being respectful was a nonnegotiable.

The third key finding was a need for cultural relevance. All four participants agreed that a culturally relevant setting helped to propel their academic achievement as Black boys. RISE Academy provided a culturally relevant atmosphere. Wright (2019) contends that educators should engage in instructional practices that are culturally responsive and relevant to better identify with their students. When a campus culture is culturally relevant, Ladson-Billings (1995) states it will produce students who are academically successful, they have or are made aware of cultural competence and students will be confident and equipped to challenge the social order of societal norms. In addition, the campus implemented a more nuanced version of culture. Although cultural relevance characterizes the struggles of minority students in an attempt to produce

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success in the classroom, RISE Academy recognized the need to accent cultural characteristics that were germane to Generation Z. The campus culture was tolerant of "sagging pants", hats worn in class, facial piercings, and any other attribute held as a nonnegotiable in the traditional setting. Their journey with RISE was dissimilar to their traditional educational experience. RISE Academy meeting the participants' need for cultural relevance as minority students, Gen Z, and boys, we believe, were catalysts for academic success.

Lastly, smaller class sizes was the final key finding. The two traditional comprehensive campuses each had a student population of 2500 students. Some class rosters were 30 students. The participants struggled academically in large classes. Small class sizes emerged as a vehicle of success for Black boys. African American students benefit greatly with smaller class sizes (Graue et al., 2007; Krueger & Whitmore, 2001). Smaller class sizes are the exception in the traditional setting.

Recommendations

The findings of this study will inform decision makers in education how to serve Black boys in the traditional and alternative educational setting. A culturally relevant school climate helped to mitigate the lack of academic achievement for Black boys in alternative education. Schools and districts should seek to acknowledge the intersectionality of all aspects culture in education. Teachers, in the traditional setting, have the ability to create a new normal for Black boys in education. The campus should provide a climate where humanizing Black boys is natural. Teachers should make themselves seem "human" by sharing stories and experiences that are common to the students they teach. As an educational system, we must adjust what success looks like, feels like, and sounds like for Black boys in school. Does success have to be an "A"?

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Does success have to be a two or four-year college or university? There must be systems in place to highlight and celebrate Black boys and individuals who look like them. Principals must be intentional with racial hiring practices. Black boys need a tangible and visible idea of what success looks like. Diversity, through language, academic texts, activities, guest speakers, is encouraged and, at times, mandated. Professional learning provided by the district, should support the development of positive, functional student-teacher relationships. Lastly, the administration should solicit district level support in the creation and sustainability of a culturally relevant environment. The district should have diversity in leadership, but also have supports for Black boys equitable to the support for special education, English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education.

Distribution of Findings

The findings of this study will contribute to the current discussion centered on the problem of the lack of academic achievement for Black boys in traditional education. It will both inform district stakeholders of how the participants in this study view traditional education, as well as the impact of alternative education as an additional vehicle to serve students of color. I identified three audiences to distribute the findings of the study. First, I will provide the Superintendent of Tyler ISD and his cabinet with the data from the research. The study can help the primary stakeholders understand the impact of traditional verses alternative education through the voices of the participants. Second, Tyler ISD campus principals in the traditional setting would have the opportunity to share the research data in department chair meetings and begin work towards strategies and activities to embrace cultural relevance. I would provide campus or district professional learning to offer clarity to the research. The teachers at RISE Academy could help with the creative process of planning and facilitating professional learning. Lastly, Tyler ISD's

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Board of Trustees should have an opportunity to review the research. If the district, through local data, identifies Black boys who would benefit from the alternative educational setting, the Board of Trustees could approve a new school. The target audience is crucial in advancing the research.

Dissemination of information via district online file sharing platforms including district social media platforms is another option for distribution. Each venue is different depending on the scope of the presentation. External stakeholders will have access to materials via project summary reports indexed on the district resource webpage.

In addition to the previous distribution methods, I will distribute the findings through district and national conference presentations and through co-authoring a book with Dr. Jennifer Guerra. I currently work at a national staff-developer and curriculum writer for AVID National. I will present my findings to AVID and begin the process of including parts of the research in our CRP strand. As a conference presenter, I can facilitate change by publicizing my research, provoking educators to participate in meaningful discourse, resulting in a better learning environment for Black boys. Dr. Guerra and I plan to start the first stages of writing a book centered on my research to further the importance of the academic success of Black boys in alternative education.

