

IN A CLASS BY THEMSELVES: POSSIBILITIES OF CLASS SOLIDARITY BETWEEN
MIDDLE CLASS AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS AND THEIR ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Stephanie Jones)

ABSTRACT

This is the story of six teachers who share their life experiences and stories regarding their family social class backgrounds and histories. Grounded in the traditions of qualitative narrative research and expressed through active interviewing, this dissertation reflects the voices of the participants as well as the researcher. Using a theoretical framework based upon critical pedagogy, this work examines the idea that teachers conceptualize and discuss dominant discourses regarding class division and social class issues within the African American community and classrooms. It is the critical discussion of discourse which will allow teachers to make meaning of new connections between knowledge and power.

INDEX WORDS: Social class, Critical pedagogy, African American teachers, African American students, Discourse

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my ancestors who not only fought and died so that I and many others could obtain these educational opportunities, but who also instilled in the community the importance of education and the mantra "never give up"-especially my father Livy who was instrumental in my determination to make a place in the world. My mother Minnie, the self-made educator who taught me that no goal was unreachable, and lastly my daughter Rayne - without her existence my stamina to push forward through good and bad times would not be possible. I love you "Raynedrops".

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY	1
Questions that inspire the pursuit of Solidarity.....	3
In this day and age does social class really matter?.....	7
Problem Abstract and Guiding Research Questions.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	12
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	19
The Great Divide.....	19
Critical Pedagogy.....	38
3 METHODOLOGY	59
Design of Study.....	61
Participants.....	64
Data Collection	66
Initial coding	71
Assembling Discourses	72
4 WE ARE FAMILY	77
Meet the Family	78

	Meet the Teachers	92
5	TEACHERS STORIES-TALES FROM THE CLASSROOM	119
	Forming Relationships	121
	Stereotypes and Assumptions	129
	Glimpses of childhood experiences	140
	African American middle class teachers conceptualize social class	150
6	FOR MEMBERS ONLY-AN EDUCATION WITH CLASS.....	166
	REFERENCES	176

CHAPTER ONE

RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY

The teacher who underrates and underestimates her role in the ongoing progress of mankind has never really looked and seen that boy or girl who sits before her each day. He is not clay, not stone, not metal, not even a sapphire or a diamond, but he is a human being. As a human being he has a mind and as a teacher it is our job to guide, so direct, and so motivate his mental progress to the end that he may become a responsible citizen in our society. What more glorious task is there to perform? (James Dillard of CCTS cited in Siddle-Walker, 1996)

Mr. Dillard, a principal of the Caswell County Training School, spoke these words at a faculty and staff meeting to express his expectations and standards of how teachers should treat their students. As I read this speech I would assume it aimed to address any misgivings or misdirections of teachers in the building as to their importance in the lives of students. Possibly in the mind of Mr. Dillard it was the teacher who must take the responsibility to forge ahead in developing students who sat before them regardless of learning environment or academic history. Mr. Dillard's rhetoric focuses on the importance in capturing the essence of what teachers are to do which is to assist in shaping students into responsible citizens¹ of the world and motivate their inquisitive minds to no end. I also would assume the speech was spoken with great intention to demand teachers take further responsibility beyond that of teaching, and go forth towards a direction where pedagogy involves relationships and developing students into critical thinkers. James Dillard asks the question regarding the duties of teaching: What more of a glorious task is there to perform? This is a powerful statement, especially when I think of my years teaching middle school. Teachers can make the most profound impact in the lives of students in ways that are often not immediately visible. When Mr. Dillard spoke such words of wisdom in times of

¹ In this text I define responsible citizen as a person who seeks to contribute to local and global communities- acts of kindness, justice, and service that will leave a lasting imprint into the fabric of mankind.

segregation, duties of teachers might have been very different than they are today. In those days before the Brown vs. Board of Education decision (1965), the segregated climate encouraged many teachers to attend churches of students, make frequent home visits, and be a visible part of the community. Furthermore the principal, as well as other faculty members, went to great lengths to show a willingness to assist students and their families in any way possible. These orchestrated acts were all completed in an effort to diminish class division, because the faculty believed in the notion of community and oneness (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Although teachers and principals were considered middle class, their attitudes, actions, and beliefs looked beyond the economic and social walls that separated them from students and families.

In exploring **possibilities of class solidarity between middle class African American teachers and their economically disadvantaged students**, I will identify and reflect upon six areas which in a traditional research model are called chapters. In chapter one, I will focus on teacher-student relationships, the effects of social class in K-12 classrooms, and how social class positions of teachers influence the pedagogical relationships shared with students. Chapter two provides the review of literature, which will examine the historical context of class division within the African American community, and the consideration of how class division in the African American community has redefined teacher-student relationships. In addition, the literature will include an examination of the scholarship of critical educators who have used critical pedagogy in classrooms. Chapter three will describe the methodology of the study. Included in this section is the rationale behind my decision to utilize narrative analysis as a research methodology. Chapter four will focus on narratives of my family and me including our personal educational journeys as African Americans and presents information collected during

the data collection phase of the research study, including the individual narratives of teachers. Chapter five will include data analysis where the teacher's words will be presented and coded to various themes extracted from collected data. Chapter six will include final thoughts regarding participants' narratives, and I will make recommendations for future lines of research as well as endeavors that have the potential to expand teacher educators' understandings of the social class dynamic in African American communities.

Questions that inspire the pursuit of solidarity

Can teachers today look beyond the social standings of their students and form positive pedagogical relationships that will prepare students to become critical thinkers in society? Or has class division created a barrier for teachers to help guide, and motivate mental stimulation among their students creating environments of apathy and failure? This dissertation will demonstrate the possibility, that both of these statements can be correct in varied contexts. If the latter argument is probable which I would personally argue to be true, there are several questions that need to be posed. When I think of the glorious tasks we as teachers must perform to help contribute to mankind, three questions emerge:

1. How can educators understand the influence of Mr. Dillard's powerful words? What might happen if they put them into practice?
2. How can certain teaching practices help to continue transcending our global society into a community of teachers and learners?
3. How can educators form relationships with students and create learning environments that will provide the necessary mental stimulation needed for future careers in a competitive capitalistic society?

These questions have influenced my research, particularly my study which is to examine how middle class African American teachers view their students living in poverty and how those views shape their teaching.

Throughout this dissertation research, social class will be a concept foregrounded, interwoven, and used as an analytic basis to look at ways in which middle class African American educators perceive the academic and social potential of their students. To examine the powerful effects of social class in education I will use the process of storytelling to answer questions that have often haunted me as an educator and will probably continue to affect me for the remainder of my life. I believe it is important to explore the feelings and experiences of teachers who come from a different socioeconomic status than their students. This research will grant a voice to the many teachers who honestly desire success of students of all economic backgrounds. Perhaps this process of storytelling will allow me to release myself from feelings of unrest as I struggle to write about my life experiences and well as exploring the lives of others.

My experiences as a middle class African American teacher taught me a valuable lesson while working with students in high poverty areas. It was difficult to understand or become empathetic concerning feelings or actions of my students because, with the exception of race, we did not share any commonalities that could link us together. At the time I did not welcome the idea that I needed to extend beyond my class position of privilege and power in society and reflect on an important role I possessed in our learning environment. Until I understood the difference between our perspectives I would encounter many frustrating and hostile moments. By forming positive relationships with my students and gaining their trust, I learned how to

relate to their reality and understand their class positions. I had the pleasure of working with exceptional teachers who saw beyond the tattered clothes of a child or the pinned up resentment disguised in the form of misbehavior. I have also witnessed and participated in discourse regarding the social class of students and their inabilities to become successful students. Whether we admit it or not, teachers are influenced by societal discourse regarding those who are most marginalized.

DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

Loud noises entered the hallway as first period bell rung for classes to change. Students filled the corridor with distinct sounds of screaming, running, playing, varied conversations with colorful language and a lot of swearing, and teachers on hall duty vocally encouraging students to quickly return to their classrooms. This morning was typical for Sedgefield Middle School which housed approximately five hundred students and had a reputation of being an educational war zone. I walked down the hallway towards the classroom feeling like a ball in a pinball machine wedged between energetic students. As I came around the corner the click of the antiquated school intercom made a screeching noise while the assistant principal in her proper and professional shrilled voice began to speak. Mrs. Jenkins demanded silence and attention from the school as she made the announcement.

“Students- Sedgefield Middle School will have a faculty versus student basketball game on Wednesday and the cost of admission will be four dollars.” As she continued to make announcements I thought to myself, “Wow four dollars is a lot of....”

Before my thought was completed it was interrupted by a loud intense conversation between two teachers, Mr. Taylor and Ms. Barnes. By this time my stride had slowed as I stopped to hear the

basis of disagreement. Mr. Taylor, a middle-aged African American male, had taught at Sedgefield for 20 years and was often looked upon as the “daddy” of the school. He argued the costs of tickets for the basketball game were entirely too expensive and a majority of students could not afford it. He felt the administration should have been more sensitive to situations of students who were poor and could not afford to attend because they would be penalized as a result of their economic situation. In addition, Mr. Taylor passionately exclaimed, “The price of tickets might as well have been forty dollars.”

In opposition to her colleague Ms. Barnes, also African American taught for three years at Sedgefield Middle and had a reputation of being a very mean and nosy teacher. Ms. Barnes said students came to school daily with new hairdos, designer clothing and shoes, plenty of candy and snacks; if they could afford to buy such items then spending four dollars on a basketball game should not be an issue or problem.

Ms. Barnes continues to talk, “We (faculty) should not feel sorry for these kids because many of them attempt to con teachers out of money and most students live better than we do - often recipients of food stamps and other government assistance.”

As I listened to both arguments I made an effort to avoid judgment of either teacher since I had understood both perspectives during my tenure as a teacher. But I did want to understand the clear differences of opinion from each teacher who taught the same population of students, and spent the same amount of time with students - particularly what factors contributed to the divergent thinking of both individuals. The conversation between the teachers reflected prevalent attitudes that I have observed among middle class African American teachers who educate poor African American students. The conversation also reminded me that despite efforts to try and be

sympathetic towards the plight of students who come from poverty there are times when we are influenced by societal assumptions and stereotypes associated with poverty.

In this day and age does social class really matter?

How does social class make an impact on teacher perceptions of his or her student's academic potential, determine particular teaching styles, and methods used to teach learning communities, provide foundational norms and expectations of classroom behaviors, or influence empathy (or lack thereof) toward certain populations of students?

McLaren (2009) describes class as “The economic, social, and political relationships that govern life in a given social order” (p. 65). Class is often reproduced through our society's various institutions and systems, and according to Althusser (1971), schools are the most effective in reproducing dominant class-based ideology. The American educational system is a reproduction of societal class structure where Althusser points out “the school teaches “know how,” but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its practice” (p. 133). In other words, the goals of schools are to recycle the ideas of those in power and keep class division alive and well in society. Perhaps the best method of immersing citizens in certain class-based ideologies is to start early in educational systems. Through educational systems and practices, students as well as teachers become subjects of ideology enacted by the ruling class.

Brantlinger (2007) discusses schools and social class by describing the relationship as, “An unfortunate aspect of the American capitalist system and its meritocratic schooling is that they depend on social hierarchy and on uneven resource distributions of resources rather than on equality” (pg. 263). Brantlinger notes that low income youth in her study felt teachers were not fair in their actions towards them. Many low income students experienced frustration, self-

alienation, and feelings of inferiority resulting from perceived second class treatment through faculty and middle class peers. For example, teachers would not provide additional academic assistance to struggling low income students, yet eagerly assisted middle class students who were considered smart.

In agreement with Brantlinger's view of the great role that social process plays in the educational lives of students, Bowles and Gintis (2005) assert education perpetuates legitimate inequality in a meritocratic manner by rewarding and promoting students and placing them in various positions of an occupational hierarchy. Schools maintain patterns of social class, racial and sexual identity which allow them to accept their status and positions in the production process (Fine, 2008; Giroux, 2001; Weis, 1993). In the U.S., the idea that education enables workers to have a greater productive capacity through the obtainment of social and technical skills is often taught from an early age. The presumption is that if you work really hard one can experience upward mobility and achieve financial success.

Problem Abstract and Guiding Research Questions

Until three years ago I would have argued that many social injustices which occurred in public schools were associated primarily with race. My argument around social injustice began to shift towards social class because of the resource disparities I observed as a middle school teacher working with a large population of economically disadvantaged students. In his forecast for the future of U.S. educational equality in the new millennium, Adam Gomoran (2008) predicted that within the next century a substantial decline in racial inequality affecting educational outcomes. However, social class inequality would continue at the same rate it had in the past. From educational systems to economic prospects as an adult social class is lived in

complex ways in the “real” world, but is not readily discussed by many; in other words, social class influences everything in our lives but remains the pink elephant in the room.

The poor and working class often experience shame caused by limited material or lack of resources and continuous attacks on their self-esteem by privileged classes (hooks, 2005). These attacks position working class and poor people as victims of unfair practices such as biased media representations and unfounded negative assumptions about their lifestyles. How can we extract/remove the dominant ideologies that influence political/social structures to make meaningful changes in social class inequities and classism? bell hooks² (2005) said,” While some of us believe that poverty needs not to exist we know that in our nation there is no collective commitment to ending poverty” (pg. 121).

Even though there is knowledge of poverty among the student populations of school systems the ever existing issue of social class will remain present and standing in the face of public education. Given the knowledge of student poverty in schools, the significance of teachers confronting such inequality may arise in individual platforms to change many of the school policies that encourage classism such as fieldtrips, fundraisers, and canned food collections. In addition race and class present complexities when considering classroom dynamics especially concerning black middle class teachers and socioeconomically disadvantaged black students. Black³ middle class teachers must face complicated realities of class differences among students

² bell hooks spells her name with lower case letters in an attempt to place focus on her work instead of her name and defies conventions associated with traditional structures of power.

³ Throughout this dissertation I will use the terms black and African American interchangeably to describe the same group of people. I am aware that in the black community both terms are recognized as descriptors.

and class differences between students and themselves. Writing about her experiences in college as a poor working class student, hooks (2009) explains:

During my college years it was tacitly assumed that we all agreed that class should not be talked about, that there would be no critique of the bourgeois class biases shaping and informing pedagogical process (as well as social etiquette) in the classroom. Although no one ever directly stated the rules that would govern our conduct, it was taught by example and reinforced by a system of rewards (p. 135). Although hooks describes the silencing of class in a college setting, similar silencing occurs in k-12 classrooms, where students and teachers enter an environment purposely created to ensure classification, classism, and social and economic division (Beach et al., 2007; Brantlinger, 2007; Jones, 2006; Peterson, 1990).

The purpose of this study is to examine how middle class African American teachers view their students living in poverty and how those views shape their teaching. Research questions will include:

- A) Does the social class background of a teacher inform student-teacher interactions in the classroom and pedagogical relationships when students are economically disadvantaged?
- B) If so, in what ways?
- C) What discourses are used by teachers when talking about their economically disadvantaged students and their academic potential?
- D) In what ways might theories of critical pedagogy benefit from explicit attention to social class?

These research questions were intended to gain an in depth understanding of interactions between discourse, ideologies, and political/social structures that are significant in teacher and student relationships and pedagogy.

The first question is proposed to examine how a teacher's social class background informs student teacher interactions in classrooms and pedagogical relationships when students are disadvantaged. hooks (2000) states that "The black masses are encouraged by an empowered privileged few to believe that any critique they or anyone makes of the class power of black elites is merely sour grapes. Or they are made to feel they are interfering with racial uplift and racial solidarity if they want to talk about class and they live the reality of class divisions among black people" (p. 98). It is my belief that we as an African American community make little effort to have valid discussions about social disparities that occur within the community. Particularly, this question focuses on how teachers perceive and view students in relation to the social class background of the teacher.

The second question explores teacher discourse and beliefs when discussing the academic potential of their socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The discourse of "academic potential" is reflected in teachers' actions in the classroom related to curriculum and instructional practices. When I use the words discourse of academic potential, I am mainly discussing how teachers use conversations to express beliefs of how academically successful or unsuccessful their students have the capability to be. As Gil and Hoffman (2009) note that the underlying beliefs of teachers provide a foundation for understanding the thinking that determines pedagogical and instructional practices in classrooms. Furthermore, during shared planning time

teacher discourse also influences teachers' thoughts and decision making for learning and instruction.

The third question examines in what ways might theories of critical pedagogy benefit from explicit attention to social class. McLaren (2009) states critical pedagogy, "asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture and while others are clearly not" (p.63). The significance of this statement conceptualizes the teacher's important role in implementing instructional strategies and practices that are socially produced and accepted. Thus it can be through the implementation of critical pedagogy that teachers reconceptualize who they are as educators and through this recognition come to understand their power in changing dominant culture's constructions of knowledge that occur in the classroom through changing practices and instructional strategies. Particularly, this question focuses on how teachers can tend to the issues of social class using their social class status and how teacher discourse can contribute to critical pedagogy and possibilities of solidarity.

Theoretical Framework

Although there are class divisions within the black community there can be efforts to unite the masses by blacks who skillfully plan strategies to resist the exploitation and oppression of the masses (hooks, 2000). hooks posits that "Visionary black thinkers must create lifestyles that create and embrace empowerment for all classes, and create opportunities for the black poor underclass to have class solidarity where their needs will be addressed and articulated" (p. 99). To speak of the efforts of visionary black thinkers as hooks (2000) suggests leads me to the focus of my research. Therefore I will use a critical pedagogy epistemology to seek to examine

relationships between knowledge and power inside of classrooms, and then middle class African American teachers could become the visionary thinkers needed to create and embrace empowerment among their students.

My intentions are to address class differences and relationships in classrooms and initiate conversations with African American educators about class solidarity. These conversations will raise issues of social class differences teachers and students experience. They may also address ways that critical pedagogy can be an entry point for students and teachers to plan in an engagement of social action and change. Rather, I believe when middle class teachers begin to disrupt dominant practices through conversations about themselves and their students, possibilities of constructing a new reality for poor students in school may arise.

The overarching theoretical perspective that guides my research is the lens of critical pedagogy. Researchers who undertake a critical pedagogical theory lens generally focus on research that will question and transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate an undemocratic life (Darder, A., Baltodano, M.P., & Torres, R.D., 2009). Critical pedagogy- similar to Marxism- positions emancipatory opportunities within the framework and emphasizes structural and systemic practices used by teachers in classrooms (Darder, A., Baltodano, M.P., & Torres, R.D., 2009; Giroux 2009; McLaren, 1995). As an epistemology, critical pedagogy historically came from the foundation set by critical theorists such as Habermas who used a number of heterogeneous ideas (Ray, 1993). These ideas involve the significance of historical consciousness as a central component of critical thinking (Giroux, 2009). The important work of Paulo Freire, whose concentrated efforts revolved around “conscientization”, lent to the ideas of teachers as critical thinkers, and possibilities for curricular transformation (Morrow, 1994).

In addition, central to a critical pedagogy perspective, is the critique of schools that perpetuate classism towards students who are economically and politically disenfranchised (Morrow, 1994). Ray(1993) states that “critical pedagogy or conscientization, begins by singling out elements from people’s background awareness in small, intimate cultural circles where an uncoerced exchange of ideas is encouraged; these begin by deploying codifications, sketches, or photos, objects which mediate discussion and are decoded through critical analysis” (p. 22).

Therefore, through these exchanges of ideas, a critical analysis occurs and dialogue provides opportunities of reflection and action. Because of this, it is important to examine history of school knowledge by questioning how and why knowledge is constructed, and why some forms of knowledge are accepted by the dominant culture, while others are not considered valid or accepted. Critical pedagogues call for understanding, and taking critical looks at social constructions of knowledge, power relations, and class relations (McLaren, 2009). This perspective helps to educate teachers in *what knowledge* students should be provided with.