Conclusion

This study began with the premise of focusing on implicit factors that caused failure in Black boys in the traditional educational setting while simultaneously looking at why alternative education was a catalyst for academic success. Studying the lived experiences of current and former RISE Academy High School students provided insight into how Black boys process their educational environment and what they needed to succeed. The participants identified a sense of belonging and the lasting relationships

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formed with faculty and staff as central reasons for their success. These conclusions confirm similar findings found in the literature regarding Black boys in education (Harper, 2012; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Land et al., 2014). The research also confirmed the role different components, germane to alternative education, played in their success. All four participants provided examples of why alternative education is better for Black boys. I expect that this research provided a blueprint for educators who desired to see Black boys excel in education.

Du Bois (1903/1989) began his collection of essays from *The Souls of Black Folk* asking or making this statement: "Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question…. How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word" (pp. 1–2). Black boys in education, in society, in this world know all too well, what it feels like to be a problem. Their voices were silent for too long. This research allowed them to speak. It is imperative that educators commit to the sensibility of making all students, but especially Black boys, feel like they are a part of the solution instead of the problem.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Baylor University IRB Approval

Hello Dexter,

Thanks for answering my question. Based on the information you provided, your study does not qualify as human subjects research because the results would not be generalizable to a broader population due to your focus on only 5 individuals. Thus, you do not need to submit any documents to our office. Attached is our guidance booklet if you have questions about determinations. Let me know if you have any other questions.

Best regards,
Jessica Trevino

From: Floyd, Dexter <Dexter.Floyd@tylerisd.org>
Sent: Monday, June 15, 2020 11:13 AM
To: Holland, Deborah <Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu>; Trevino, Jessica <Jessica_L_Trevino@baylor.edu>
Subject: IRB

Good morning,

My name is Dexter Q Floyd, and I am a student in the Baylor Online Ed.D. Program. Our graduation date is August 14, 2021. I am writing regarding my Problem of Practice research and to inquire whether my research will be classified as human subjects' research or exempt as human subjects research.
The title of my research is, "Implicit Factors that Contribute to High Failure in African American Males at Traditional Comprehensive High Schools."

The research is based in and from the Tyler Independent School District in Tyler, Texas.

The researcher will follow the experiences of five black boys who graduated or is on track to graduate from RISE Academy, a dropout prevention/credit recovery high school in Tyler ISD. Tyler ISD has two traditional comprehensive high schools and one academic alternative high school.
I intend to conduct this research using an ethnographical case study focusing on: students who are currently enrolled at RISE, students who have graduated from RISE, students from John Tyler High School and students from Robert E. Lee High School.

I will use a questionnaire to conduct purposive sampling; in addition, I will have focus groups and individual interviews. Please let me know if you require any additional information regarding my study to conduct your evaluation.

Kind regards,

Dexter Q. Floyd

Principal
Alvin V. Anderson RISE Academy High School

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APPENDIX B

Consent Forms

Baylor University

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Black Boys on the RISE: A Qualitative Case Study

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER: Dexter Q Floyd

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research:

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study is to provide insight into the implicit

factors that contribute to high academic failure for Black boys in the traditional setting but

acquire academic success in the alternative educational setting. We are asking you to take part

in this study because you are a current or former student in the traditional and alternative

setting. Your experience in both settings adds value to the study.

Study activities:

If you choose to be in the study, you will participate in several activities which include:

1 personal interview: The principal researcher will conduct a personal interview with the participant relating to your experiences in the traditional and alternative educational setting

1 focus group interview: The principal researcher will conduct a focus group interview with all participants in a collaborative setting relating to their experience in the traditional and alternative educational setting

1 questionnaire: The principal researcher will administer one close-ended questionnaire prior to the personal interview.

We expect that you will be in this research study for 5–7 months. During this time, interviews will be scheduled with you at an agreed upon day and time. Each interview will be 30 minutes long. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed at a later date. A pseudonym will be used for your name in all printed and published materials. If you agree to take part in this study, we will ask you to sign the consent form before we do any study procedures.

Audio recording:

We would like make an audio recording of you during this study. If you are recorded it will be possible to identify you by voice recognition on the recording. We will label these recordings with a code instead of your name. The key to the code connects your name to the recording. The researcher will keep the key to the code in a password-protected computer/locked file. The recordings will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Audio recording is required for this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you should not be in this study.

Risks and Benefits:

To the best of our knowledge, there are no risks to you for taking part in this study. You may or may not benefit from taking part in this study. Possible benefits include contribution in helping to shape the narrative about alternative education as a vehicle of success for Black boys. School personnel and teacher educators may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study, as it may help to prepare future teachers for successful careers in teaching Black boys.

You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you want to take a break or stop the interview.

You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Confidentiality:

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by using codes and keeping all research material in a password protected computer and locked file cabinet. We will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

Authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Compensation:

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Questions or concerns about this research study

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our telephone numbers and email addresses are listed below:

Principal Investigator: Dexter Q. Floyd, Dexter_Floyd1@Baylor.edu Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brooke Blevins, Brooke_Blevins@Baylor.edu

If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438. You can talk to them about:

Your rights as a research subject

Your concerns about the research

A complaint about the research

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have

already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing consent.