In McLaren’s (2009) view, three tenets guide the work of critical pedagogues. The first tenet seeks to understand the connection between power and knowledge where dominant curriculum uses knowledge to maintain social relations and class interests. He argues teachers should recognize power relations are connected to forms of school knowledge that produce what is accepted as truth. Additionally, critical pedagogues would argue that knowledge should not be analyzed on the basis of truth but rather if it is oppressive or exploitative (McLaren, 2009; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1987). Many critical pedagogues also argue that curriculum in schools do not challenge dominant practices such as, content material used solely to prepare students for standardized tests, or the absence of instructional practices that teach students to think critically

for themselves and ask questions that confront oppressive conditions in society (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fisher, 2009; hooks, 2003). Therefore critical pedagogy seeks to expose knowledge that misrepresents reality, but informs the daily lives of people.

Second, schools reward those students who exhibit dominant cultural capital including those students who use middle class elaborated codes (McLaren, 2009). McLaren suggests critical educators should also take note not to overvalue certain ways of talking, acting, etc... as they uncover conditions for social reproduction. Hence, when an educator introduces critical curriculum yet constantly encourages student usage of dominant social and language practices he/she maintains existing social and power relations. Teachers should challenge the pedagogical notion that all students enter schools with the same development. Schools value and reward students who possess cultural capital of the dominant society (also used by teachers) and devalue the cultural capital of students who perform subordinate class positions. Academic performance is connected to students' cultural capital, and each student comes to school with different experiences and alternative forms of intelligence (McLaren, 2009). With an awareness of different cultural capital educators can prepare and diversify teaching strategies used for motivation, academic, and social conditions. Overall, educators must have an awareness of different cultural capital so they can prepare and diversify teaching strategies used to motivate, instruct and reflect social living conditions.

The final tenet is critical educational theorists believe curriculum trains students for subordinate or dominant positions in society and this curriculum is often called the *hidden curriculum* which includes the unintended outcomes of the schooling process (Anyon, 2008; Kelly, 2009; McLaren, 2009). Schools use hidden curriculum to influence students through rules

of conduct, classroom environment, and pedagogical practices teachers use with certain groups of students. Hidden curriculum also consists of teacher expectations, grading policies, teaching and learning styles, and messages sent to students by the instructional environment. McLaren argues that teachers unconsciously shift professed educational views and goals of the classroom due to hidden curriculum. McLaren's assertion is important especially since it indicates the importance of a teachers' role in continuing the social relationships used to maintain economic and class ideologies.

Particularly, it is this critical perspective that will permit me to take a more in-depth meaningful look at the pedagogical relationships between middle class African American teachers and economically disadvantaged students. This perspective of critical pedagogy situates itself agreeably within the critical perspective because "the concept of critical theory refers to the nature of SELF-CONSCIOUS CRITIQUE and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions" (Giroux, 2009, p. 27). Therefore, it is the combination of a critical theory perspective and a historical socioeconomic perspective of African Americans that allows me to take a critical view of pedagogical relationships between teachers in students in the African American community.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

The intersections of race, class, and gender present many complex contextual meanings, therefore critique of black and white middle class educators and their relationships should be critically analyzed. For instance, the assumption that white middle class teachers and their black economically disadvantaged students have little in common denotes a widespread perception

among educators (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Sleeter, 2008). There is skepticism, for example, that white middle class teachers can create or maintain positive pedagogical relationships with their poor black students (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Gay, 2004). Two significant concerns with this notion, however, include the narrow focus on white middle class teachers and the assumption that “white middle class teachers” form a homogenous group that would behave in similar and negative ways with students of color (Delpit, 1995; Jones, 2006; Jones, & Enriquez, 2009; Lensmire, & Snaza, 2010). Such approaches have foregrounded racial difference while diminishing social class. Black middle class teachers and their pedagogical interactions with black students from working-class and poor families should also be investigated.

A major gap in the research regarding race and its impact on teacher-student interactions and classroom pedagogy is the consideration of social class difference when students and teachers share racial identification. The assumption that black teachers understand their black students has been difficult to invalidate. Obviously a commonality of race exists, yet beyond skin color there may be complexities and contradictions of culture and class which are overlooked or disregarded. If school structures promote mainstream norms and standards of knowledge where educators unconsciously facilitate educational inequalities then researching relationships between black middle class teachers and economically disadvantaged black students is crucial for education, especially for teachers in particular because student achievement and futures are direct derivatives of teacher practices (Darder, A., Baltodano, M.P., & Torres, R.D., 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Jordan, 2010; Little & Bartlett, 2010; Oakes et al., 2000). Chapter one is titled “Relationships are key.” The title draws from Mr. Dillard’s words from

Siddle Walker’s book (1996). He believed in order for children to have positive academic

successes, there must exist a positive relationship between teachers and students. As I reflected upon my successes and failures as a teacher most of my experiences truly were dependent upon my relationships with students. Mr. Dillard believed teachers were the major driving forces behind student motivation/success, and thinking deeply about his beliefs roused strong feelings of agreement. I affirm one of the ways in which positive relationships can form between teachers and students is for teachers to understand the structural and system inequities that students cope with at home and school.

Teachers with views similar to Ms. Barnes, the teacher from Sedgefield Middle School, may have relationships with students, but could these relationships be further strengthened by understanding certain societal assumptions and stereotypes placed on populations of disadvantaged students? In contrast, those teachers with views such as Mr. Coleman, the other teacher from Sedgefield Middle School, could be instrumental in encouraging other teachers who may not have the critical understanding of structural inequities to form solidarity between themselves and students. I can only hope that during my journey of research and through this text, that I can explore the many intersections of the interesting, and profound lives of middle class African American teachers and their students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I review the bodies of literature that focus on class division within the African American community and the tenets of critical pedagogy. I first describe the historical and chronological events that have led to social class division among African Americans. Furthermore, I consider how class division in the African American community has redefined teacher-student relationships - refocusing curriculum and instruction, and re-visioning pedagogy in the classroom. I then move from examining class division within the African American community, and its effects on the classroom to the critical pedagogy that informs my work. Particularly I consider the scholarship of those whose research has been taken up within the academy and mainstream culture. Finally, I conclude with the contribution of my work within the field of education and how it will address the field's current gaps in understanding class divisions within the African American community and how class divisions impact classroom curriculum and pedagogy.

The Great Divide-Middle class and Poor Working Class Blacks

Understanding the work of E. Franklin Frazier is essential to taking a historical perspective on the African American middle class. While there are many perspectives and people that have shaped an understanding about middle class blacks, Frazier has significantly contributed to mainstreaming notions of the black middle class. Frazier believed the black bourgeoisie represented a group of people "lacking a cultural tradition and rejecting identification with the Negro masses on the one hand and suffering from the contempt of the

world on the other” (p. 24). The contempt of White America often reflected through social practices such as denial of front entrance into business establish, assignment of separate facilities, and rejection of employment opportunities. According to Frazier (1957), the black bourgeoisie developed an innate inferiority complex where they surrounded themselves with a world of make-believe to satisfy a desire for status in America and to escape the scorn of Whites. This world of make-believe consisted of material purchases and the creation of social hierarchies within the African American community.

However, it was the publishing of Frazier’s (1957) landmark book *Black Bourgeoisie: The Book That Brought The Shock of Self-Revelation to Middle Class Blacks in America*, that the complexities of the black middle class society became prevalent. As a result, Frazier’s book, revelations and challenges of the black community were examined and exposed to the world. Published over half a century ago, the book continues to generate intense conversations in current societal views of divisions between black middle class and poor black working class families.

Frazier’s notion of the *Black Bourgeoisie* was greatly influenced by a number of studies that he conducted in African American communities over several years. According to Frazier, he was often accused by his critics of writing untruthful facts about behavior which seemed characteristic of middle class America regardless of color. The majority of middle class citizens often purchased objects which reflected social status and symbolized class positions. In response to the criticism Frazier stated, ”As a case study of middle class Negroes it does show the peculiar conditions under which a middle class emerged among the Negro minority and the peculiar social and cultural heritage of the Negro middle class which was responsible for the

outlook on life” (p. 7). It is this particular explanation- the explanation of how class division began and continued within the black community- this study explored and exposed. Although many patterns and behaviors noted in *Black Bourgeoisie* could have applied to all races, Frazier aimed to show the presumed class status of African Americans in America had not changed their overall lower level economic positions in mainstream America (Frazier, 1957). Hence, despite the steady economic climb and obtained status and income, middle class African Americans were not equal to middle class whites⁴. Frazier’s intentions were to demonstrate to the world longstanding and negative effects of slavery on African Americans especially concerning the mental, social, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects (Frazier, 1957).

Before E.L Frazier’s critique of the black middle class, the occurrence of class division among blacks in America dates back to the times of slavery. Slaves chosen to live and work inside homes of slave masters began to acquire skills and knowledge closely associated with their masters (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). These slaves are historically referred to as “house slaves,” and their peers that worked in the field were known as “field slaves.” Many house slaves acquired language, reading, and vocabulary skills with the adaptation of religious morals and behavior. On the other hand “field slaves” acquired skills used to farm and complete handy work. Russell, Wilson, & Hall (1992), suggests the behavior and ideals of house slaves mirrored their masters thus many house slaves were subject to less social control and more privilege than field slaves.

⁴ Throughout this dissertation I purposely chose not to capitalize the words black or white simply because I did not want to give more significance to one word more than the other; therefore both appear throughout the dissertation in lower case letters.

Additionally, as house slaves continued close associations with their masters, mixing between races increased, and the practice of placing lighter and darker-skinned blacks on various steps of the hierarchal ladder according to shades of color became common (Frazier, 1957; hooks, 2000; Patillo-McCoy, 1999). Light skinned blacks received more privilege because of relationships with white slave owners and were given special status because they were offspring of white slave owners. Racially mixed blacks had greater access to resources through white relatives, and received material advantages over darker skinned blacks. In the 1850's mulattoes attained freedom earlier than non mulattoes to gain skills and become entrepreneurs who were more established economically than recently freed blacks (Frazier, 1957; hooks, 2000; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

After the Civil War, economic hardships faced slave owners, and many racially mixed blacks with status lost the privileges afforded to them; including loss of property, loss of business, and wealth support from White relatives. To keep their positions as colored elite, they segregated themselves into a separate community while discriminating against darker-skinned blacks. Class distinctions based on skin color and length of time a slave had been free dictated the social and economic lives of former slaves (Golden, 2004; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Slaves who were given freedom for a length of time before Lincoln's official release of slaves were adamant in not associating with darker skinned slaves, who were still arriving in the country struggling to transition from slaves to freed citizens. The elite group of mulattoes who were free before the war formed exclusive social clubs such as Bon Ton Society and Blue Veins providing a successful way to maintain the previous hierarchy (Frazier, 1957; Johnson-Bailey, 1996; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

As groups of African Americans began to form exclusive clubs and societies, the notion of *color classism* began to develop. Russell, Wilson, & Hall, (1992) speaks of *color classism* also known as the *color complex* in African American communities:

Traditionally the color complex involved light skinned blacks' rejection of blacks who were darker. Increasingly the color complex shows up in form of dark-skinned African Americans spurning their lighter skinned brothers and sisters for not being black enough. The complex even includes attitudes about hair texture, nose shape, and eye color. In short the color complex is a psychological fixation about color and features that lead blacks to discriminate against each other (p. 2).

Many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) also used color as a requirement to gain admission making the primary mission of these institutions to groom light skinned blacks into a life of the bourgeoisie. In the early 1900's, colleges such as Spelman, Howard, and Hampton Institute all supposedly required applicants to pass a skin test before admittance (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Students were trained for careers that would be opened to them strictly based upon skin color. Dark-skinned students attended HBCUs such as Tuskegee Institute and Bethune-Cookman College where industrialized education was promoted to ensure appropriate amounts of skilled workers (Anderson, 1988; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Many of the middle class were educated in southern industrial schools which placed great emphasis on professional and business education (Anderson, 1988; Frazier, 1957).

Frazier (1957) believed higher education for blacks became a gateway to educating the bourgeoisie. Higher education provided them with the means to become wage earners and gain economic independence in America. Education provided access to an environment of shared

ideas and furnished a form of escape from physical and social segregation in America. In regards to acquiring an education Frazier stated, “The importance of degrees in the black community gave a Negro an indication of a “superior culture” and “a mark of refinement” (p. 147).

Frazier argued the values and aspirations of second generation emancipated slaves blacks changed with heavy adoption of middle class values. For example, teachers were no longer primarily concerned with their role of shaping and molding young minds. Instead, teachers of second generation emancipated slaves were more concerned with using the occupation of teaching as a source of income, which gave opportunities to maintain middle class status and participate in “societal activities”. In other words new priorities established by second generation emancipated slaves, became more of a focus in their teaching careers rather than placing importance on educating those belonging to the lower social hierarchy. I am certain that during this time when middle class values were acquired by the second generation, the concept of community and oneness became less of a priority and sustaining the good life became more of a priority. I am also certain that during this time of “priority change” the notion “you got to get yours because I got mine” was born.

With the arrival of the Black Renaissance (1920’s-1930) in the African communities of America, the influence and significance of mulatto social clubs began to deteriorate. However, attitudes regarding skin color and class continued, and in most major urban cities there existed a section where predominantly light skinned blacks lived. Many light skinned African Americans were doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Isolation and rejection from white America is one reason why middle class African Americans desired to earn money and buy material things such as large homes and expensive cars to

compensate for their rejected social positions in America. Frazier (1957) argued opportunities to purchase status symbols often gave middle class⁵ blacks a false sense of reality. This false sense of reality leads me to reflect upon magazines such as Ebony and Jet with a focus on confirming the wealthy lifestyles of affluent African Americans. In the 1940's through early 1970's despite the ownership of status symbols and wealth, many affluent African Americans were denied access to mainstream America's social elite. In agreement with Frazier, I believe the practice of middle class African Americans purchasing status symbols to prove themselves to mainstream America was misleading, and unfortunately continues today.

From 1900 until about 1950, color classism existed in African American churches as well. A new denomination, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), was formed by light skinned blacks to escape worship with darker skinned members of the African Methodist Episcopal church (AME). Families wishing to join color conscious churches were required to participate in an act such as completing a test to determine if skin color was lighter than paper bags or light brown painted doors of the church. In either case, if the interested parties had skin color that was darker than colors listed, they were not allowed to become members of the church. Similarly, church members who could easily maneuver fine toothed combs through their hair were admitted membership into certain church communities (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Color classism and social classism (Golden, 2004; Hurston, 1937; Johnson-Bailey, 1996; Kerr, 2006; Morrison, 1970) among members of the African American community continued throughout the twentieth century. Members of the elite and middle class often adopted the

⁵ The word middle class, light skinned, and dark skinned was not hyphenated due to the researcher's belief that hyphens serve as a separation factor between two words that should be viewed as one notion.

normalized white culture that would often set them apart from the majority of African Americans. Activities such as participation in debutante balls; boarding school attendance; and the purchase of vacation homes were some of the cultural practices elite and middle class African Americans adopted from middle class white culture. Through his work in African American communities Frazier believed a simultaneous action occurred as elite African Americans sought the approval of White America; by adopting many practices and values of White America, middle class African Americans were steadily rejected creating a self-hatred towards common African American characteristics, ideals, and values.

Calmore (1995) asserts that during the 1960's social class division became more defined as business, industry, and schools offered new opportunities to blacks. Some blacks became more economically sound and upwardly mobile; however civil rights activism promoted team building activities ranging across all classes and ideologies. Activism among middle class and poor blacks was based on the common experiences of racial discrimination and policies (Gregory, 1992). Conversely, as class liberation became part of the ideology of the black race, most upper class blacks acquired new class positions, and began to see more common interests with the existing White power structure than with other groups of blacks (Calmore, 1995). Moreover, as integration began to take place, middle class African Americans were not as subject to violent systematic discrimination in the work place as their economically disadvantaged counterparts (hooks, 2000).

By the late 1960's liberal individualism became the norm for black people who moved away from a communalism that involved more uplift and sharing of resources (hooks, 2000; Lawrence, 1995). While in positions of power in segregated institutions, middle class blacks had

the ability to create and maintain certain ideologies in the community demanding better social and economic conditions for their people. However, in the early 1970's black community leaders began to serve on formerly all-white governing bodies thus lessening attention to their own communities. Blacks who served on these boards often obtained additional power and social status (Gregory, 1992). The integration of African American intellectuals into predominantly white institutions increased the size and influence of the black middle class.

After decentralization each group had different needs and interests for the now integrated governing bodies (Gregory, 1992). As a result, staples of the community such as social services (e.g. free healthcare, job placement, child care) were disrupted and split apart between poor and middle class groups. This pivotal point in African American history further divided communities by social class. Although they were given few positions in white institutions and organizations, black middle class used their privileged positions as the top of the social pyramid in the African American community to overcome rejection of white America (Frazier, 1957; Gregory, 1992), and not necessarily to advocate for economically disadvantaged blacks in the community.

GOOD OLD FASHIONED CAPITALISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON SOCIAL CLASS

To further examine the great divide between middle class African Americans and poor African Americans I will discuss the economic impact in the community as a result of industrial decline and the effects of capitalism on social class structure in the African American community. Robert Reich (2008) served as Secretary of Labor with the Clinton administration and believes much of the U.S. economy produces different income levels through the loss and gain of jobs. Reich likens job classification to the rising and sinking of different boats. Diverging incomes result from different boats which are sinking rapidly, sinking slowly, and rising steadily.

Reich explains that job classification is composed of three types of workers: routine producers, in-person servers, and symbolic analysts. In this section I briefly describe the background of each type of worker and also provide further examples of each type of worker. 1) Routine producers (auto, steel, factory workers) – historically were well paid, creating a middle class group.

However as time has passed positions which include routine producers have moved to other foreign countries where workers work for a fraction of what U.S. routine producers have traditionally earned (Aronowitz, 2003; Johnston, 2007; Reich, 2008; Wilson, 2009). 2) In-person servers are employed in business establishments such as Wal-Mart and McDonalds, and often work part time, earning minimum wage and small paychecks. Furthermore, Reich explains low wages are a result of intense labor competition to fulfill the need for human personal attention. I would assume that in order for humans to feel needed and important within the job classification system, jobs are available to fulfill these needs despite intense labor competition, limited amount of jobs, and low wages. In person servers are often prohibited from organizing into labor unions or create effective lobbies to limit intense labor competition (e.g. Wal-Mart is “nonunion”), and many of their duties have been replaced by labor saving machines such as automated tellers and automated car washes (Reich, 2008). 3) Symbolic analysts- Yet another kind of worker rising in the U. S. very rapidly is the symbolic analyst job, such as scientists, researchers, engineers, actresses, sports figures, and architects, have a great demand for their insight and are lucratively paid for communicating these insights. In fact, symbolic analysts at the top of the economic ladder are paid very well, and love to perform the duties of their jobs. Symbolic analysts from America are sought after because of the expanding world market, and increasing global demand through worldwide communication and transportation technologies

(Reich, 2008). In other words, symbolic analysts are paid for a performance they have much talent for and often enjoy doing.

The economic fallout of the U.S. economy is evident in 2011 as job loss and demotions place blue collar workers in lower social class positions. According to the U.S. labor department, although the unemployment rate among the general population is 9.1%, it is at 16.2% for African Americans, and 17.5 for black males (CBS News, 2011). Many blue collar workers were living comfortably, but many have had to relinquish those lives and acquire positions of the working poor (Aronowitz, 2008; Reich, 2008; Wilson, 2009). Aronowitz (2008) argues that although blue collar wages have decreased, many workers understanding labor positions have weakened in the era of reindustrialization, and union membership has decreased. The working class lacks power over terms and conditions of employment and unions no longer serve as a movement for intellectual or political developments rather as a service organization perceived to be placing themselves into survival mode (Aronowitz, 2008; Wilson, 2009).

Wilson (2009) argues the loss or gain of status hierarchy and social class positions can be attributed to the changing political climate of the U. S. over the past few years. Wilson suggests that a conservative Republican led Congress aligned with Republican presidents, have passed numerous legislative policies that have been detrimental to middle and working class families. Brantlinger (2007) contends the U.S. has had a history of tension between political power (presidents/politicians) and democratic ideals of liberty and equality of its citizens. Lucrative, stable, long- term, full time jobs have transformed into flex-time, part-time, and temporary jobs producing changes in the labor market, and lessening governmental support in terms of social safety net (Brantlinger, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Consequently, Aronowitz (2003) adds to the

discussion of political influence on an unstable economy, arguing a series of conservative governments have implemented policies resulting in decreased labor power, fragile wages, and a decreased standard of living for a large amount of the United States population.

William Julius Wilson, whose scholarship has centered on the economic, political, and social policies affecting African American communities, believes loss of jobs and low wage earners struggle to make ends meet failing to invest dollars into neighborhoods. During harsh economic times, loss of jobs in middle and working class families have affected African Americans and other communities of color more than other groups in America. The African American population has been afflicted with cumulative experiences of racial restrictions and its internal class divisions, and urban economies changing from production of goods to technology laden workplaces (Wilson, 2009).

Historically the sharp decline in lower skilled labor has had more of unfavorable effect on blacks because a considerable proportion of African Americans work in positions considered “unskilled.”⁶ Wilson challenges views that the plight of African Americans is solely based on racism; he believes the economic mobility of blacks is hampered by systemic governmental policies as well as job discrimination, and failing segregated public schools (Wilson 1997; 2009). Indeed, blacks with an insufficient amount of knowledge and education required for higher paying jobs, have restricted access to employment through low paying jobs or remain jobless. Wilson (2009) provided data collected between the years 2000 and 2004, (years prior to the Great Recession in the U.S.) on the impact of joblessness in real earnings for black, Latino and

⁶ The word “unskilled” has quotations around it to show my agreement with Mike Rose’s work in which he examines society’s expectations of unskilled workers, and questions the intelligence of unskilled workers in the book *The Mind at Work*

white males. Real earnings figures reflected jobless rates, employment rates, and education.

These real earnings also corresponded to the amount of expendable income used to by workers to support families and communities. Black males were in the bottom quarter of the earnings distribution which totaled \$1,078 compared with \$9,623 for Latino males and \$9,843 for White males. The limited annual real earnings for black males reflect their considerable higher jobless rates during the period. More educated and highly trained African Americans have benefited financially with shifts in the labor market than those with lesser skills. Thus, the number of skilled blacks (professionals, technicians, managers) increased sharply as the number of unskilled workers remained substantial (Wilson, 2009). According to Wilson, data collected in 2005 shows very little difference in the employment rates of black, white, or Latino college graduates, however, the employment gap widens between black, Latino, and white men who were not in college.

In Wilson's opinion, the abrupt halt of a booming economy in the late 1990's further crippled the economic state of the black community. Wilson believes if the robust economy would have extended past 2001 the present economic state of the community would have improved, but, he might think differently in the current economic crisis. During the robust economy slack labor market periods increase job opportunities, consequently reducing unemployment and attracting workers who are out of the labor force. In 2011, however, the grim statistics regarding African American tell a different story. The foreclosure rate among African Americans is at 7 % (white community is 4%), and while African Americans make up 11.5 % of the labor force, the Bureau of labor statistics report that they account for 16% of the unemployed in America (CNN Money, 2010; U.S Department of Labor, 2011).

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Some scholars have claimed the black middle class has largely abandoned poor blacks (Frazier 1957; hooks 2000; Wilson, 2009), while other scholars contend the black middle class have not abandoned poor blacks, but has uniformly fought oppression and domination (Calmore, 1995; Gregory, 1992; Moore, 2005; Patillo-McCoy, 1999). The significant differences of views among scholars reflect the complex conversations regarding social class within African American communities. Wilson (1987) suggests during the 1960's racial solidarity was a dominant focus in most African American communities and little attention was paid to social and economic differences within the black community. Gregory detailed in his study about the interests of the black middle class benefiting all classes of the black community, yet in many ways mirroring the interests of white middle class. For example, many black middle class property owners were very interested in the overall economic and political issues of the community that would impact property values.

There is research (Gregory, 1992; Moore, 2005; Patillo-McCoy, 1999) that suggests blacks move away from poor neighborhoods to show upward class mobility, but yet work to remain culturally and socially close to the poor blacks they are trying to leave behind. These scholars agree that middle class blacks value the connection to lower income members of the black community which would possibly confirm middle class enthusiasm to use their positions and resources to help advance the black race. In the black community as well as other communities there are extended family networks that involve intertwined relationships between middle class and poor (Calmore, 1995; Patillo McCoy, 1999). In a study of middle class black families living in one Chicago community, Patillo-McCoy (1999) (influenced by the work of

Julius Wilson) spoke of middle class African Americans who have chosen to forgo group solidarity with working class,

Middle class African Americans have become more segregated from poor African Americans, but I argue that the increased size of the black middle class – not as some suggest its increased propensity to move away from poor blacks – has caused these observed changes in the configuration of black communities. In the end, the black middle class continues to live near and with the black poor (p. 13).

Patillo-McCoy's statement leads me to assume that not all middle class blacks are readily willing to sacrifice aspects of their lifestyles such as quality school systems, upscale restaurants, and retail stores, in order to overcome injustice within the African American community. Some middle class African Americans purposely attempt to move away from the harsh reality of low income communities.

It is not uncommon to hear about middle class blacks who choose to collectively unify with poorer blacks and confront daily oppressive practices and neighborhood conditions. Calmore (1995) notes, "Certain people of color have deliberately chosen race-conscious social justice and anti-subordination" (p. 319). I view black race consciousness in duality with social class consciousness as an awareness of oppressive forces and the commitment to fight against these forces through social, political, and economic action. Middle class blacks have established physical and social spaces where they appreciate material benefits of middle class lifestyle while sustaining their commitment to interracial and class solidarity (Moore, 2005). In a study (Gregory, 1992) which examined an African American community in New York with residents of various socioeconomic backgrounds, middle class families orchestrated acts of activism based

upon their interests as property owners as they continued to consider the plight of working class residents as well.

Nevertheless, hooks (2000) suggests, although class liberation has catapulted many blacks into another standard of living, it is also viewed as a divisive force that separates the haves from those who have not. Urban sprawl and economic inactivity have decreased inner city residents' access to economic opportunities and led to the decline of neighborhoods. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's federal transportation and highway policies created an infrastructure for jobs in the suburbs, resulting in the construction of freeway and highway networks through the hearts of many cities led to the destruction of many sustainable low income neighborhoods. Jobs in the suburbs equaled long commutes in automobiles omitting the use of transit systems and keeping inner city residents away from suburban jobs. During this time legislators passed labor policies that required employees to pay the lowest wage available, minimum wage, to blue collar and service workers. Unfortunately, these labor policies failed to protect minimum wage workers from obtaining acceptable earning wages; making daily living difficult for inner city working poor to support families (Wilson, 1997). In addition, mortgage tax exemptions gave both black and white middle class families incentives to leave racially mixed inner city neighborhoods because the suburbs offered a decreased cost of living, and this promoted increased economic segregation. Wilson believes all of these factors motivate middle class African American families to move to the suburbs and leave low income neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and deteriorating physical conditions.

In the 1960's annexation of suburbs led to the practices of zoning laws, site selection, and discriminatory land use that gave inner city racial minorities fewer opportunities to become

residents (Gregory, 1992; Wilson, 2009). Although minorities faced these barriers, middle class blacks had greater opportunities to become residents of suburban communities as a result of access to economic and social capital. Despite, possible suburban residency, Wilson (2009) noted before the 1970's middle class blacks faced obstacles when considering moving into white neighborhoods. Middle class blacks faced overt discrimination and even violent attacks before the 1988 Fair Housing Amendment Act passed through Congress and the probability of middle-class blacks moving away to more desirable white neighborhoods became a reality. Moreover, suburban communities purposely enforced restrictive zoning laws, and refused to permit the construction of public housing impacting overcrowded deteriorating inner city ghettos housing the poorest and least politically powerful residents. Thus public housing became a federally subsidized institution segregating families by class and race, and developing into highly concentrated inner city ghettos for poor black families. Most of these families abandoned thoughts of moving to the suburbs, unable to fight against the protests of middle class working whites and blacks (Wilson, 2009).

hooks (2000) suggests, black middle class people forget poor blacks and differentiate themselves from poor blacks creating a world which seemingly protects them from racial assault while poor blacks are mistreated daily. She also argues that individual blacks are leaving the underprivileged behind and choosing silence rather than speaking out against systems that dominate, exploit, and oppress the poor. Likewise, Calmore (1995) argues class division imposes a risk that removes middle class blacks from a strong identification with the black poor person's values, interests, and needs. This issue of class division parallels findings by Wilson (1996), who concluded that middle class residents and inner city residents often clash when inner city

residents seek leisure activity away from their communities. Wilson explains, “Sharp differences in cultural style and patterns of interaction that reflect the social isolation of both poor and middle class neighborhoods often lead to clashes” (p. 187). He uses an example of behavior that middle class patrons may deem as inappropriate or offensive, such as, talking or cursing loudly throughout a movie prompting middle class patrons to give disapproving looks or comments. In retaliation against middle class patrons’ pretentious actions, inner city residents heckle the crowd with belligerent responses, encouraging middle class residents to take patronage elsewhere to even more exclusive parts of town. Wilson emphasizes this experience increases feelings of racial or class antagonism towards inner city residents and middle class residents as well.

Acknowledging class division, particularly regarding employment opportunities, Crenshaw (1995) states, “The removal of formal barriers created new opportunities for some blacks who were not shared by various other classes of African Americans” (pg. 117). Crenshaw discusses the influence of class positions within the black community and its impact of various racist and classist experiences. In agreement with Crenshaw, Wilson (1996) posits low income African Americans face obstacles mildly experienced by middle class America, particularly in the hiring process. It is Wilson’s contention that low income African Americans are constantly judged and viewed negatively by potential employers. In fact, a study conducted by Bertrand and

Mullainathan (2003), African American applicants were discriminated against in the labor market based upon their names or the sound of their names. Furthermore, this discrimination also correlated with the rate of callbacks regarding the sound of names. Wilson asserts blue collar or service jobs require minimal academic or language skills and employer expectations are typically low. Employees automatically criticize inner city workers (especially

males) for being lazy, belligerent, dangerous, and ensuring high rates of job turnover, tardiness, and absenteeism. Wilson theorizes that hostile workers are produced through harsh, dehumanizing, low wage environments that encourage high rates of turnover (1987). I have observed in some public schools the creation of hostile students based upon the teacher's perceived unacceptable behaviors/appearances of students, and student's perceptions of boring curriculum.

In addition, I have also observed parents who have become hostile towards school faculty, staff, and environments as a result of perceived unfair treatment towards their child (ren). Attitudes, appearances, and high rates of turnover create the common perception that inner city people are undesirable workers. These perceptions result in negative hiring decisions when inner city workers are denied employment.

While the issue of class division in the African American community is grounded in the notion of economics, status, and historical context, it is important to view critical theories such as critical pedagogy to examine how division affects African Americans in classrooms of public schools. Woodson (2006) states, "One of the most striking evidences of the failure of higher education among Negroes is their estrangement from the masses, the very people upon whom they must eventually count for carrying out a program of progress" (p.52). Therefore, a critical pedagogical perspective of class division allows me to take a critical view of teacher-student relationships.

Critical Pedagogy

Without quality education which expands one's capacity to think and act critically, the status quo is less threatened. Additionally the problematic educational policies of public schools contribute to black middle class teachers' lack of understanding their poor students (bell hooks, 2000; Patillo-McCoy, 1999). Brown versus Board of Education was a landmark case in America's efforts in ending racial segregation in public schools (Bell, 1995). The decision from this case demanded equal schools with resources and facilities for both black and whites together. Despite the mandated integration that came out of Brown v Board, contemporary public schools are now more racially segregated and economically disproportioned than ever, failing to provide quality education (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Therefore, racial integration in school systems has become nonexistent due to effects of white flight, demographic patterns, and lack of social reform among court systems (Bell, 1995).

My perspective on critical pedagogy is not limited to its traditional scholars and terminology rather I view critical pedagogy as an extension of a framework that stretches beyond the limits of boxes and frames. For example, Ladson-Billings discusses culturally relevant teaching as a practice that incorporates African American culture (or other cultures) into pedagogy and curriculum. Although Ladson-Billings termed these practices as "culturally relevant", I also consider those particular practices as components of critical pedagogy.

In McLaren's (2009) view, critical pedagogy seeks to understand the connection between power and knowledge where dominant curriculum uses knowledge to maintain social relations and class interests. He argues that teachers should recognize power relations as connections to forms of school knowledge that produce accepted truth and knowledge based on exploitation and

oppression. Many critical pedagogues will argue curricula in schools' do not challenge dominant practices, teach students to think critically, or ask questions that confront oppressive conditions in society. Therefore, in the daily lives of people critical pedagogy seeks to expose knowledge that misrepresents lived reality. According to McLaren, critical educational theorists consider school knowledge as ordered, structured, and socially constructed through symbols, social interaction, or relations (race, gender, class, and culture) with others. In addition, the idea of constructing reality will ask an important question: Why are some constructions of reality created and embedded in school curriculum and practices and others are excluded?

In the U.S. public educational systems, schools have returned to segregated facilities, not only defined by race, but also by class (Anyon, 2008; Bell, 1995; Bowles & Gintis 1976; Kozol, 1991). With such a tragic reality, teachers-as a part of structures and practices in schools are not positioned within the system to go against the grain and may feel too disjointed to organize liberatory curriculum and practices (Shor, 1987). Many teachers as well as students are not accustomed to in-depth reflective discussions involving topics such as inequitable distribution of school and community resources, declining minimum wage, and employment rates, and unfair suspension policies. These topics can be uncomfortable, often creating intimidating environments for teacher/students who engage in the act of deconstructing presumed truths and creating new truths.

The term "cultural relevance" implies that culture is an important factor in the lives of humans. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1997) coined the term *culturally relevant teaching* and explains *culturally relevant teaching* is, "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes"

(p. 20). In other words, culturally relevant teaching allows teachers to use cultural relevance to assess student knowledge, celebrate student culture, and transcend students beyond negative effects of hidden curriculum. One difference between “critical pedagogy” and *culturally relevant teaching* is *culturally relevant teaching* celebrates the “black personality” to draw a connection between academic excellence and identity. Ladson-Billings notes that *culturally relevant teaching* is a special kind of teaching that encourages excellence, and has the best interest of the students in mind. For example, during my tenure as a teacher my philosophy regarding students was “all students were capable of learning” yet I often succumbed to the pressures of teaching the state test to students. Indeed, my teaching practices were a comfortable operative of the hidden curriculum where I often used instructional methods of skill (kill) and drill as well as a provision of a continuous supply of reproducible worksheets.

McLaren (2009) argues teachers unconsciously shift professed educational views and goals of the classroom due to the hidden curriculum. However, within McLaren’s assertion is important especially since it indicates the importance of a teacher’s role in continuing the social relationships used to maintain economic and class ideologies. After much self-reflection of my teaching experience hidden curriculum not only influenced pedagogical relationships with students but also the instructional strategies. I used to teach mathematics and science, and unfortunately I pushed the hidden curriculum agenda because I truly believed the notion of students sitting quietly for fifty minutes while I taught a beautifully constructed lesson. The lessons were teacher directed and not open to student input or involvement, and I would unconsciously give more academic attention, praise, and academic assistance to students who shared class positions with me. Although I was aware of certain injustice, many of my students

encountered, the goal was to disseminate information needed to meet standardized test goals and boost my reputation as stellar teacher.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The significance of implementing critical pedagogy in classrooms not only lies within theoretical importance but also within its applicability to an analysis of how schools can challenge structural inequality. According to Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) urban schools are succeeding in continuing structural inequality that dooms students inside of these institutions to fail. Both authors explain it is useless to argue about the intentions of schools to continue cycles of poverty rather we must create an educational system that challenges the conditions of social and economic in their inequity in their lives and opportunities to use academic skills that will allow the entrance into college to become an attainable reality. Looking back as a teacher in the classroom I am quite sure students did not have a desire to hear my personal tirades regarding societal ills in creating schools to keep them in their current oppressive living conditions. Instead following the tenets of critical pedagogy we (students and I) possibly could have created a curriculum that would have helped to challenge the social issues around the school as well as in their communities.⁷

In the classroom, critical educators must constantly remain alert regarding the innate racism of curriculum as well as the systemic practices that decrease opportunities for marginalized students held equally accountable for system standards (McLaren, 2009). Critical Race Theory (CRT) “challenges the universality of white experience and judgment as the

⁷ In this chapter I chose to include personal narratives only in the section of critical pedagogy because I felt my classroom experiences share a similar connection to the scholarship of those who have examined and incorporated the critical pedagogy framework into their research.

authoritative standard that evade people of color and normative measures, directs, controls, regulates, the terms of proper expression presentment and behavior” (Calmore, 1995, p. 318). In other words, CRT seeks to question dominant standards that are applied to all humans, yet such standards fail to recognize intersections of color, gender, class, sexual preferences.

As a result, CRT seeks to examine dominant practices that have not only formed the stitch work of American ideology and also black communities’ acceptance and usage of American ideology. Characterizations of blacks in negative ways such as lazy, unintelligent, ignorant, criminal, and shiftless has resulted from white race conscious efforts (Lawrence, 1995). These stereotypes and ideologies managed to permeate into the black community. It is my contention that teachers are participants of dominant culture and may embrace negative stereotypes of students in lower class positions as a part of personal educational beliefs.

Conversely, Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) argue that critical pedagogy brings a responsibility that is placed upon the teacher to create and develop classroom environments that are counter-hegemonic regarding teaching practices and social processes. This action would demand teachers to critically analyze school and classroom policies that promote classist thinking. Moreover, McLeod, & Yates (2008) argue “class is about subjectivity how one understands and positions self and other, rationally and emotionally, and one’s sense of potency and possibility” (p. 359). By reflecting on personal subjectivities, it seems plausible for teachers to draw on and develop a critical pedagogical curriculum that will expand across content areas.

The intersections of race and class are often blurred and can be difficult to separate (Lareau, 2008; McCleod & Yates, 2008; Sleeter, 2000; Stovall, 2006). Lareau (2008) has found that regardless of race, black and white middle class families draw on class resources in their

relations with institutions. Middle class parents of both races shared similar ideas regarding their children's success and also shared similar views about child-rearing practices. However, in regards to racism Lareau argues that racial exclusion and insensitivity occurred with middle class black children who were exposed to predominately white environments. Black middle class parents were mindful of possible racial discrimination and took more of an active role in protecting children from difficult or painful situations.

CRT and Critical pedagogy both seek to disrupt dominant discourse and ideology that has become a part of society. I view CRT as the foundation or groundwork that has been laid for other critical theories such as critical pedagogy to further examine disparities that affect those who are marginalized in school systems.

MAKING CRITICAL THINKING HAPPEN IN THE CLASSROOM

When I think of critical pedagogy the words transformation, empowerment, critical thinking, and connection come to mind. Critical pedagogy presents a powerful and critical stance on the limiting aspects of education and curriculum in present day classrooms. However, there is a question about whether critical pedagogy can actually become a part of teachers' practice and challenge students who experience hegemonic and oppressed conditions. Not surprisingly, there are critical educators who have accepted the responsibility to implement the theoretical frame of critical pedagogy and turn it into a realistic practice of social activism (e.g. Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fisher, 2000; Freire, 1993; hooks, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Shor, 1996; van Manen, 1991)

The first major work considering the introduction of critical thinking in education was *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) which describes the roles of the oppressor and the

oppressed in public education. Although most of Freire's work focused on adult education, his ideas of liberatory education could be utilized in K-12 education as well. According to Freire, those who are in positions of the oppressed must realize they are objects of the dehumanization process. The struggle of the oppressed involves recognizing the struggle of humanization that exists between the oppressors and the oppressed. Freire states, "The oppressed must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and whose mark they bear" (p. 67). Once the oppressed accepts responsibility for the struggle they recognize that a fight for humanization will ensue.

Moreover, Freire introduced a pedagogy based on components of reflection, dialogue, and action. Reflection involves thinking about the world, and recognizing that the oppressed are considered objects, not human beings. Through the process of reflection, dialogue is introduced into conversation transforming knowledge, and destroying domination. As dialogue occurs, both teachers and students who are considered subjects began to critically reconstruct reality and knowledge. Consequently, oppressed students participate in their struggle for freedom and liberation. Hence as false perceptions of reality escape the minds of oppressed students then students transform into subjects. Freire (1993) speaks of dialogical *relations* as a process which "Allows students and teachers through dialogue to cooperate together; to create new terms and name with and together" (p. 89). Growth is allowed to occur in both teachers and students through the learning process and oppression is no longer the foundation of argument.