APPENDIX C

Interview One Protocol

Date/Time of Interview:_____

Location of Interview:_____

Interviewer:_____

Interviewee:_____

Personal Interview Questions

1. Do you believe the high school you attended had a positive or negative impact on your educational experience? Why or why not?

2. In you educational journey, which era, elementary, middle or high, did you enjoy the most. Why was it your favorite?

3. In you educational journey, which era, elementary, middle or high, did you least enjoy. Why was it your least favorite?.

4. In the traditional setting, do you believe your teachers contributed to you having a good or bad experience at school? Why or why not?

5. Was there anything you loved about the traditional campus?

6. Before enrolling in RISE, how would describe your educational experience?

7. Do you believe that other factors, outside of school, such as drugs, sex, hanging out etc. contributed to you not being successful on the traditional campus?

8. Did you feel you had parental support during your high school education?

9. Could anyone at home help you with your homework if you needed help?

10. How important was school to you before coming to RISE?

11. Do you feel like, school or education is for you. Why or why not?

12. What is/was your motivation to get up and go to school every day?

13. If you work, go to school and have a personal life, how do you manage your time to ensure everything gets accomplished?

14. At this stage in your life, what do you want to accomplish?

15. Anything else you want to share?

APPENDIX D

Interview Two Protocol

Date   and   Time   of
Interview_____:_Location of
Interview:_____ Interviewer:___
Interviewee:_____

Focus Group Questions

I. What does alternative education mean to you?

2. How is RISE different from the traditional campuses

3. Prior to coming to RISE, explain why you considered yourself a "good" or
   "bad" student.

4. At the traditional campus, did you feel like teachers expected you to brraduate
   high school? Why or why not?

5. Why are/were you motivated at RISE to graduate?

6. How do you feel about the teachers here at RISE? How are they different?

7. In your opinion, what is life like for an African American male in our current
   world?

8. What is life like for Black boys in education in Tyler?

9. How can we, as educators make sure Black boys have a better experience
   in the traditional setting?

10. What can we do at RISE to make sure Black boys have a better
    educational experience?

11. Do you feel your race played a role in you being unsuccessful at the comprehensive traditional schools?

12. Do you feel your race played a role in your being successful at RISE?

13. In addition education, what has RISE taught you?

14. What's next in life for each of you?

15. Any last thoughts or comments you want to share?

APPENDIX E

Interview Three Protocol

Date/Time of Interview:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Location   of

Interview:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿ Interviewer:＿＿

Interviewee:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Questionnaire

1. As a child, did you like school? Yes or No?

2. As a child, did you like school? Yes or No?

3. As a child, was school hard for you? Yes or No?

4. Were you bullied in school? Yes or No?

5. Did you bully students in school? Yes or No?

6. Did you participate in athletics in middle school or high school? Yes or No?

7. Did you fail many classes in school? Yes or No?

8. Did you make "As" in school?

9. Were you absent a lot in school? Yes or No?

10. Did you have many friends in school? Yes or No?

11. Were you sent to the office to see the principal or assistant principal a lot in

    school? Yes or No?

12. Did you have many White friends in elementary school? Yes or No?

13. Did you have White friends in middle school? Yes or No?

14. Did you have White friends in high school? Yes or No?

15.   Overall, was school a fun and exciting place to you?

APPENDIX F

Tyler ISD Consent Form
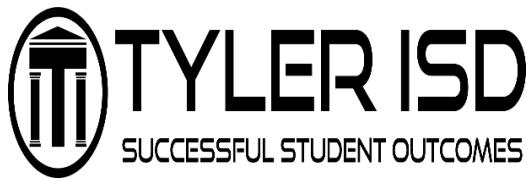
Dear Research Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in conducting research in the Tyler Independent

School District. It is the goal of TISD to participate in research efforts that will enhance

the development of teachers and students in Tyler ISD and education in general.

Researchers are required to submit a Research Study Application for proposed

research projects for data analysis. The application is designed to provide sufficient

information to determine the appropriateness of TISD participation in the research

project.

Please complete all requested information. Because research participation

decisions are based on the information provided in the application, include as much detail

as possible. All requests should be submitted four (4) weeks prior to the date that data is

needed. Approved research projects are required to submit an electronic copy of the

reported results to the Assessment and Accountability Department at Tyler ISD. The

process will include a review by a committee of Tyler ISD professionals.