Another aspect of Freire's liberatory education is problem posing, which encourages teachers to be reflective at all times. This particular strategy encourages teachers to constantly form reflections, and allows students-teachers equitable contribution to presented material.

Assuming the role of a problem posing educator true knowledge is co-created with students. As the process continues, students began to evolve new understandings, new challenges, and gradually become committed to the struggle of freedom and liberation (Freire, 1993).

Since Freire's important work in critical pedagogy other critical scholar educators have implemented various methods to promote critical thinking and practices in the classroom. Shor (1996) believed in a democratic classroom based upon the principles of John Dewey, which created an atmosphere of *shared power* among students. He discusses power sharing among students which "Establishes the learning process as a cultural forum or public sphere for the negotiation of meanings to help to get students thoughts and failings into the open as soon as possible" (p. 34). Specifically, within a democratic classroom, discourse involved students being reflective concerning questions such as: Why are they taking the course? What do they want out of the course? What topics would they want to study?

Shor's pedagogical practices also reflect Friere's (1993) *generative theme*, where the instructor initiated a topic that became a theme of the class based upon student experiences, conditions, and expressions. Shor believed student voice should be used as a foundation of the course and the instructor's academic voice is almost silenced as problem posing dialogue begins with questions for writing and discussion. The type of collaborative learning that occurred had a democratizing structure where only student groups exist, and communication was valued by instructor. In order to fully understand student experiences teacher input involved taking notes during group or individual presentation.

The concept of power sharing was termed *organic intellectualism* in Andrade & Morrell's classroom (2008). Gramsci (1971) described organic intellectuals as "the thinking and

organizing element of a particular fundamental social class” (p. 3). Gramsci believed that organic intellectuals were instrumental in guiding the ideas and hopes of their social class. With Gramsci’s notion of organic intellectualism in mind, both researcher educators who also coached a girls’ basketball team held three reflective meetings during the year to discuss players’ goals, expectations, and strengths and weakness in basketball and academics. The research educators saw these meetings as opportunities to collaborate on their perception of students as coaches, and students’ perceptions of students themselves. After meetings occurred, clear goals and concrete steps were established to achieve student goals and involve self-reflection. The process of self-reflection allowed coaches to have insight concerning what students expected from themselves. Individual plans were allowed to be created and became more personal to meet the needs of the students. Individual plans also allowed students to think more deeply about their role in solving community issues.

Using the notion of organic intellectualism as a foundation to organize and become leaders of their social class, students equally share power and collaborate about perceptions of themselves, learning environments, and their communities. Further self-reflection of their roles in their community as well as in the social reproduction cycle helps lend to the notion of *critical social capital*, which gives students of color opportunities to build collective racial and cultural identity (Ginwright, 2007). Critical social capital differs from the traditional notion of social capital by placing emphasis on the collective aspects of community change. Highlighting racial identity and political awareness serves as an important community and social support for youth (Ginwright, 2007).

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) also adapted the idea of *dialogic pedagogy* when designing activities for units especially using the element of *generative themes* as a pedagogical practice. Both scholar educators completed a five year research project incorporating urban critical pedagogy into their classrooms and into the athletic program where they also served as coaches. As teacher-researchers both Duncan-Andrade and Morrell dedicated time and resources to understand the connection between youth involvement, popular culture, and implications of popular culture's influence on the development of academic skills and critical thinking. The project situated dominant literary texts such as *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Othello* as well as popular films and hip hop music to raise students' awareness of power issues, oppression, and transformation. These books, music, and movies were used as instrumental tools for students to label, analyze, deconstruct and change unequal conditions in schools, communities, and other oppressed communities worldwide. Students were given an opportunity to have genuine discussions concerning inequity and social justice. The purpose of the project was not only to suggest the notion that urban critical pedagogy embodies notions of equal opportunity, but means of access should be continuously critiqued. In conjunction with the implementation of critical pedagogy, students may also use critical social capital to work with teachers to promote intergenerational advocacy, while simultaneously understanding personal challenges and political issues (Ginwright, 2007).

hooks (2003) uses feminist critical pedagogy in her classroom built upon the core of democratic education- a collaboration of pedagogies. According to hooks, feminist pedagogy was used to transform the consciousness of ordinary people with regards to feminist thinking and practices. Corresponding to democratic pedagogy, feminist pedagogy sought to have teachers

and students share thoughts and ideas inclusively. hooks along with other scholars practicing feminist pedagogy specifically pursued audiences outside of the academy which meant producing academic work that included everyday language and not the usual academic language. According to hooks, the ultimate goal of feminist pedagogy is to produce work that can be shared by all communities in conflict. hooks speaks of shared knowledge between teacher and student “We do the work of opening up the space of learning so that it can be more inclusive and challenge ourselves constantly to strengthen our teaching skills” (p. 43).

Similarly within democratic education, students and teachers experience the process of teaching and learning, continually while sharing in a mutual collection of knowledge beyond the classroom. Various types of language, such as, Ebonics and everyday language are accepted, validated, and acknowledged in these critical conversations. hooks contends democratic educators should dually share knowledge outside of the walls of learning institutions, and create various instructional strategies to provide well rounded avenues of knowledge for students. Additionally, hooks attributes democratic education to meeting student needs, and compelling teachers to “commit to teaching.” That is, democratic educators find ways to make connections between academic and real world simultaneously meeting the needs of students.

Fisher (2000) echoes the beliefs of hooks, as she observed during her study the importance of teachers making commitments to teach and make connections with students. In her research examining critical literacy in an urban school, Fisher discusses a democratic educator who wove the elements of spoken word into an educational context. The teacher made a commitment to educate her students a result of her past mis-education as a student in urban public schools. Mama C as she was affectionately called around the school shared with students

a novel she had written entitled *Mauraya's Seed-Why hope lives behind project wall*. This novel was used to give students an opportunity to learn about the lives of people she read about and encountered outside of school, and as motivator for low income students living in ghetto projects to become aware of future opportunities that awaited them.

The previous example solidifies Mama C's commitment to serve and be accountable in her pursuit to practice critical pedagogy meeting the needs of her students. Mama C's actions reflect what is termed by hooks as *love*. hooks defines *love* as "a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust" (p.131). This notion of love is not limited to a teacher's practice, but also extends into love for student-teacher relationships. Accordingly *love* in student-teacher relationships allow students in classrooms to share a mutual quest to learn with teachers (hooks, 2000).

van Manen's (1991) version of critical pedagogy is termed *tactful pedagogy*, and includes concepts of understanding, thoughtfulness, and pathic knowledge. These concepts are interchangeably used, but never mutually exclusive, and provide teachers with a powerful way to create an environment of respect, trust, and knowledge beneficial to the growth of students. One aspect of tactful pedagogy is pedagogical understanding. According to van Manen, pedagogical understanding involves the process of listening, gaining a distinct perception of a child during a particular moment, and understanding the best course of action for the child. A classroom teacher has many duties and responsibilities which often affect attempts to understand students in the classroom. However a teacher must be able to perceive a child's academic abilities, and assess strengths and weaknesses of skills and concepts while creating a curriculum that is based upon critical pedagogy (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008). For example, in order to introduce critical

concepts, student consciousness should be cultivated. A teacher's perception of a student's weaknesses or strengths in understanding consciousness would be very important in determining the methods and strategies used when introducing topics. Perception also concerns the ability to observe student personality/temperament, and understand where "he or she" is coming from.

This perception may occur when a teacher is aware of how to handle situations when a student is displaying a class disposition different from his/her own. Once a teacher has become accustomed to personalities, strengths, and weaknesses he or she is able to listen to children whether the communication is vocal or silent. Many students in a classroom do not speak vocally, but silence speaks loudly. A teacher who possesses pedagogical understanding can grasp the silence of a student and hear through non-verbal cues to determine appropriate measures to take for the child's best interest.

It is van Manen's contention *sympathetic capacity* must accompany pedagogical understanding. van Manen writes, "To have sympathetic capacity means one is able to discern the subtle signs in child's voice, glance, gesture, or demeanor" (p. 97). In other words, teachers use pedagogical understanding when sympathy is involved. Students are waiting for teachers to ask "What's wrong?" or to respond in a sensitive way to a nonverbal action exhibited by the student. Because pedagogical understanding requires a teacher to make decisions that are best for the child, children will feel the support and concern from an adult who has great influence in their lives.

The notion of critical pedagogy has particular meaning in allowing students to become critical thinkers of society during "reflective" process. Thus teachers incorporate tactful pedagogy for students to obtain critical consciousness and action. Next, I will discuss a few

examples of the how tactful pedagogy and critical pedagogy are interwoven in the instructional practices of teachers.

THE TWO BECOMES ONE

Pathic knowledge is an intuitive sense of “knowing” how to approach situations in the classroom going beyond *self* and believing in *otherness*. In a classroom which incorporates critical pedagogy there exists a “knowing” within a teacher. Most students who are unfamiliar with democratic classrooms have not been encouraged to deconstruct societal issues, media, or historical books, that reflect dominate culture. Valuing the opinions, beliefs, thoughts, and experiences of your students reflects pathic knowledge. Pathic knowledge may occur when teachers create an environment which involves *power sharing* and *negotiated authority* which leads to the deconstruction of normative societal standards. Power sharing provides access to liberation, freedom, and open dialogue between students and teacher and between students.

When tactful pedagogy is incorporated into critical pedagogy educators are allowed to be intuitive and sensitive the needs of students; always keeping in mind what is best for the student. The interconnectedness of both critical pedagogy and tactful pedagogy may involve an educator to change instructional strategies and practices according to the needs of students asking the question: What is best for the student in a classroom aimed at creating solidarity between middle class African American teachers and economically disadvantaged students?

At the forefront of tactful pedagogy is the ability to understand and develop patience needed to attend to children who may have given up academically in the past, but who deserve a wonderful future. Tactful pedagogy occurs when a teacher connects curriculum to real life using real life situations and allows teachers to understand students’ experiences to assist children in

various ways to achieve academically. The notion of this type of pedagogy allows teachers to become vulnerable and express themselves through anger, happiness, disappointments, and frustration which will provide opportunities for ongoing reflection (wondering attitudes): How to improve situations? How can students better understand class and economic ideologies embedded in the curriculum?

van Manen offers yet another reason for teacher-student relationships to consist of nurturing, caring, learning, respect, thoughtfulness, and understanding. All of these factors encompass the notion of tactful pedagogy which van Manen explains as, “A tendency to act thoroughly towards children in constantly changing situations” (p. 120). van Manen gives the impression that a teacher who uses tact incorporates positive, thoughtful, and mindful actions into everyday practice. Such a sense of responsibility gives critical educators an opportunity to extend sharing, caring, and attentiveness to various contexts and situations.

I assert that tactful pedagogy is something that doesn’t come naturally to some teachers and it is a purposeful, conscious effort to make. Tact seems to be intuitive and in a sense it is something that one can grow into, but there must exist an openness to receive the gift of tactful pedagogy. Indeed, it is a gift to incorporate thoughtfulness and mindfulness as a normative, consistent presence into teacher practice. As a result these factors will help to influence and change how children react to curriculum and teachers. It is van Manen’s belief that pedagogical tact, “Manifests itself primarily as a mindful orientation in our being and acting with children” (p. 149). In other words, educators will build relationships in the classroom with a willingness to incorporate the process of tactful pedagogy while determining whether a lesson should be modified, or a child be rewarded with a special treat for passing one test out of a series.

INGREDIENTS FOR CRITICAL LEARNING

There are many ingredients needed to form a successful learning environment where critical pedagogy is practiced. An educator's promotion of freedom to be one's self allows students to have healthy self-esteem and an awareness of consciousness. As Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) reminds us educators must be very self-reflective and aware especially when emphasizing certain ways of talking, acting, language practices and values. With this in mind teachers' deliberate actions of self-reflection allow students the space to potentially become self-actualized through reflection (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008).

Included in the process of practicing and allowing freedom in the classroom, is the notion of what hooks terms as "moving beyond shame." Too many times in classrooms oppressed groups are continuously marginalized and shamed by historical events in our books, media, and hidden curriculum. Indications of classrooms where shame is present may include: students who are told they are "stupid" because of race, the stigma attached to "being smart" should only apply to a certain race, and history books who devalue certain cultures. hooks (2003) believes, "There can be no better place than the classroom, that setting where we invite students to open their minds and think beyond all boundaries to challenge, confront and change the hidden trauma of shame" (p. 103). Moving beyond shame solicits vulnerability, recognition and respect among a community of learners.

The promotion of community is also imperative in the process of implementing critical pedagogy and creating holistic agency. For people of color to access resources that are in possession of the dominant system Calmore (1995) believes will depend on “Whether we are more directed by assimilation or autonomy, by individual fulfillment or collective responsibility, by group accommodation or group resistance” (pg. 323). Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) encourage teachers to emphasize classroom environments that focus on collective learning and teamwork over individualism. They also advise teachers not to return to the practice of individual assessment models especially when students are not cooperating with classroom community models.

The idea of classroom community models is reiterated throughout Duncan-Andrade & Morrell’s work *The Art of Pedagogy* (2008). Both researcher educators believed classroom community was important to establish a counter cultural community of practice among students. Collective teamwork and learning was stressed. Indeed embracing classroom community models are not foreign to segregated classrooms, for instance Siddle-Walker (1996) describes the phenomenon of individualism as well as collective learning during segregation. Siddle-Walker reveals student recollections of teachers who would make purposeful efforts to form individual relationships with their students while showing a great amount of caring and concern for the group as a whole. Teachers saw education as a racial uplift and their educational philosophy was to celebrate the individual successes and provide knowledge that would contribute to the black race as well as to the human race (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Responsibility for motivating students to learn was bestowed upon the teacher. As one student said, “Presenting themselves and their

material in ways that would engage the student was as much their job as responding individually to the child who seemed unengaged” (pg.154).

As with many pedagogical practices there are drawbacks in liberatory classrooms. Shor (1996) acknowledges that students have inexperience with discussion about topics especially in the presence of authority, because traditionally a culture of silence exists in classrooms. In many contemporary classrooms students are not allowed to discuss thoughts or feelings during classroom time so many students will not discuss honest thoughts because of mistrust of authority (a possible retaliation). Within a liberatory classroom problems occur with students possessing the inability to comprehend dense material and articulation is typically associated with a certain class status. To combat possible issues of dialogue in the classroom, hooks (2003) stressed teachers should get to know students by assessing cognitive skills, and political awareness compiling a thematic and linguistic profile of students. Such profiles provided students with the ability to analyze single features regarding everyday life and also provided students with an opportunity to detach from reality.

Regardless of the challenges of critical pedagogy in the classroom, it is clear that a liberatory classroom can have a significant impact on educational institutions and can be used as a tool to show how education can serve as a vehicle to empower African American teachers and students and promote solidarity.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CLASS DIVISION AND ITS EFFECT ON PEDAGOGY

There is literature on pedagogical relationships between middle class White teachers and economically disadvantaged African American students. However, there is very little literature

on pedagogical relationships between middle class African American teachers and low income African American students. While a small body of literature existed on class division between middle class African Americans and poor African Americans particularly regarding housing communities, occupations, and social capital (Frazier, 1957; Gregory, 1992; McCoy-Patillo, 1999; Moore, 2005), none of it was specifically targeted towards examining class division in educational institutions. Presently educational practices, such as the implementation of social justice and teaching practices in classrooms were developed to assist students and teachers in challenging societal issues. These practices are wonderful to have in the classroom, yet positive teacher student relationships will determine if successful critical learning environments will occur.

The purpose of Frazier's work was to challenge and expose the black middle class lifestyle, similarly, Wilson's work intended to discuss the political, social, and economic policy contributions to class division with African American communities. Likewise, McCoy-Patillo and Gregory's studies examined class division within African American communities, but failed to focus exclusively on educational systems. Even in the case of Duncan-Andrade & Morrell's work, there still exists a gap because while their work has implications for critical pedagogy, it is still not aimed at understanding how social class affects the pedagogical relationships and practices of middle class African American teachers and their low income students. This lack of focus on social class in the classroom is significant.

In addition to a lack of focus on class division between middle class African American teachers and economically disadvantaged African American students, the work discussed here did not address how theories of critical pedagogy might benefit from explicit attention to social

class. Though hooks' work does look at social class in the democratic classroom, much of it focused on college classrooms and aspects of intra race class division which occurred during her childhood. Furthermore, when she examined racial and societal factors, she diminished the role that intra class division had in contributing to students' academic underachievement. Again, failure to examine the role that teachers play in positive relationships with students is damaging because the fundamental perceptions and attitudes within pedagogical relationships plays an important role in building class solidarity.

My study aims to contribute to this literature by promoting the notion of pedagogy of solidarity between middle class African American teachers and economically disadvantaged African American students. I am conscious that adult conversations regarding race and class may be difficult; however one could not imagine outcomes that come from a spark of conversation. For example, a research study conducted by Johnson-Bailey (1999) explored issues of race and class that became apparent when the researcher an African American female interviewed other African American women. Through the interview process participants conceptualized race and class differently producing moments of awkwardness during conversations. Participants stated, "Educated blacks think of themselves as better or superior than other members of the race" (p. 663). In this statement education was associated with class, and the researcher would not have discovered the awkwardness or hindrance concerning class and gender if she not had conversations with participants. This study is one of many examples which illustrate the necessity of having open conversations about class and race in the black community.

Black middle class teachers must be committed to establish, maintain, and sustain positive relationships with economically disadvantaged students. Fulfilling stated duties and

responsibilities of job requirements will not be enough of an effort to help change the lives of children. Maybe someday black middle class teachers will think beyond dominant ideologies, and discourses which affect their actions and thoughts. Established practices of (dominant ideology) must be constantly challenged as well as those individuals who continue to maintain dominant norms. Middle class African American teachers can make the difference in knowing that someday their commitment to students WILL be measured beyond the four walls of our classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Upon completing a review of the literature on the effects of social class in the African American community and exploring questions that might contribute to this developing knowledge base, I began the process of planning, collecting, organizing, and interpreting my data. As I wrote throughout the research believing with Atkinson (2007) that, “the life story itself as told to the interviewer is atheoretical in that people do not tell their own story based on a preconceived notion” (p. 234). I aligned narrative inquiry, research questions, and critical pedagogy framework to analyze the data. Although the participants did not tell their stories based on any particular theory (Atkinson, 2007), however with the telling of personal experiences and the surfacing of powerful meanings within their stories, any theory may have been applied. As a researcher, I examined the narratives of each participant with a critical pedagogical lens especially around discourses teachers used regarding the teaching practices and perceptions of classroom/school relations. Atkinson (2007) explained that,

it is only when the researcher comes to the life story later as a text to be the interpreter with a theoretical framework in hand to read it with that the story takes on a specific theoretical perspective (p. 235).

As data collection progressed, I began to understand the importance of intertwining personal stories and theory to show how family backgrounds and experiences have helped shape our perceptions of social class in our world. This connection became especially important when analyzing our actions, experiences, interactions with others, and our societal roles as teachers and citizens.

Critical pedagogy is one component of the theoretical framework that guided this study. This perspective refers to a body of literature that focuses on research that will question and attempt to transform class structures/practices used by teachers in the classroom. Critical pedagogy also seeks to critique schools that perpetuate classism towards students who are economically and politically disenfranchised. In this particular study this analysis also focuses on issues of class as perceived by middle class African Americans. For example, within the African American community, unfavorable political and economic policies (Wilson, 2009) have been some contributing factors to within race class division. A critical pedagogical analysis would examine such issues by considering how the women being interviewed view such issues as a basis for present day perceptions and classroom experiences.

This study sought to understand how the role social class plays in relationships between middle class African American teachers and economically disadvantaged students, and was well suited for a critical qualitative research approach. According to Merriam (2002) the objective of critical qualitative research is to become empowered (empower others), change our social context and ourselves, and release ourselves from constraints that affect our thinking and existence in the world. Critical qualitative research questions will ask how race, class, and gender influence society and how power relations exist between oppressors and oppressed. Audre Lorde (1998) explains that African American women in research share a desire to commit to the power of reclaiming language that has historically worked against them. She explains that African American women must be willing to transform silence into language and transform language into action,

For those of us who write it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all it is necessary to teach by living and speaking truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing that is growth (p. 196).

Narratives have been used by feminist scholars especially when telling stories of other women (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The use of narrative research centers on the “self” for data collection and analysis and can be used as a methodology by researchers who have “liberatory” hopes for research (Bloom, 2002). Bloom describes narrative research as having three essential goals that provide a frame for the narrative research approach which is concerned with, “using individual lives as a primary source of data, using self-narratives as a location which the researcher can generate social critique and advocacy and deconstructing the “self” as a humanist conception allowing for nonunitary conceptions of the self” (p. 311). Bloom (2002) sets forth that as a method; narrative research gives narrators an opportunity to concentrate on how the story is told – and in this case, discourses used in the story rather than the story itself.

Design of Study

Initially I sought to involve both male and female participants in the study; however I received resistance from many potential male participants which were to be interviewed. Eventually I chose to specifically target middle class African American female teachers. In doing so I could follow the traditions of scholars such as Bell-Scott, Casey, Etter-Lewis, and Johnson-Bailey, who have used narratives of African American women to tell life histories. As Kramp

(2004) suggests “stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present and assist us to envision the future” (p.107). The autobiography of each participant is a personal story in that each woman’s perspective is unique and varied. It was necessary for me as the researcher to record and tell stories because “acknowledging our longing to know and share women’s life stories and to tell our own pushes us to break the silence” (Gillespie, 1998, p. xv).

Johnson-Bailey (2004) explains narratives give a “trustworthy way of giving voice to participants” (p. 124). In this study, autobiographies of each teacher were told to the researcher in such a way that gave a snapshot of individual life perspectives. Women of color benefit from narrative work, because its design includes collaboration and interaction which speaks to power disparities involved in research (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). My desire for this study was for participants to feel as if their contributions were important components needed to ensure success. One challenge of using narrative in research studies is to remain attentive to power issues that may arise such as balancing of voices, contributing to the process of societal hierarchies, and competing political agendas (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

PARTICIPANTS SELECTION

In order to find middle class African American teachers who taught economically disadvantaged students I told everyone I knew in and out of education that I was looking for such participants for the study. The sample for this study consisted of six female teachers, Brooks, Sasha, Master Teacher, Lisa, Toya, Tracy. Participants considered their race to be African American and their social class to be middle class. The majority of women had earned a baccalaureate or higher degree and earned more than \$50,000 a year. The majority were married

with at least one child. All participants with the exception of Lisa taught in inner city or suburban schools with large populations of economically disadvantaged African Americans. Lisa taught in a rural area about fifty miles outside of a southern metropolitan city. Sasha, Master Teacher, and Brooks all volunteered to be participants as we engaged in conversation during a former colleague's birthday party. Lisa was referred to me through a common friend we shared. Tracy was a former coworker whom I worked with many years ago, and I met Toya through a mutual teacher friend.

Due to gaps in literature regarding this topic I knew that I would choose middle class African American teachers who historically have been an ignored group in issues of social class. As previously mentioned I desired to interview both genders because I was equally interested in how African American men perceived their students in the classroom. However, I found most potential male participants who were approached about the study, to be resistant to being interviewed. All participants were interviewed individually and my interview format consisted of a single one and half hour session, in which the participants answered questions about their personal lives, teaching careers, and thoughts about social class (Appendix A). All participants were promised anonymity in any presentations or publications that would come from this study, and were given copies of interviews as well as access to my written work. Most interviews occurred at places chosen by the participants and each participant was contacted by telephone two days prior to the interview to confirm participation and interview times. I conducted interviews in three participants' homes where we sat over lunch and a glass of wine. In these cases, wine was requested by the participants and seemed to be a helpful aid in making participants more comfortable and less nervous. Two interviews occurred over lunch at Panera

Bread, and two interviews occurred at Jason's Deli. Although both of these restaurants were very noisy they were comfortable places to have discussions. I wanted participants to feel as comfortable as possible and gave them power in choosing to interview places and times.

Participants

Lisa Taylor

Lisa is a forty-one year old teacher who has taught for 14 years and came from a poor working class family. Lisa is very tall and might be mistaken for a player with the WNBA. She initially was not an education major and happened upon the field while coaching a girls' basketball team. Her first school had a 100 percent African American population of children who come from poor working class families. Lisa currently teaches sixth grade social studies and this is her first year she is not teaching special education.

Master Teacher

Master Teacher is a forty year old teacher who has taught for 18 years. Master Teacher has a warm presence that illuminates the room when she enters as her smile is very warm and her personality inviting. Master Teacher taught elementary school eight years and for five years she has taught middle school. She works in a metropolitan school district where her school is 95 percent African American. She has decided to take a break from the pressures of teaching in inner city schools and pursue a career in homeschooling. Master Teacher came from a single parent home and refers to her social class position growing up as "the best of both worlds". The best of both worlds referred to her father's upper middle class background and her mother's poor working class background.

Sasha

Sasha's is middle aged and taught the longest with a total of 26 years. She is eagerly waiting retirement which will occur in three years. Most of Sasha's career has occurred in elementary school and two years ago she was moved to the middle school level. Sasha stands at 5 feet and is very shy and elusive during discussions. Sasha grew up in a middle class family and considers her current social class position to be upper middle class.

Brooks

Brooks is forty years old and has taught elementary school for a total of 12 years. Brooks is a bubbly and happy person who appears to be optimistic and is thoughtful and reflective throughout the discussion. Brooks first began her career as a flight attendant and after being influenced by her teacher educator mother made a career change to education. Brooks came from a middle class background and considers herself to be in the lower middle class position. This year Brooks is no longer in the classroom and has been chosen to be an EIP pullout teacher who works with a population of students who failed to meet state test score requirements.

Toya

Toya is twenty-eight years old and has been a middle school teacher for six years. Toya was warm and friendly throughout the interview and was candid about interactions she has had with her students. Toya first began her teaching career in a poverty stricken rural middle school and considers the Title I school that she currently teaches in to be beyond luxury in comparison with the first she school she started in. Toya came from a middle class background and considers herself middle class.

Tracy

Tracy is forty years old and has been a middle school teacher for 9 years. Tracy is straightforward and provides direct answers to questions throughout the interview. Tracy began teaching because she was inspired by her educator aunt and uncle who raised her as a child. Tracy grew up very poor and considers her class position to be lower middle class.

Data Collection

In order to elicit narratives from middle class African American female teachers about their experiences, and issues of social class differences/division in their teaching experiences, an array of data collection strategies were utilized. Qualitative research allows the researcher to constantly ask questions as a means to understand and accurately capture the perspectives of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). With the aim to address both research questions and sub-questions it was necessary to incorporate a variety of methods within my collected data; interviews, and written documents.

INTERVIEWING

Many scholars (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) argue that interviewing does not only involve a set of skills but rather it is an exploration to listen and make meaning of how people understand the world in their words. In order to explore the worlds of my participants, particularly in relation to the effects of social class on pedagogical relationships, I interviewed female African American middle class teachers who have taught economically disadvantaged African American students during their teaching careers.

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each participant. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) state that interviews come in special forms of conversations, and narratives are essentially

a product of talk between the interviewer and respondents involving active interviewing. They argue that one reason for involving active interviewing is it allows respondents to become a subject of the interview where opinions and thoughts of respondents' surface and interviewing becomes a part of a meaning making project. This notion of allowing respondents to transform their ideas and opinions into a more constructive form of knowledge is more profound than merely collecting data. It is also about making the power dynamics between the interviewer and respondent more equal. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) explain that respondents who are considered active participants are a part of a joint process where the interview and participants are "constantly developing" (p. 150). Therefore, active interviewing allows participants to use their voices as a means of redistributing power.

Another reason Holstein and Gubrium (2004) states it is important to employ active interviewing is that active interviewers encourage respondents to discuss responses that bring forth alternative possibilities and considerations that might not have been accessed through simply looking for preferred responses to questions. They believe that respondents just telling a story (the "what") is inadequate in the interview process. An interview will also need to include the "how" which will depend upon interaction, and negotiations between the researcher and respondent. The "how" answers the question of how interview questions and responses from the respondent will be given. If interview settings and interview protocol questions are negotiated between the respondent and interviewer then a possibility of alternate unpredictable responses may occur.

The teachers participated in a single one on-one semi-structured interview. Although it was a semi-structured interview with an interview protocol, I was not limited to the questions

listed on the protocol. While trying to ask every question, I was not hesitant in allowing my participants to take the conversation in another direction before trying to address another question. The interviews varied in length depending on the teacher and consisted of a mixture of open ended and closed ended questions. The interview questions addressed the life histories of the teachers and present perceptions of their lives as teachers. These questions were also designed to provide social class background information about teachers.

PERSONAL JOURNALS

In conjunction with interviews I kept a personal journal of reflection. After each interview I would take a few moments to reflect upon any statements or emotions that stood out to me during the interview process. I often wrote in the journal as a means to express all the unexpected and expected challenges that emerged during my data collection journey. The personal journal allowed me to keep my personal feelings in check while also revealing my subjectivities as a researcher.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

My last form of data stemmed from personal narratives by myself and members of my family. Davis & Ellis (2008) states that auto ethnographic narratives are “personal accounts written as stories with characters, plot, and dialogue-traditionally.....written as first person accounts of one’s own experiences” (p. 284). A total of five stories were provided from mom, Aunt Lee, and me. Included were two narratives based upon the educational experiences of my father who is deceased and earlier educational experiences of my teenage daughter. Each of our stories reflected the first-hand accounts of our educational experiences. Although most of the stories were single voiced, characters other than the narrators are not unidentifiable because in

personal narratives David & Ellis (2008) strongly cautions writers against using identifiable information or names that would provide embarrassment or shame to parties mentioned in the story. Similar to Gubrium and Holstein's (1997) strategies of data collection, I conducted two reflexive dyadic interviews with mom and Aunt Lee where both participants were interviewed in a conversational form. As these conversations continued I constructed meanings from the dynamics of the interview and agreed with Denzin (1989) when he said "personal experience narratives are more likely to be based on anecdotal, everyday anecdotal, everyday commonplace experiences" (p. 44).

The conversations with both women pulled reflections of past educational experiences and the emotions that were often suppressed during those times. My own personal narrative afforded me the opportunity to recall my past educational experiences and travel deeply into a state of thoughtful reflection. The narrative of my father surfaced from reflections regarding his important influence on my education and past conversations we have shared during my childhood. Although the narrative did not reflect verbatim all of our conversations it encompassed paramount experiences relevant to this study. Finally I included the educational journey of my daughter who despite coming from a middle class background has had complex experiences in public schools. The importance of hearing her story through my voice became more meaningful as I wrote through those moments.

DATA ANALYSIS

From the beginning of this study I had decided that narrative analysis would be the analytical tool of choice in putting such rich and descriptive stories together. As I continued to collect data from participants I began to realize how imperative the process of analyzing was to

fully capture the stories of middle class African American teachers especially when addressing the issues of class and race. I especially looked forward to undertaking the task of abstracting important aspects of each participant's story and carefully making connections between various themes, and was mindful of how delicate a process data analysis could be. Atkinson & Delamont (2005) said that researchers should analyze narratives "so as to treat them as instances of social action, that is, as speech acts or events with common properties, recurrent structures, cultural conventions, and recognizable genres" (p.825).

In my analytical journey, the first stage of data analysis began with organizing data. Individual interviews and focus group meetings were transcribed and organized. Next I used the strategy of domain analysis a method used by James Spradley (1976) to identify and differentiate classes of items in interviews. Lecompte & Schensul (1999) suggest this type of analysis "is initiated using what are called descriptive questions which induce people to describe the components of the world in which they live" (p. 70). As I read and reread interviews to highlight important ideas, concepts, stories, quotes, and recurring ideas, I considered how Spradley's system of data collection would be useful in identifying categories within interviews that connected to each other in a meaningful way. From these identified categories I abstracted themes that would further inform my research.

Initially during this process I was troubled with the process of how I should code my data. Should I code certain phrases, ideas, events, or behaviors? Certainly I wanted a clearly descriptive and detailed analysis and I was painstakingly aware of a possible need for data reduction (Reissman, 1993). Apparently inductive coding would allow me to examine data in a process where data would naturally fall into chunks and afterwards I would be responsible for

providing an explanation of why the data fell into certain concepts (Lecompte & Schensul, 1999). Reissman(1993) notes it is important for a researcher to limit answering specific questions from your research because with analytic induction questions “change” and new ones “emerge” (p. 60). Particularly I decided to use what Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define as relationship and social structure codes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) relationship and social structure codes are “units of data that direct you to cliques, friendships, romances, coalitions, enemies, and mentor/ students” (p. 177). Consequently, social structure codes involve a description of relations in a setting (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

Initial Coding

My initial coding started after I conducted my first set of one-on-one interviews. During this process it was imperative that I was attentive to the data. After the interviews were transcribed, I read and reread the interviews. I then took Rubin and Rubin’s (1995) suggestion to create a few main coding categories with additional lists of categories and leaving enough room in the margins for marking space. Rubin and Rubin (1995) state that initial coding may occur by words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or story by story. My initial coding took place story by story. This story by story coding was also applied to my interviews. In order to not come to general assumptions, Rubin and Rubin (1995) state that it is beneficial to remain engaged as you code and not turn the process into an automated task,

If you pay close attention as you code, you will hear much more meaning in your data than you can when you just read the interviews. You may see connections between what different people told you or you may read different examples of the same concept and suddenly notice that the examples point out nuances you need to pay attention to (p. 240).

Some of my initial codes included mothering, frustration with school policies, caring, identifying with students, understanding, disbelief of solidarity, uncertainty, experience with racism, awareness of roles in community, agreeing, description of social class, experiences with family, individual purpose, interaction, anger, disagreeing, social class awareness, perceptions and attitudes towards academic ability, and stereotyping of student and parents.

EXTENDING CODING AND ARRANGING WORDS, PHRASES, AND IDEAS

In the second stage, I continued to reread individual interviews and I began taking important phrases and concepts from each text. These phrases and concepts were those emphasized during each interview by all participants and were important in moving the conversation from one idea to another. I once more reviewed the transcripts looking for common words or ideas that were stressed across the paragraphs of the transcript. Next I began arranging these words, phrases, and ideas in columns assigned to each of the participants. During this stage I purposely stayed on task not to lose the teachers' personal stories through this tedious process of systematically trying to sort through and make meaning of my data. In this stage of analysis I began to employ narrative inquiry. Polkinghorne (1988) was correct when he stated that narrative meaning is a cognitive process that changes human experiences into meaningful plots

Assembling Discourse Categories

Through the action of coding, I envisioned a chapter of analysis (Chapter 5) that would move personal thoughts, ideas, experiences, and emotions prompted by interview questions, and dialogue. In moving with the data rich narratives, coding helped to further delineate language that needed to be categorized into various discourses. Repeatedly I read and reread each theme

and corresponding narratives. One of the methods used to categorize discourses was to closely look at the context in which the participant discussed experiences or topics. In addition, occasionally as I read the narratives a random phrase or word would enter my mind to explain the discourse found in a particular narrative.

The third research question focuses on what discourses the teachers used when talking about their economically disadvantaged students and their academic potential. Gee (1996) explains discourse as,

Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit, which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize. (p. 127)

To construct categories of discourse from the data, I carefully read through participants' narratives, particularly the language of the narratives and the existing discourse from literature/theoretical frameworks. Reviewing language and key terms in the narratives gave an idea of how I should categorize or name discourses around the issues social class, race, and gender. The following categories of discourse will be used expansively throughout this study. .

CATEGORIES OF DISCOURSE

- 1) Social class discourse- is used to describe how participants view social class in their communities, classrooms, and home life.
- 2) Deficit discourse-used to explain the failure of students as a result of the lack of resources.
- 3) Meritocracy discourse- is used to explain the notion of “being able to pull oneself by your own bootstrap”. If a person works hard then they will be successful. .

- 4) Oneness discourse- is used to describe how African Americans regardless of skin color or social class should come together as one.
- 5) Crab in the bucket discourse- is used to describe the actions of people in the black community not being supportive of one another and pulling each other down in order to get ahead financially, socially, or politically.
- 6) Glorious transformation discourse-used to describe a critical look at oneself and the ability to transform or change adopted ideologies that are found to be troubling.
- 7) Individualism discourse-used to describe the act of looking at individual situations rather than looking at the community as a whole.
- 8) Pathic discourse-is used to describe a sense of “knowing” and being” intuitive” about student situations.
- 9) Classist discourse- is used to position students and families as lazy, and unmotivated.
- 10) Hierarchy discourse- is used to describe movement between social class positions.
- 11) Inspiration discourse-is used to describe the act(s) of being inspired by another individual or experience.
- 12) Blame discourse- is used to blame or point fingers at someone else to explain the challenges or difficulties or challenges faced in the classroom. . *Constructing Narratives*

Polkinghorne (1988) argues that narrative analysis allows researchers an opportunity to “produce a description that includes comparisons and contrasts within the story under consideration, and between this and other stories” (p.167). With this statement in mind, I decided to use Labov’s (1982) model for analyzing interview text by distinguishing parts of the interview that included narrative accounts from those parts that did not. In order to construct my narrative I first took all of my interview data for each teacher and placed it into one document. My participants often told similar stories/experiences with different circumstances, so I grouped data according to stories. After grouping data according to stories I then looked through my

personal journal to see if there were any corresponding notes that connected to a story from the interview data. After sifting through the data to find individual stories, I then moved to grouping similar stories with other similar stories. While each teacher's narrative evolved into its own story because each teacher's experience is different, most of the narratives were then organized around class backgrounds, school stories, and community stories. Thus categories were created based upon the stories of participants.

Following Patton's (2002) description of interpreting findings through the identification of themes and pattern, I tried to follow his advice that "there is no absolutely "right" way of stating what emerges from analysis"(p.476) while recognizing that there are "more or less useful ways of expressing what the data reveal"(p. 476). As I read my data I searched in my mind the most fitting language that could describe data themes. Once I started to link categories with common themes and concepts the process became easier and less dramatic. The process of placing categories together gave me an opportunity to synthesize common themes into a larger overarching theme.

After collecting data my final themes were: familial background especially factors such as social class largely influences teacher student relationships, social class division is a normalized part of black community, this group of teachers discuss and conceptualize social class in varying contexts, and in relation to themselves consider themselves middle class. As I sifted through the stories attempting to make sense of data in front of me I began to realize the importance of using narrative inquiry as a methodological tool. The use of narratives permitted a critical pedagogy lens to explain participants' teaching practices, and perceptions of social class positions. An essential part of the data collection process was the relaxed conversations which

occurred during the interview process. The participants were excited in the telling of their lives and rarely needed further prompting to solicit additional information. A significant amount of the participants' reflections, stories, and experiences were integral in allowing the study's research questions and other guiding questions that connected to the topic to be answered. The narratives around education and social class were not neat and the text around them was sometimes conveyed in messy ways. However, the rich descriptions and stories of family experiences and other influences gave me the cognizance to realize that no other method would have been suitable enough to capture the impact of social class in the individual lives of African American middle class teachers. Additionally, the "telling" of participant narratives also helped me as a researcher to make more meaning of my life experiences, drawing deeper connections between the influence of family background and decisions regarding my educational journey.

CHAPTER FOUR

WE ARE FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Before collecting the personal stories of participants I assumed that family background would matter and influence how African American middle class teachers and my assumptions were correct. Family background mattered in two significant ways: through the data I found the personal experiences of participants shaped or influenced their perceptions regarding social class impacted by family members or other key figures in their lives, and by experiences of struggle, disrespect, respect, and kindness. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce each participant and tell a brief story about each her family background, descriptions of physical and personality characteristics, stories regarding personal relationships with students, experiences that have influenced how she perceives her students, and her perceptions of the African American community.