All decisions are made in accordance with board policy. Tyler Independent

School District will only release de-identified student level data from education records

for the purpose of education research by attaching a code to each record that may allow the recipient to match information received from the same source, provided that:

1. A district or other party that releases de-identified data under this section does not disclose any information about how it generates and assigns a record code, or that would allow a recipient to identify a student based on a record code;

2. The record code is used for no purpose other than identifying a de-identified record for purposes of education research and cannot be used to ascertain personally identifiable information about a student; and

3. The record code is not based on a student's social security number or other personal information.

Questions about the application process should be directed to Dr. James Cureton, Director of Assessment and Accountability.

APPENDIX G

Research Study Application

Tyler ISD

COMPLETE ALL ITEMS ON THIS APPLICATION AND SIGN.

(YOU MAY SIGN YOUR APPLICATION DIGITALLY USING A DIGITAL SIGNATURE APPLICATION)

Researcher(s) Information

Name of Researcher: Dexter Floyd

Position/Institution: Principal/RISE Academy

Contact Address: 2800 W. Shaw Street

City, State Zip   Tyler. Texas 75701

Contact Phone: 903-352-4400 Contact email: Dexter.Floyd@Tylerisd.org

Co-Researcher(s)   Click or tap here to enter text.

Is this application for   ☒   District Consent for Participation

(e.g., your sponsoring institution requires district agreement prior to approval of

your research project.)

☒   Access to Data

(e.g., your sponsoring institution has already approved your study and you are

seeking.)

If this is a student research project, provide the following information.

Supervising Professor: Brooke Blevins, Ph.D.

Institution: Baylor University   Phone: Click or tap here to enter text.

Is this project for: ☐ Class Project ☐Master's Degree Project   ☒Doctorate Degree

Project

☐ Other: Click or tap here to enter text.

Project Description

A description of your proposed research project should thoroughly explain each of the areas identified below.

A. Title of Study: Supporting the RISE of Black Boys Through Alternative

Education: A Qualitative Case Study

B. Research Question(s): 1. How do Black boys describe their experiences in the

traditional education setting? 2. How does the experience at RISE Academy

differ from the the experience in the traditional educational setting? 3. Why

do Black boys believe they experience greater academic success in the alternative educational setting?

C.   Hypothesis/Hypotheses: Click or tap here to enter text.

D.   Will the study require participation by TISD populations? Yes

   a.   If so, which populations: Two current RISE Academy seniors. Both students are 18 years old or older.

E.   Instruments to be used (e.g., forms, questionnaires, assessments, etc.):
      Questionnaire and personal interviews

F.   Anticipated Project Dates – beginning and end: Click or tap to enter a date.
      1/1/2021

G.   Data collection procedures:
      Questionnaires, personal interviews, and focus group interview.

H.   Data Security procedures:
      Audio and video recordings, which are kept in a secure location and destroyed after data analysis.

I. Data analysis procedures:

Individual case analysis, cross-case analysis

J. Results reporting:

Click or tap here to enter text.

K. Explain why you are seeking to do your research in TISD:

The research involves current and former students of RISE Academy

students.

L. Potential benefit to TISD:

The importance of alternative education as a vehicle for academic

success for Black boys.

Supporting Documents

Additional supporting documents may be requested and should be submitted in a timely manner if you are seeking to conduct research. Supporting documents could include, copies of **ALL** instruments that will be used, Student/Participant Informed Consent letters (include translated letters as applicable), Parental Informed Consent letters (include translated letters as applicable), Professor's endorsement Form (for student research projects).

Researcher Statement

☒ "I understand that submission of this application **does not guarantee** that the Tyler Independent School District, or its membership, will participate in the proposed project."

☒ "I am responsible for the accuracy of information provided in the Research Study Application."

☒ "As the researcher, I understand that it is my responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of the participants in this study."

☒ "I will conduct this research project and subsequent result reporting in a manner consistent with ethical conduct."

☒ "I hereby agree to abide by the policies and regulations of the Tyler Independent School District."

☒ "I authorize unlimited use of the results of this research project by the Tyler Independent School District."

☒   "I agree to provide the Tyler Independent School District with an electronic copy of

the reported findings of this study within 60 days of completion."

*Dexter Floyd*_____

      _12/10/20_____

Signature   Date

APPENDIX H

Consent For Research Tyler ISD

From: Bitter, Jarrod
Sent: Tuesday, July 13, 2021 11:23 AM
To: Floyd, Dexter
Subject: Permission for Doctoral Study

To whom it concerns:

Please accept this as consent for Dexter Floyd, doctoral candidate, to complete his research study as outlined in Tyler ISD.

Feel free to contact me if you need any additional information.

Thank you,

Jarrod Bitter
Assistant Superintendent of Administration and Innovation
Tyler ISD

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