This chapter imparts information compiled during the data collection phase of the research study. The research consisted of interviewing seven middle class African American teachers. I decided to include the narratives of my mother, father, daughter, and myself, as additional contributions to the study. The decision was made to include members of my family's narratives because my narrative and my family's narratives were significant as they have shaped and guided the lens through which the entire study was conducted.

Following a brief introduction presented in chapter three, I present personal narratives including me and my family. Afterwards, the story of each woman participant in the study is presented in a two-part format (Johnson-Bailey,1994). A preliminary demographic profile of each participant is presented followed by a summarized narrative, and a brief abstract of each interview.

Basic descriptive indicators are also included in the demographic data. The narratives give an awareness of each woman's life circumstances, and provide a snapshot of what I perceive as the important highlights of each woman's life story about her, particularly as they pertain to her social class experiences, and the questions of this study. Each of the profiles and summarized narratives contain many similarities, however each woman's narrative also embodies diversity. Demographic profiles include a physical description of the woman, a description of the setting, the participant's class status, length of time teaching, and the date and time of the interview. Each summarized narrative includes the background information of her family, information on her early school experiences, and her present classroom experiences. The participants are presented in the order in which they were interviewed.

As the author and researcher of this dissertation, my life, the lives of my family and educational journey have provided the lens through which the women in this study are perceived. Hence, the reader will first encounter a presentation of my narrative and narratives of my family in an attempt to provide an opportunity to let the reader understand the perspective from which I analyzed the women's stories.'

Meet the Family

MY CHILDHOOD

Growing up as a military child provided me with an opportunity to not only see the world but to become an observer to many experiences. Several schools I attended rarely included African American teachers who could guide or mentor me as a student. The first time I experienced attending an all-black school with teachers and students was in a rural school setting in middle Georgia. Branch County Elementary was a community school where if you were in

any kind of trouble everyone had the power and permission to punish without preapproval. Your last name and ancestry were used as information by classmates, faculty, and staff to predict your behavior. Fortunately my mother attended the same school as a child and she was considered very intelligent, not to mention my grandfather was known as a good and honest man. I was in the fourth grade and my teacher Ms. Bridges appeared to be middle class and well educated. Most of the students were poor but there were some who were considered middle to upper class.

Although I was young my memories were quite vivid during those times. A majority of teachers at the school believed in academic excellence and achievement for all students, therefore giving everyone an opportunity to be successful. I honestly cannot say during my time of attendance all teachers were fair to students who came from poor backgrounds, and were considered as capable as the students who came from middle class backgrounds. I do recall that if you were labeled as “smart” despite your class positions your talents were utilized for the benefits of the school district. In classrooms you would hear teachers say to students, “It doesn’t matter where you come from it is where you want to go.” Branch County Elementary was a resource-poor school but the support and high expectations set by teachers for students were unique to other schools where I attended or worked.

Growing up we were considered a lower middle class family. Both of my parents worked and my brother and I were provided with the necessities. My parents were very active in our education and were adamant about receiving a good education. So they pushed us academically enforcing study periods afterschool and on weekends. Most of my father’s family was on government assistance and we would visit them during the summers. Visiting dad’s family was quite exciting to me, because I never experienced free lunch programs, or paying for groceries

with food stamps. My mother's family who lived around the corner was working class people who at the time would have been considered lower middle class. My parents wanted my brother and I to be exposed to all kinds of people which I believe influenced their decision to send us to a different environment for the summer. Spending time with my relatives was not all fun and games and my visit became an eye opener as I grew older. I was aware that I didn't want to live in small quarters with multiple people, and that a roach and rat infested home was not a safe place to live in. In dad's family none of my cousins attended college, and they have struggled throughout their lives with making a decent living. I never understood father's harshness regarding education, but now as an adult I completely understand. As I reflect upon my father's determination regarding education and success, two discourses come to mind- meritocracy discourse, and hierarchy discourse. Dad always believed that if you worked hard you could be a success no matter where you came from. This discourse was often reiterated in our home simply because dad was a success story because of his hard work. He had also moved from one class position to another class position and he perceived this move was a result of hard work.

As an undergraduate I obtained a Risk Management and Insurance degree. After the first year I knew that the corporate world was not for me. I wanted to choose a career that gave back to the world and to my community. In between jobs I substitute taught at a private school and decided becoming a teacher was the career for me. I returned to school and entered an alternative teacher preparation program and became certified to instruct middle grades education. I can honestly say that the program did not prepare me to teach children who came from poverty stricken situations. Content and curriculum was first and foremost in the program and many student teachers were left to fend for themselves in the field. During the eight years that I taught

in inner city schools I learned a great deal about myself and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of the children whom I taught were good children, but I did not understand them. I failed to understand how they dressed, talked, behaved, or viewed life. I always seemed to have students who “refused to learn” and more importantly were “not motivated to learn.” Instead, they vocally expressed interest in joining gangs and dealing drugs. As a middle class teacher I could not fathom why children didn’t have supplies, completed homework, or were transient. A classist discourse informed my thoughts and actions as I judged those children who were unable to provide the middle class dispositions, material wealth, and lifestyles that I was accustomed to.

It was not until after many years of teaching that I came to a realization that I had been totally disconnected from my students – informed by discourses that sought to change my adopted dominant ideologies such as solidarity discourse and glorious transformation discourse. This realization came after working at a school where ninety-five percent of the teachers were angry, and frustrated towards students and the words they spoke about the students cut like a knife into my heart. How could I judge my students I realized in the past many times I had spewed the same horrible venom and thoughts at my students. When I returned to graduate school to obtain my doctorate I began to read articles and books which discussed institutional racism and oppression. In addition to reading powerful texts I engaged in meaningful discussions with professors and other doctoral students regarding continuous classism in the school system which deeply affected African American students. And this I realized helped to contribute to the oppression of students when I was in the classroom. Although my good intentions were to help my students move into higher class positions, I had not tried to understand their home life or

build relationships with my students. I had not been able to connect with them because my background did not include being socioeconomically disadvantaged. As I think about the situation now the disconnection was unfounded simply because I had several family members who were socioeconomically disadvantaged. I connected well with them because we were family and I always knew that if they needed anything I felt compelled to help in any way that I could despite class differences.

In an attempt to remain financially stable I decided to substitute in a local school system particularly at the former middle school where I had previously worked. The school housed a ninety five percent African American, three percent Hispanic and two percent Caucasian population. I figured that I had acquired all of this wonderful theoretical knowledge during my coursework, and it could be used during my substitution jobs. While substitute teaching, it became clear that it could be effortless to become entangled in the venomous structured learning environments that existed in schools. I found great difficulty in adopting a practice that could nurture, develop, and understand the lives of children while not enabling them to become dependent upon my assistance. Many of the children barely knew essential information needed to further their middle school learning such as multiplication facts and identifying parts of speech in a sentence. Middle school teachers would point fingers at elementary school teachers as well as parents. The teachers were informed by a discourse of blame where they pointed the fingers at someone else for the difficulties experienced in the classroom. On many occasions I had to challenge my middle class, higher educated self on judging parents and their children in regards to attitudes about education. No matter how difficult the road became to internalize and utilize all of the knowledge learned in graduate school, I would always keep in mind that there was a

system in place to keep the children exactly where they were in a continuous cycle until – and unless – that system was explicitly disrupted.

DAD

My father completed high school and longed to continue his education in college, but his mother and six sisters depended on him as a source of income. Education was not important in my father's household. My paternal grandparents had not obtained an education beyond elementary school. Both grandparents were able to survive and feed their families based upon acquired gambling and cooking skills. Unfortunately if Dad wanted further encouragement to continue his education and choose a different path than his parents, he would not receive it from his parents. In the 1950's and 1960's enlisting in the military was a strong and only option for young African American males, so he enlisted in the Air Force and remained in the military for thirty plus years.

Once he missed his opportunity to attend college he made a vow that he would not only marry a woman who was a college graduate, but his children would attend college as well. Dad's disadvantaged background provided him with the belief that college attendance represented status and privilege - an opportunity to escape the ghetto while using your brain. My brother and I were always given "the importance of education" lectures from Dad. I imagine he had seen the benefits of education and how many of his educated friends moved from one class position-poor to another class position-middle or upper class. Dad must have really seen an academic potential in me because he was a constant driving force behind my educational career, and in many respects he served as my teacher as well. He encouraged my study habits to an extent where I occasionally was forced to forego play time. However his efforts forced me to

become a better and well-rounded student in school. He recognized certain skills and knowledge were needed to survive in the world came from many aspects of school. One day I remember bitterly crying because he had given me an assignment to complete and I wanted to go outside and play with my friends. After all it was a sunny beautiful day and I needed to enjoy it. As I was putting on tennis shoes Dad came into my room handed me a reading comprehension book rattling instructions to complete multiple pages. Looking at him in disbelief and very fearful of punishment I didn't respond, but started to cry. Dad looked at me and asked "Why are you crying?" I responded, "Because I don't want to do work I want to go outside and play with my friends" then Dad said "Sharlonne you may not understand now because you are young but the knowledge you gain will someday be able to take you far and you must rely on your brain because a pretty face and talent will not be enough". I didn't understand what he meant in that statement. How could a nine year old understand the value of sacrificing playtime? Dad was able to change class positions through his work as a military employee and through marriage to my educated mother. He wanted my brother and me to never experience the poverty stricken days he had seen, and beyond that he knew that attending college meant having an opportunity to gain power and privilege in communities and throughout the world. Fortunately before he passed away he obtained his associates degree and was a few courses away from completing his bachelor's degree. His desire to obtain a degree and help others in social work provided me with the motivation and inspiration to pursue my education, and also to help others who are less fortunate. Discourses of solidarity/oneness discourse, and inspiration discourse came into play during this time. I observed how great the act of helping others made my dad feel and I too

wanted those good feelings. Dad always believed that the human race needed to act as one and that all should be linked together as fellow human beings.

MOM

Another influence in my life was my mother who is now happily retired and living a fulfilled life. My mother grew up in a rural farmland area in middle Georgia. Mom would tell my brother and I stories about walking five miles to catch a bus to school and not attending school regularly because she and her sister had to help with crops. Mom always would say, “I knew I didn’t want to live in Branch county all of my life, be the wife of a farmer, and sit around having babies, there was another life for me and in order to get it I had to get an education.” Again the meritocratic discourse and hierarchy discourse informs this narrative, because mom truly believed that the only way that she could be successful in life especially coming from a small rural town was to become educated and gain access to a life that would change her life forever.

Mom came from a family of six children four of whom had already left a Branch county in hopes of finding better job opportunities and better material lives. Mom and her younger siblings attended an predominately African American K-12 public school where aunts, uncles, sisters and brothers all attended school together. Despite the economic limitations of being the daughter of a poor sharecropper Mom managed to graduate as the salutatorian of her high school class and began college at historic Tuskegee Institute.

Mom often speaks of her encounters with classism and colorism from certain teachers at her high school. Often times she was looked over for opportunities to do activities outside of school because she was not a child from town and according to her she was too “dark skinned”.

Because of those factors Mom often felt the need to prove her academic intelligence and worth. Her father believed girls should not further their education beyond high school, and that a college degree was not necessary; education for women was a waste of time. My grandfather believed women were only capable of running households, but not obtaining further education. My grandmother did not agree with granddad, for she wanted her daughters to have choices outside of the realm of being a housewife. Grandmother always played the role of the submissive wife as it related to matters of the household, however thankfully she spoke on behalf of my mother to attend college and eventually won the battle. Although Mom achieved the honor of being salutatorian in her high school she faced many barriers to gaining such an achievement. Barriers such as class and racial division could have prevented Mom from achieving her dreams, but her determination and drive kept her on a journey to obtain a higher education. Mom recalls particularly a male teacher Mr. Edwards who always believed in her throughout high school. He was her guidance counselor and always encouraged her to think about the possibility of attending college. In fact he believed in mom's academic abilities and talents so much that he made several trips to speak with Grandma and Granddaddy about her taking college tours around the southeast part of the country.

Shortly after graduating from Tuskegee Institute mom married my father and began her ascension into a middle class status. Mom was very proud of the fact that she had been able to move to such a position unlike her parents who were satisfied and complacent with their poor working class positions. Although I did not further probe mom's statement regarding her parents' complacency, I would assume from other conversations we have shared that she was not criticizing their lifestyle choices. Mom and I frequently have these types of conversations where

she understands that her relatives are happy with little material wealth. She is aware that her relatives were not accustomed to any other lifestyles so desiring other lifestyles was not a high priority. As a student in college, her exposure to other lifestyles prompted her to desire a different lifestyle-**not better**, but different. Mom traveled the world as a military wife, and observed people living good and bad material lives which inspired her to make sure that her children would live good material lives as they grew up. Mom would always stress to my brother and I, “No one in your life can make you successful but yourself.” She also believed that in order to gain success you had to work hard and be willing to start small. Mom’s notion of education not only focused on going above and beyond, but regardless of educational environments or personal barriers she believed intrinsic motivation was needed to achieve academic success.

KIMBERLEY

Kimberley is a talkative, inquisitive, and very curious child who commands attention wherever she goes. Kimberley is thirteen years old and has had a very bumpy educational journey in the public school system. I am well acquainted with Kimberley because she is my daughter. At the beginning of my teaching career I would gasp in horror when I discovered colleagues would enroll their children into private schools or in public private schools because my thinking behind their actions was: Are certain public schools not capable of giving teachers’ children a quality education? Employed in an inner city middle school where ninety percent of the students were two to three grade levels behind, limited resources was the norm, and large numbers of discipline occurrences were common I could understand teachers’ unwillingness to enroll their children at this particular school. Although I understood school placement decisions

concerning their child, I disagreed with their actions until my daughter became school aged, and I questioned the quality of education obtainable to her. When Kimberley entered nursery school, I chose to enroll her in a very well-known private school that included a middle class clientele and highly qualified pre-k teachers. Other local public preschools were available for Kimberley to attend, but I felt she would not receive the education needed to make her competitive in grade school. Why did I feel this private pre-k school was more qualified to give Kimberley a better education than local public schools? Primarily I taught children who attended public preschools, and I was not impressed with the basic foundations provided to students. It was quite ironic that I now changed my attitude towards public schools when it concerned the quality of education for *my* daughter.

When Kimberley became ready for grade school, I began to experience firsthand educational disparity as a result of property taxes. Kimberly turned six and was ready for kindergarten I made a decision to enroll her in public school. My neighborhood was located in the center of a large southern metropolitan city, and I was aware of unequal resources which existed among schools located in the area. Determined not to allow Kimberley to attend any of these schools I made an attempt to enroll her in an out of zone school which required me to camp out overnight in a long line of anxious parents. Unfortunately, all kindergarten slots had been filled and I elected to reenroll Kimberley in private school until she reached second grade. As she entered second grade I felt the time had come to send her to a public school and despite all good reviews about our neighborhood school I was not comfortable enrolling her there. Through personal contacts at the board of education I secured Kimberley a third grade spot at an affluent out of zone elementary school. This neighborhood school was funded primarily through property

taxes. Resources were plentiful including well qualified teachers and a one million dollar funded PTA. Parents used resources and privilege to fund field trip excursions, form business partnerships, and sponsor school events.

As Kimberley entered middle school I once again faced the situation of where she would attend school. In her school district it had become increasingly difficult to have students attend out of zone schools. Apparently upper middle class parents were not happy with an increase of out of zone students populating their neighborhood schools. Not to mention the spiraling economy during the years under the Bush administration created hardships for many affluent families who were forced to exchange private school education for public school education. In an effort to enforce in zone attendance a coalition of parents hired private investigators to investigate any students deemed out of district at elementary and middle schools. Faced with the anxiety of potentially being caught by the parent investigators I decided to enroll Kimberley in an all-girls academy. This academy named after a famous civil rights leader was predominately African American and had a population that was ninety percent economically disadvantaged.

During her one year enrollment at the school, my presence was known around her school not only as an involved parent but as a former educator who was pursuing a doctoral degree. I am certain the cultural capital which I possessed, as well as my class position afforded Kimberley opportunities that many of her peers would not receive. I often pondered did the middle class African American teachers who pulled Kimberley aside to tell her “she knows better than that” when she is off-task during class ask other students the same question. I also asked myself: would the same teacher take the time to notice another student if her academic abilities were not equivalent to my middle class child? Would differentiated instruction or

additional academic assistance be given if Kimberley needed it despite her class difference?

Social class discourse, and individualism discourse informs this narrative. Kimberley's teachers were aware of her social class status as a child who has a middle class position, therefore she was treated differently than her peers who were not from the same class background. They sought her individually to correct inappropriate behaviors and to offer her rewards and opportunities not offered to her classmates. I am an African American middle class mother who is beginning to understand how social class privileges some and excludes others. I inherited this class position from my parents just as Kimberley has inherited a middle class position from me. She has been exposed to various academic and social opportunities that many of her peers will not be exposed to. Kimberley's educational journey rendered the realization that many students who attended the academy have acquired their class positions from their parents or guardians, and not through choices of their own.

All these stories regarding myself and my family give the reader an opportunity to explore how family upbringing and experiences helped to shape the way I perceived education and more importantly how I viewed social class especially in the African American community. Without the emotional, physical, mental, and financial support that came from my parents I would not be the scholar educator that I am today. My parents always exposed me to the discourses of solidarity/oneness, glorious transformations, and crab in the bucket discourse. They always taught me not to think I was better than anyway and that we as humans always had room to grow and change our minds. My parents also encouraged me to not develop the crab in the bucket discourse where I should be supportive of other African Americans attempts to be successful. Growing up in these discourses allowed me to become open to looking at dominant

ideologies with a critical eye and to change how I viewed my multiple roles as a member of the African American community-one being to promote solidarity. I can say that the evolution that has taken place throughout my life and who shaped me into the person I am today came from the foundation of two people who wanted their children to be contributors to the human race.

During my childhood I saw the other side of middle class living and although I had not experienced a life of poverty, my parents were there to always remind me of how “blessed” I was to be in the class position that I was in. Upon the reflection of telling the stories that relate to my family I assert that social class background does inform student teacher relationships. My outlook on life and the relationships (good or bad) that I formed with my students were influenced by my experiences during my childhood.

The next presentation of narratives tells the stories of six African American female educators who teach in schools which educate predominately poor and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The narrative purely reflects the voice of each participant, and while I constructed these narratives, I was diligent in ensuring that my voice or perspective was not present in any of the narratives. As you read the narratives I urge each reader to keep these questions in mind. How do the positive or negative experiences during childhood influence the discourse used by teachers when talking about economically disadvantaged students and their academic potential? How do teachers view themselves in terms of social class positions and how do they feel about social class and its’ effect in the black community? How does social class background inform student teacher interactions? At the end of all the participants’ section, I will give a brief overall summary of my thoughts about the interviews and some assertions that surfaced as a result of having these discussions.

Meet the Teachers

Sasha

Demographic Profile

Sasha is a middle aged African American woman who stands at 4’ 11” and who possesses a monotone voice and calm demeanor. She lives about thirty minutes from a large southern metropolitan city with her husband, daughter, and miniature poodle. Her split level home is located in a racially mixed neighborhood which I looks like it was built in the late 70’s or early 80’s. Sasha has a hidden wit about her that makes one curious, and often times during the interview she was more verbally expressive with topics that she felt passionate about. Initially she appears to be quiet and reserved, but once she thaws she becomes somewhat animated. Throughout the interview her mannerisms became quite engaging especially observing her facial expressions and moments of loud expressive giggles.

Sasha decided that the interview should take place in her home where she felt most comfortable, and she did not want to take time away from her preparation for an upcoming trip. When I arrived at her home on a hot and muggy summer day, she came to the door in a tan dress and comfortable shoes. Along the side of Sasha was her miniature poodle named Mimi who barked and growled as I came in. Immediately Sasha put Mimi away in another room so we would not be disturbed by her barking. As I walked through the front door with a glance to the right then left, I became very interested to get to know this woman with whom I had brief encounters. Sasha’s daughter recently graduated from high school and would be attending a college not too far from where she lives. Her son has a career in the technology business, and lives in San Francisco. Sasha rarely mentions her husband, but I have seen him in a couple of pictures around their home.

Sasha works at an inner city middle school that is located in a large southern metropolitan city where she has been teaching for two years since her elementary school was closed. She entered Atlanta University's teaching program over twenty years ago, and felt the program adequately prepared her to teach students who came from low income areas. Her mentor teacher at the time taught her how to be organized and work with discipline issues. However, according to Sasha, the middle school she currently teaches in is what she describes as a dumping ground of the school system. Large amounts of students with disabilities and who act "kind of wild behaviorally" tend to make up the school's population.

We met on two occasions and both interviews took place at Sasha's kitchen table. The first interview lasted about one hour and the second interview was also approximated one hour. The next time we talked was in Sasha's house I distinctly remember hearing Mimi bark loudly throughout the conversation. Her daughter, who was also in the house, never interrupted the conversation.

Summary Narrative

Sasha considers herself middle class based upon the salaries of her and her husband. Sasha came from a middle class background and to her knowledge did not have family members who were considered poor or working class. While growing up, Sasha had mostly middle class friends although she does remember having one friend who came from a poor working class background. Sasha recalls how she never wanted to be poor and she didn't want the government taking care of her. She felt that education was the only way that she would be able to make a living without having any handouts from the government. Before Sasha began teaching she joined the police force but quickly discovered this career was not her calling. As a child, her mother was a teacher and had put that

career expectation upon Sasha. She recalls that teaching really was her calling but she was constantly in denial about becoming a teacher.

Sasha taught for twenty five years in a large southern metropolitan city. Twenty-three years of experience occurred in various elementary schools in the same school system. All of the schools were predominately African American and only one of the five elementary schools in which she taught contained a primarily middle class population of students. Sasha feels that there are considerable differences between middle class and socioeconomically students. Usually in middle class settings parents were behind the students as well as the teachers. Her perception of kids who came from poor backgrounds was different. She observed that students in these situations were made to come to school and did not focus on learning but rather on being class clowns or cafeteria food. In her last elementary school Sasha was placed with a group of students who were unable to read and labeled as having disabilities. She saw social promotion as the cause of students coming to her unable to read. In fact she also blamed the high illiteracy rate in her school system based upon social promotion and the systems' failure to retain students who cannot meet the requirements of their grade.

As a second year middle school teacher Sasha finds herself entangled with issues of discipline and building positive relationships with her students. Sasha believes her problems with children stem from her being a straight laced teacher who believes students should stay in their place with teachers. She explains that those teachers who act like the students tend to not as struggle with behavior problems as those who demand respect. On more than one occasion Sasha has tried to transfer out of the school, but "the powers that be" from the central office will not allow her to move.

She explains that once you are assigned to work there you are purposely kept in the same building for years to prevent high teacher turnover.

Sasha measures her success as a teacher through CRCT scores- a state of Georgia mandated standardized test given yearly to measure the progress of student achievement. She explains her first year at the school the students did not do well on the CRCT. She eagerly admits scores were partly related to the students' dislike of her. In addition, she also did not want to be at the school so her perspective about teaching was totally different than last year. At the end of the school year, Sasha realized she needed to change her perspective if she was to obtain higher scores from students. This year Sasha began to develop a different attitude towards her students –where she stopped saying she “didn’t want to come to this school”, but rather she had to work so she had to make the best of it. Her attitude was better and more positive thus resulting in improved test scores. As scores grew so did her relationships with the students. Students began to treat her better and her relationships improved. The improved relationships motivated her to become more effective with class control, and gave her an opportunity to teach whole lessons which would not have occurred last year.

Master Teacher

Demographic Profile

Master Teacher is a petite woman whose smile lights up the room with her bubbly personality. She has worked as a teacher for 18 years in the states of Georgia and Florida. Just recently she decided to make a drastic change in her teaching career by resigning from the school system and starting her own homeschool. Master Teacher is one who is determined to “keep it real” as she says. Never one to bite her tongue throughout the interview she speaks very honestly about education and her role in the field. Master Teacher considers herself middle class because

of her ability to provide for herself and her son a lifestyle that never lacks. Master Teacher is a single mother of one and prides herself on not allowing her son to become a failing statistic of the public school system.

Master Teacher and I worked together for a number of years at my former middle school. She was always a teacher with whom I would have brief engaging conversations, so she came to mind as a potential participant. Without hesitation she committed to the interview and invited me to her home just thirty minutes outside of a large southern metropolitan city. The interview occurred in July and I was delighted because Master Teacher offered to cook lunch and I offered to bring the wine. Her home had a warm feeling to it, and I felt quite at home. Master Teacher offered me a seat at the kitchen table as she started to prepare the meal. We conversed about the latest events and happenings in and around the world and I asked if she would allow me to record our interview as she cooked. She did not object however she required me not to let her wine glass go empty. The interview lasted for approximately one and a half hours.

Summary Narrative

Master Teacher describes her childhood as eclectic. She came from a family of educators where everyone was an educator with the exception of her mother who was an accountant. Master Teacher knew that she would be a teacher as early as her childhood. As a little girl in her grandmother's home she would teach school every day to her teddy bears on a chalkboard. She recounts that she took it upon herself to carry out a dream of becoming a teacher through her childhood and then into her adult life. Her father and mother were never married and she lived primarily with her mother, but spent a lot of time with her father's family as well. Master Teacher describes her father's family as providing her with a silver spoon in her mouth while her

mother's family was very poor. Her life was intertwined between lifestyles, and she believes that having the best of both worlds gave the values and beliefs she currently embraces. Master Teacher recalls many times when her dad's side of the family had to pitch in to make sure she had the basic necessities. Many times she would attend school with the knowledge that her clothes and shoes were not brand name or expensive-different from other children's. Because of this she knew that she had to make it out of poverty. In fact her childhood impressed upon her to always have the outlook regarding her students that they could make it regardless of their situations.

Master Teacher attended a semi private school as a child and through high school. The school consisted of economically disadvantaged and wealthy students. There were students who lived in big lavish houses and parents who drove Mercedes and BMW's, on the other hand, she was able to attend private school because her mother was an employee and received a reduction in tuition. She explains attending a private school at that time was really a big deal.

As a middle school teacher in an urban inner city school Master Teacher has expressed concerns with the politics of public school systems and how they affect low income students. For instance at her former school she felt the school system dropped the ball in how they met the needs of students. Through her observations, the school was never clean or safe and failed to invest properly into making an inviting environment. She insists the kids had tough lives already and the system had a mentality of "they can take it" which she believed was unfair because privileged students had environments that were completely opposite. Master Teacher witnessed what she called "losing children" as a result of an absence of student rewards. She explains the efforts of kids were being ignored and took away from their motivation. Although her students

may not have the academic knowledge as students in affluent areas or read on the same level they tried just as hard. There were no incentives in place for students to come to so every day instead students were told to “do this –you have got to make this’ you’ve got to have that”. Hence working hard yields rewards. In fact, many of the students were very bright and began to become unmotivated. Lack of rewards, repetitive teaching and increased discipline all contributed to students becoming “lost” in Master Teacher’s school.

Master Teacher received her undergraduate degree in teaching from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). According to her, the teacher education program at this school adequately prepared her to teach students from poverty stricken situations. She recalls this student teaching experience was her first” taste” that information from books differed from real life experiences. The school where she taught had teachers who were very supportive and intuitive regarding the student teachers’ skills and abilities. Many of the teachers knew that she had passion and that she was capable of completing certain tasks. However teachers observed that another student teacher was not as passionate and would struggle during his student teaching experience.

She especially credits her mentor teacher with showing her all of the best practices she uses today. The first day Master Teacher walked into the classroom, she saw her Caucasian mentor teacher sitting with a confederate flag on her desk. The school was one hundred percent African American and she was shocked. The mentor teacher told her she really didn’t deal with black people outside of teaching. It was surprising to her that the conversation took place because she would have never asked the teacher about her life outside of school had she not volunteered the information. However despite the teacher’s views, through the course of the

semester all barriers were broken down and they became the best of friends. Throughout the semester they both learned from each other's teaching practices and relationships with students.

As a result of the blossoming student teacher/mentor teacher relationship the mentor teacher's attitude changed toward the kids and she became more affectionate. In return her mentor teacher showed her that some of the kids didn't want to be loved like you think they wanted to be loved and she showed Master Teacher how to handle them. She describes the best moment of her student teaching experience occurred when her mentor teacher commented on her weekly report that she would love for Master Teacher to teach her child. Everything the mentor teacher taught was described by Master Teacher as "the bomb" and helped her become the educator that she is today.

Before summer began Master Teacher made the painful decision to take a break from teaching for a while. Her decision was based upon the last two years of being unhappy in the classroom. She felt she could not help her kids in the way that she knows would help and benefit them. She explained her hands were tied because of the system and particularly teacher morale in the school was very low as a result of teaching an increased number of students per class. She also expressed dissatisfaction with unruly students and lack of discipline. Administrators were not supportive of the teaching staff and made teachers feel that if they stepped out of line their careers would end. She also noticed that parents assumed that teachers don't care about the kids. She felt that it was not a fair assumption for parents to make primarily because there were teachers who knew they didn't have to show up to the school every morning(if they didn't want to), and when they showed up every day it became unpleasant when encountered with parent opposition. Although she felt relationships could improve with parents she felt it was hard to

keep the line of communication open when parents had a perception that teachers didn't care based upon a bad experience with one or two teachers.

Brooks

Demographic Profile

Brooks is a tall woman in her late 30's whose facial features are striking at first sight. She has a low cropped haircut and stands about 5'10". Brooks is the mother of triplets and struggles to keep her professional and family life together. Brooks and her husband live in a suburban community about thirty minutes outside of a large southern metropolitan city. However before she married, Brooks lived in the metropolitan city and misses the busy hustle and bustle of city living. She suggested coming to the metropolitan city to participate in the interview. She needed to breathe the smog filled air and feel the quick paced environment. Brooks and I met at a local restaurant and decided to make the interview a working lunch. Brooks and I met at a social gathering and she volunteered to be a participant after engaging in conversation about my dissertation topic.

Brooks arrived in workout wear and informed me that she had finished a five mile run in a local park around the corner. As we responded to the intercom announcement that our food was ready for pick up, Brooks and I talked about the differences of city living to suburban living. We found our views about the topic to be very similar. Brooks and I moved twice around the restaurant due to table space constraints and background conversation that may have affected the quality of taping through the audio recorder. As we found an area that was comfortable enough to continue with the interview we decided to eat our lunch first and then began the interview

process. We talked over a noisy lunch crowd, loud conversations, and an intercom system. The conversation lasted about one hour and a half.

Brooks has a personality that instantly draws people to her. Her responses are often thoughtful and laced with kindness. She constantly smiles as she responds to questions and is probably the most cheerful participant that I have interviewed. She has been teaching for twelve years as an elementary school teacher and currently teaches at a Title One school that consists of Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian students. Most of the student population is considered transient who constantly move in and out of schools around the area.

Summary Narrative

Brooks is originally from a large southern metropolitan city and came from a middle class background. Brooks attended a predominately affluent African American private Catholic school during her elementary years, and a predominately African American high school. Brooks never attended middle school because her mother was unsure of the new middle school concept. Brooks remembers becoming aware of class differences as early as elementary school. In elementary school she noticed classmates who lived in apartments weren't clean. She and her classmates would make fun of a classmate who smelled like pee all the time and this incident made her notice he wasn't as well groomed as she was. She also recalls in middle school, her grandmother came to pick up her and her brother from middle school in an old 1974 Cadillac. In the mid 1980's Brooks felt that her grandmother arriving in a big old Cadillac was embarrassing especially with her peers present. Although she came from a middle class background she believed an outdated Cadillac indicated characteristics of poverty.

Her high school contained a mixed socioeconomic population of students. The affluent students came from families of judges, doctors, lawyers, and famous civil rights activists, while economically disadvantaged students came from low income housing. Students from the similar class backgrounds would socialize together and were also enrolled in academic courses together. Brooks felt there was an issue with the placement of only middle class students into AP classes and the math/science academy. Students who came from lower income backgrounds were placed in remedial courses. The only times during the day when students would interact together would be in classes such as PE, art, music, or shop classes.

Brooks came from a background of privilege. Her father worked at General Motors which was considered a good job for black people in the 1970's. Her father came from an affluent family where his mother was a nurse and his father was a teacher. Brooks' mother was a teacher, who came from a very poor family and attended college on an academic scholarship. In the early 1970's her family moved into a four bedroom house with a basement and was the first black family to move on the street. Her father told her a story of going outside to wash the car and the white neighbors would go inside. Eventually all of the white people moved out of the neighborhood and more affluent black people moved into the neighborhood. Her middle class lifestyle afforded her family dinners at Red Lobster twice a month, visits to the puppetry art shows, theater productions, road trips to the beach, trips to Disney World, and travel to the country of Panama. Although Brooks' lifestyle provided her with many opportunities she said her mother made it a point to show her how giving back to the community was important in life.

Her mother helped those who were less fortunate than others, and because she saw her mother giving back to the community it affected her attitude towards economically

disadvantaged people. Because her mother came from a poor background and knew what it was like to struggle, Brooks was instilled with good values of not picking on people or not putting people down. Brooks explains she didn't grow up being snooty with the mentality "oh I have more than you" in fact she says her mother taught her how to bargain shop. Her mother's practical nature gave her an opportunity to learn the value of the dollar.

Initially Brooks did not want to be a teacher although her mother was one. She attended college with the hopes of becoming a fashion merchandiser. Unfortunately she recalls she did not have the courage to take the required accounting classes that many of her friends were failing. Hence, she changed her major to education with an emphasis in educational psychology still with an imprint in her mind of not teaching. After graduation she became employed with a major airline and figured out that the lifestyle of a flight attendant was not for her. Eventually she returned to school and became certified to teach elementary school students.

According to Brooks, teachers at her school discuss social class regarding students, but indirectly. For instance Brooks explains that she had a student who fell asleep in the class and was constantly sleepy. Upon further investigation, the parent of the child had been taking him to work with her because she could not find a babysitter. The student sat in the parent's work booth and was awake past 11 o'clock on school nights. The topics of lack of attention span, consistent tardiness, and lack of breakfast are also discussed among her and her fellow faculty members. She also mentions that students who were placed in the "best" teachers' classes tended to have upper middle class parents who were very involved in the school's PTA, and everyday activities. These parents put in many volunteer hours and could readily choose the best classes to place

their child in. Parents who did not agree with the punishment of their child or who felt their child was being picked on by teachers were parents in the school who rarely made visits.

Brooks has taught in a total of three schools in her 13 years of teaching. Her second school which was 100 percent African American was a Title One school with a 100 percent African American staff. Brooks explains that although teachers were middle class and students came from disadvantaged environments positive relationships were formed between students and teachers. She felt black people and white people treat classroom management very differently. She said as a black teacher they had to raise their voices to receive a response from the students versus a white teacher who would not have raised a voice and yet would receive little response from black students.

Describing her role as a teacher in the classroom as the children's second parent, Brooks believes it is her job to educate her students, and make sure that they learn all that they need to learn. She says the very first thing she does is find out who didn't eat breakfast and if they had not eaten then she makes them go to the cafeteria to pick up something. Her thoughts are "you are not going to sit up in my class hungry and not paying attention". If students come in looking dirty she will make them go and clean up. She says that she will do many of things parents may not have caught before the child leaves the house.

Lisa Taylor

Demographic Profile

Lisa is a forty-one year old whose entrance into a room is quite noticeable especially because she is 6 feet 4 inches. The first thing that comes to mind is a WNBA player with style. Lisa is well dressed with an athletic build, and carries herself elegantly. She arrived twenty minutes late

after coming from a hair appointment, but calmly entered the restaurant with a short stylish hairdo. We met at a local restaurant and decided to make the interview a working lunch. Lisa was referred to me as a possible participant by our mutual friend who happened to be Lisa's jogging partner. Our friend thought that Lisa would be a perfect interview candidate based upon her class background and teaching career. I contacted Lisa and chatted with her regarding my study and she agreed to meet with me that week to interview.

Lisa had been married for about ten years to her husband, and they have a seven year old son who is in the second grade. Lisa's life is quite active especially in regards to her son whom is enrolled a number of activities. Lisa spends quite a bit of her time driving back and forth from one activity to the other and relishes any amount of quiet time that she can get. As we discussed where to meet to conduct the interview I offered to drive to her home forty minutes outside of a large southern metropolitan city, however she would not hear of me driving such a long distance. We both agreed to meet halfway between her suburban home and the city. Before Lisa arrived I waited for her in the front of the restaurant, once she entered we chose a booth over in the corner of the restaurant where there was less foot traffic and noise. Lisa appeared to be confident, articulate, and straightforward as she talked about her summer vacation. Her responses were reflective as she slightly paused before each response. Occasionally during the interview Lisa became distracted with the surroundings of the restaurant and it became difficult for her to remember questions and responses. The interview lasted about one hour and forty minutes.

Summary Narrative

Lisa grew up in an extended family, with a grandmother, a mother, cousins, and aunts, but no father in the home. Her mother worked and made sure that she and her brother were

exposed many to activities such as recreation-roller skating, swimming, and events going on at church. Lisa believes the amount of exposure she experienced as a child resulted from a lack of both parents being involved. Lisa recalls going out of town a lot and participating in all kinds of sports and dance activities. As a child she knew that education was important because she figured her family always had what they needed but not necessarily what they wanted. In order to get those things that she wanted she had to work hard in school because her mother couldn't afford to pay for her to attend college. Luckily, she said that she was blessed to be surrounded by mostly African American teachers who were successful and attended college. Her memories of her teachers included taking her under their wings and exposing her to sports at the school and in the community. Her PE teacher took her to basketball games and exposed her to volleyball games which inspired Lisa's interest in both sports. All of the exposure Lisa experienced allowed her to have a great understanding of the kinds of things she wanted to do once she got older. Her family environment was "safe, and free from domestic issues". She stated that "her family didn't realize they were poor because everything they needed was provided and everyone was well taken care of". According to Lisa they were never without lights, water, and the food they ate consisted of beans, cornbread, and rice. Overall Lisa felt she had a pretty good childhood.

In addition to being exposed to different life experiences by teachers, Lisa also had a best friend from an upper middle class background with whom she became very close. She remembers one time her friend's sister took the both of them trick or treating and she received a toothbrush and other neat stuff and this experience made her become aware of how upper middle class people lived. Although she spent time with her friend she constantly made comparisons

between her friend's life and her own life. Lisa's mother didn't attend college, worked as a blue collar worker in a factory, but always stressed education. Her friend's mother attended college and worked at AT &T as a computer analyst sometimes working at home. Her friend was a debutante and took Lisa to her first college party. Lisa recalls that experience convinced her that college was the route that she would take. In addition, the friend's mother would take them to fine restaurants and teach them how to act and what to do when they went to these types of places.

Lisa has been a teacher for 14 years and primarily taught Reading and Language Arts to students who had difficulty in passing the CRCT. Lisa currently teaches at a school where demographically white students make up 55% and black students make up 45%. Lisa has been at the school for seven years and believes one of its major problems is teachers' unwillingness to change. Lisa explains that the teacher turnover rate is very low and teachers tend to stay the duration of their career. However, the school received large populations of students who come from other schools that have been placed on the "fail" list. Many of the teachers would make comments such as "oh we are getting those kids". Lisa recalls once telling another teacher "when they walk through the door they are our kids". The school is considered a Title One school and many of the disadvantaged students who come into the school are able to fit in and make it academically.

Previously Lisa taught at a middle school twenty minutes away with a 95% black faculty, and a student population that was 100% black and who came from very low socioeconomic backgrounds. At this particular school discipline was the biggest challenge and teachers were always prepared to battle in order to teach. Lisa insists that it was very difficult to

teach because of student misbehavior, only compounded by administration's lack of structure. Lisa taught at this school for six years mainly because at the time she felt that she was comfortable in that type of environment. She felt as if she could fix all of the problems and do different things the next year. Furthermore, Lisa was close with the faculty because she felt comfortable with them and she also felt that she was in an environment that represented family and cohesiveness. She quietly explains that her work environment reminded her of the childhood that she experienced growing up around mostly black people. She and other teachers would discuss how they could help fix the children because they knew the students' struggles. Eventually they were able to fix and save some situations.

According to Lisa her teacher preparation program did not prepare her for teaching students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Her experience was a struggle because she was coming into another teacher's territory and did not know the students. Her authority was limited and the length of her field experience was also limited. She said that the students only saw her as a lady who was coming into the classroom to teach language arts, so that was a struggle. The program prepared her for teaching content but when she walked into the classroom she was on her own. In her opinion nothing prepared her for student teaching only the experience of going through it and learning how to deal with different situations. Lisa added that the Harry Wong book was helpful in using different strategies.

Tracy

Demographic Profile

I worked with Tracy at my former middle school and was always impressed by her teaching practices. When I thought of the many teachers who inspired my dissertation topic she

was among the group. Tracy lives thirty minutes west outside of a large southern metropolitan city. I suggested that we meet at a restaurant in close proximity to her home. Tracy was very insistent that it was not necessary to drive to the suburbs because she needed a change in scenery. Eventually we agreed to meet halfway between her residence and the city. We agreed that I would text her the day before to confirm our meeting time. As agreed, I texted the time and restaurant where the interview would be conducted. The day of the interview I discovered a scheduling conflict so I texted Tracy to inquire if we could change our meeting time which originally was 3:00 P.M. Tracy graciously agreed to a time change of 5:00 PM.

Tracy was already sitting at a table when I arrived ten minutes late. She was on the phone chatting with a former student about an upcoming debate team meeting that she was going to attend. Tracy could easily be mistaken for a catalog model. Her stature is very athletic yet her facial features are unique and exotic. Tracy's hair is cut into a short hairstyle and very curly. She informed me as I rushed in that she had all the time in the world because her husband was home with the children. Tracy is 5' 11 and outspoken. Tracy has never been one not voice her opinions about various issues and concerns. Her responses were to the point and she stood firm on all of her responses and beliefs. After ordering our food Tracy and I found a comfortable booth overlooking a street of passing cars and pedestrians. Before we began our interview, Tracy briefly explained to me why she decided not to pursue her doctorate and her future career path in education. I listened intently to her logic and reasoning as she attempted to make sense of why "dummies" were placed in leadership positions throughout the school system. Our interview lasted about one hour and forty minutes.

Summary Narrative

Tracy grew up very poor and was raised by her grandmother. Her mother had her at the age of 18 and grandmother took custody of her as a newborn. In addition to collecting a disability check her grandmother cleaned houses and ironed clothes for a living. Tracy recounted her grandmother was unable to collect welfare for Tracy because her biological mother didn't grant her grandmother official custody. She described her grandmother's home as an old wooden house with indoor plumbing, but no hot water. Although Tracy considered herself poor as a child she said her grandmother purposely exposed her to different things. For example Tracy explained if her friends had fifteen outfits to wear then she would have five, but never went without the things she needed. Because she wanted to buy more things at the age of 15 she received permission to work. She adds that her grandmother also made sure that her aunt was a real influence in her life because she had attended college and was a refined young lady. Tracy explained "Grandmother encouraged the relationship between the two of us so that I would bond with a woman who she wanted me to be like".

Tracy described her school experiences as always one of three African American students in her classes throughout her educational career. She was placed in gifted classes and received the type of exposure that she wasn't normally given at home such as; taking field trips to various parts of the state, attending cultural arts events, and participating in organizations- Girl Scouts, and FBLA. This exposure gave Tracy drive and perseverance to succeed and have a better life. She didn't have many material things which gave her the drive to want more and to do more than peers who were materially better off than she was.

Tracy has been teaching Language Arts and Social Studies for nine years. Tracy chose another major in college because she did not want to become a teacher like her aunt and uncle. It was not until she started a family and began to question what was going on in her kids' classrooms that she decided to change her career. Because of her post college career change, Tracy did not go through a traditional education program. However she completed a teacher preparation program through a Florida school system.

Tracy currently works at a neighborhood elementary school that has a predominately black student population. The faculty is also African American with the exception of two Caucasian Teachers with Teach for America. Tracy has only been at the school for eight months and previously taught at a middle school for five years. Tracy explained the neighborhood middle school was predominately black and 99% of the students were on free or reduced lunch. In the 70's and early 80's the middle school's neighborhood consisted of influential African Americans, and began to decline when housing projects and low income homes were built. Tracy often experienced burnout and stress as a result of a lack of administrative, parental, and district support. Tracy believed the school was deemed to be the worst school in the district because the district failed to support the principals or teachers who worked there. Tracy also felt the school did not open up its doors and welcome parents in an effort to provide support and assistance with their children. Differences were not accepted in the school and parents may not have felt welcomed. Tracy accepts responsibility for occasionally using judgment against the parents. She recalls a time when she was in a conference with a parent who had on pajamas and hair rollers, Tracy admits that she would sit and think "okay well she must not really be serious about what is

going on, instead of thinking, it doesn't matter what she has on, and she's here to talk about her child".

Tracy states that her lesson plans attempt to expose her gifted children to real life situations. One of her parents told her about how a parent volunteer at her son's school located in an upper middle class neighborhood came in to teach the students math using origami. The parent was an engineer who taught the children origami which developed in to a discussion about designing airplanes, angles, and coordinates. For Tracy hearing about such an occurrence deeply troubled her because integrating mathematics with real life situations was a process that Tracy often struggled with while planning her lessons. While in a meeting with her principal Tracy said to him "how am I supposed to give my children that type of exposure when I don't know anyone is an engineer that will volunteer their time to come into the school?" Tracy felt "it was not fair for her kids not to have the same opportunity because their parents don't have XYZ".

Although Tracy considers herself lower middle class she believes that poverty is a mindset rather than an actual substance thing that you can measure. Tracy explained that a person could make six figures and live paycheck to paycheck which she considers poverty. On the other hand she believes a person can make as little as 15, 000 a year without debt and have the ability to take care of their children without any financial difficulties.

Tracy measures her success as a teacher by how many of her children feel successful and how many children feel confident in going to the next grade. Tracy insists that she doesn't trust the state and the systems way of measuring success based upon CRCT data. However, it was only after she began to develop personal relationships with her students that she began to look past test scores. Tracy is still in contact with most of her former students and keeps up with their

progress and grades. Her relationships with former students let her know that she had been effective as a teacher and mentor. Many of her students have gotten things from her that they weren't aware of. For instance when Tracy browses the pages of students' Facebook pages she may see a student quote a statement that she would say all the time in class. Witnessing her influence on former students confirms Tracy's philosophy that teaching is a process that never stops and it is also an ongoing process.

Toya

Demographic Profile

Toya and I had to meet twice because of a tape malfunction during the first interview session. Toya has a petite frame with an athletic build. Toya is the youngest teacher participant and has a bubbly personality. At first glance one could easily mistake Toya for a high school student. Because of her busy afterschool schedule we had to quickly squeeze in both interview sessions between cheerleading practice and volleyball practice. I found Toya especially interesting throughout the interview because as I asked her difficult questions regarding her life as a teacher she would immediately respond with a smile or a giggle and rarely did she stop to think about a response to a question. Toya was easy to interview and talk to and remained positive throughout our time together even in the midst of the tape malfunction.

Summary Narrative

Toya came from a middle class family where both of her parents had great jobs but never finished college. Because of their limited educational backgrounds Toya recalls how her parents always stressed the importance of education to their three children. Toya is the youngest child and readily admit that she was very spoiled. Her older sister and brother would help her with

homework while she attended school. Toya grew up in a small town in Mississippi where there was a strong sense of community. An example of this strong sense of community was that she and other students were disciplined by the teachers at school because they were viewed as second parents. Most of her teachers were from her hometown and the idea was to give back and not look down on students who came from poor backgrounds. The teachers were very familiar with the areas from which students came and tended to be very supportive academically and socially. Toya says she and her siblings' experiences were linked to her aunts and uncles because both her parents worked a great deal. In fact her mother's humble background with a family of 15 children always made Toya and her siblings grateful for the lifestyle available to them. Toya appreciates the stories her mother told her about being poor because they made her very humble and helpful towards other student's in need.

Toya began college as a nursing major but then changed her mind after an older cousin discouraged her with comments about the coursework and academic difficulty associated with the major. Afterwards she made a decision that she could still give back to the community but through teaching. Toya has taught reading and language arts for six years. Currently she teaches in a Title One school where the racial makeup is 5% Hispanic, 1% Caucasian and 94% African American. Many of the students come from housing projects or areas considered "bad". According to Toya the school is a nice newly built building, and is kept "super clean" by the janitor. The school has a large makeup of students who are economically disadvantaged but has a reputation for high test scores. Many parents from other zones within the district compete in lotteries to send their children to this school. Toya speaks fondly of the school environment, the exceptional communication between the principals and parents, and the caring relationships

between teachers and students. In the three years that Toya has worked at the school she has not seen the school or staff face any major problems.

When discussing the various dynamics that may occur between teachers and students, Toya reflects on a personal relationship she had with a female student. The young lady reminded Toya of someone she went to school with. The student was a fourth or fifth child with older brothers so many times she put on a tough, hard persona but Toya felt deep down inside she wanted to act like a young lady. The student had no one to teach her how to act like a young lady or teach her what to do. Toya bought her some clothes and helped her to get a hairstyle. The student was very appreciative and her mom was happy and appreciative towards Toya. As a result of Toya investing time and care into the student her behavior problems began to decrease. Up until then Toya believes that no other teacher had reached out to the student before partially because of the mother's intimidating presence.

In Toya's opinion popular teachers at her school are the ones who actually take out time with the students during class or during transition between classes. They ask students "how are you doing, how was your day?" Teachers who also participate with afterschool activities such as school dances and participate in dancing or joking with students were viewed as popular among the students. Toya says it is very difficult to attend to the needs of students who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. She contends that teachers are often bombarded with "stuff" from the administrators where they want this done and that done and there is only so much time in a day to actually help students. In her years of teaching Toya observes that students who are high achievers have academic motivation that starts from home and those who don't have home support want to get out and not repeat the cycles of their parents. Personally, Toya

measures her success as a teacher through the capabilities of her students. She will ask the questions: “Can you do this, and are you capable if you go out somewhere to complete a task by yourself? Can you move on to the next grade and be successful?”

This school year has proven very challenging for Toya and her colleagues, due to low morale. Although the school has made AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) for seven years the principal has continued to set high expectations for the school to gain goals of being in the 99% of students to pass in a particular content area. In fact the school failed to meet being in the 99% percent as a result of low scores in a particular subject area. Toya feels as if the principal should give more praise to teachers, and less bashing and lecturing based upon failure to meet a certain goal. Before Toya relocated to a large southern metropolitan city she was a teacher in one of the poorest counties in Mississippi. Toya found it hard to teach in this school because of the mindset of the parents and students in the community. The parents did not like talking to teachers because they felt teachers were more educated and knew more than them. The only parents who may have been cooperative were the working class ones who were involved in their children’s’ education.

Toya believes the biggest challenge facing African Americans today would be parental involvement. Most of her students come from single parent homes and she feels that many don’t value education because it’s about quick money or fast money for them. She says it seems as if the students think “my mom is the only one who is raising me and she is working I do what I want to do when I am home- I don’t care about school work”. Toya feels a solution to a lack of parental involvement would be to have parent classes to assist them with job searches, life

improvement, and relationship building with their children. Toya also believes that family nights where the child and parent can interact together would be beneficial.

The women in the study were eager to participate and conveyed their responses in a thoughtful and reflective manner. As many of the stories were told some women were honest in giving specific details and others told stories with witty undertones. Although the discussions did occur in the traditional interview style, the dialogues were so relaxed and included many smooth transitions. As I continued to reread individual interviews they allowed me to see similarities and differences in social class backgrounds among the participants and to see how their own experiences influenced student/teacher interactions, discourse, and perceptions. However, the method of inductive coding allowed me to look at common themes that I saw across all of my participants. For example, when analyzing Sasha's data I never realized that she never talked in depth about any childhood experiences that may have inform her classroom practices or relationships. I did understand that she came from a middle class family raised by her mother and father but the silencing of her childhood influences was not highlighted until I realized how much Brooks, Lisa Taylor, Master Teacher, Tracy, and Toya would talk about their family backgrounds and childhood experiences.

Furthermore, though Sasha did not talk in-depth about her childhood experiences, she used several examples of her daughter's educational experiences to confirm her feelings her perceptions of students who come from poor working class backgrounds. I noticed all but one of the teachers discussed in detail the importance of getting to know the students and forming relationships and a majority of the teachers measured personal successes as an educator beyond the CRCT. Many participants also believed that staff development was needed in educating

teachers in forming relationships of class solidarity I also noticed the topic of parental involvement and participation surfaced in the responses to many questions. Although I had not included the topic of parental involvement in my initial research questions the consistent references towards parental involvement were enough to think about how the topic could be included in the research topic for future discussion.

In Chapter Four I gave the reader quick snapshots into the lives of the participants, however in Chapter Five I will take more of an in depth look at some of the themes that surfaced during the collection of data. The analysis will include extended texts extracted from transcriptions and the participants' narrative texts will be employed to support the various findings of this study. The summarized narratives give the reader a preview of how participants' family histories shape the complex discourses that have influenced the ways these women perceive themselves, their work as teachers, and their students. For example, most of the women shared some of the same discourses

CHAPTER FIVE

TEACHERS STORIES-TALES FROM THE CLASSROOM

Tracy: As a middle class citizen, I have to ask myself, is that my values I am placing on someone else, or am I not seeing that they're fine the way they are and I am placing too much value on material things.

In chapter four, I introduced each participant and told a brief story about family backgrounds, physical and personality characteristics, and stories regarding personal relationships with students. The narratives of the participants help me as a researcher to reflect on the importance of permitting teachers to openly share their backgrounds, beliefs, stories, and experiences, and to have an opportunity to discuss issues around social class as it pertains to their students, community, and profession. These stories, evidence that teachers regardless of complex professions, are having discussions regarding class and through this process are helping to provide missing pieces to a larger puzzle of who they are as educators and as citizens of the world. In this chapter, I closely examine the narratives of teacher participants as to discuss the various discourses that inform the narratives. My hope is to understand through these narratives how social class backgrounds of participants impact their relationships with students, and to offer an account of how discourses acquired from family backgrounds influence discussions involving disadvantaged students.

The particular themes that I will discuss, to highlight the complexities of relationships between middle class African American teachers and economically disadvantaged students include:

- 1) Forming relationships with students is a major focus of teachers' practice.
- 2) Stereotypes and assumptions regarding academic ability and behavior were influenced by the awareness of social class (cultural, social, and economic capital).
- 3) Glimpses of childhood helped to make meaning of teacher discourse regarding philosophy, duties as a teacher, and measure of success.
- 4) African American middle class teachers discuss and contextualize social class in varied contexts especially regarding the African American community.

Within my discussion of each theme, I point to various discourses that were operating in the teachers' narratives. After repeated readings of the narratives, comparing the narratives and themes to theory and research reviewed earlier in this dissertation, and interpreting the links between words, phrases, and effects of teachers, I constructed names for discourses circulating in their stories:

Before the discussion of themes and discourses, it is important to assert that middle class African American teachers are conceptualizing issues of social class. In other words, middle class African American teachers are aware of social class differences, having significant conversations of social class, and transferring meaning along class lines. These realizations of assigning meaning along social class lines is sometimes articulated by participants as we dialogue about our positions within the African American community. Chapter five began with a memorable quote from participant Tracy questioning her criticism of students who seemingly lacked desire to gain better material lives she expresses, "as a middle class citizen, I have to ask myself, is that my values I'm placing on someone else, or am I not seeing that they're fine the way they are and I'm placing too much value on material things". Tracy's realization that she might not be "right" to place her values on someone else points to the ways in which teachers, regardless of color or gender, often fail to recognize how their daily thoughts and actions affect

students who come from poverty and are influenced by their own personal values.

Forming relationships and caring about students is a major focus of the participants' teaching practice

Forming relationships with students was a common thread woven through every teacher's narrative. The women in the study are determined to understand and form good relationships with students despite class differences. Two major influences that shaped why they felt the importance of forming relationships with students were *key persons from school experiences and family background*. Every teacher that interviewed shared personal stories with me that they felt were significant in shaping relationships with students. *Key persons from school experiences* involved influential persons such as coaches, teachers, mentors who exposed participants to various life situations and helped shaped them into the persons they have become. *Family background* involved the class position in which they were raised and how their parents/guardians were significant in framing how they looked at persons in other class positions. Furthermore although each participant came from different social class backgrounds, and were in various stages in their careers, the women shared similar stories and experiences.

KEY PERSONS FROM SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

I was interested in exploring the experiences or persons that encouraged teachers to form positive student-teacher relationships, but could also provide data that may possibly contribute to the larger base of research which examines relationships between African American teachers and African American students. An example of this is seen as Lisa Taylor explains that her middle school P.E. teacher, who also coached a high school volleyball team, would take her to games and allow Lisa to travel with the team around the country. This relationship was the beginning to

what Lisa describes as a growing interest and love of sports, exposure, and greater understanding of the kinds of things she wanted to do when she got older. In fact Lisa adamantly believes in teacher/student relationships, she says that “building relationships is the key to a successful classroom and school year you need to do first before you even think about delivering that content, because if you don't have a relationship with them, then it's just like them being around a stranger every single day, but once you build a relationship you get to know them, they get to know some things about you, then they're more apt to receive anything from you”. Lisa continues to express the similarities of forming relationships with students to dating someone:

“ If you look at it just like when you're dating someone, you want to know everything they did when they were little, how they were brought up or whatever, before you were going to have this relationship with them. You plan on seeing this person every day, being a part of their lives. It's the same as a school setting. You have these kids in your room, you're a part of their lives, you're going to see them every day and we want them to listen to you, interact and talk with you, but you don't want to know anything about them before that day. So how successful of a relationship do you think you guys are going to have? “

Another example of childhood influences affecting the current pedagogy of participants was Tracy's experience of attending Pre-k and her teacher who went to church with grandmother was aware of Tracy's living with an elderly grandmother in a dilapidated house with no hot water. However, Mrs. J noticed how bright Tracy was in school and would go over to the elementary building and obtain more challenging work for talkative Tracy. While thinking about

teachers who have had a positive impact on her life Tracy remembers another important teacher in her life:

And then when I entered high school, I think I had made up my mind that I liked the positive feedback from holding various positions in middle school and I wanted to be in the newspapers all the time, I made sure my grades came out on honor roll. I was president of this and I was a part of that. So I just made sure that I was always surrounded by positive people and I have to say that my basketball coach in high school -- I started playing basketball when in 7th grade. My 8th grade year, I played with the varsity at the high school and I played with the middle school. So once I finished with the middle school went over to varsity and played the rest of their season. My varsity coach was my rock. I mean, she was there when my mom wasn't there and she even surprised me -- her and her husband surprised me. Her husband was my 7th grade math teacher. They surprised me at my wedding when I got married. But she was my rock; she had a son my age. Her son was in my classes.

Lisa Taylor and Tracy's narratives reiterate the importance of teachers having pivotal relationships with their students and the narratives also revealed how they view themselves as teachers. Again both teachers share a discourse of solidarity/oneness as a foundation of their pedagogy, especially as their actions were influenced by their previous relationships with former teachers. In other words, the participants mentioned that childhood experiences of growing up in poverty and having teachers make efforts to form relationships with them during that time was integral in impacting how they viewed students who came from impoverished positions, and

more importantly motivated them to form relationships interwoven with pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact.

Lisa's telling of her volleyball coach providing exposure to her life by allowing her to travel with the team across the country or Tracy explaining the role her varsity basketball coach served as a surrogate mother provides a foundation for the practice of cultivating their own pedagogical tact (van Manen, 2002). Their experiences have been informed by a pathic/tact discourse where they sense that certain students need additional support beyond the classroom. For example, Tracy explains that although she is presently a teacher in an elementary school she attends most of her former students' extracurricular events around the city. In some cases she provides financial support towards the students for uniforms, travel expenses, or activity fees. On the other hand Lisa lends an ear and a shoulder to her students whom she observes are at their breaking points. Lisa has served as a mentor to many of her students who are ready to drop out of school or do not fit in because of their economic backgrounds. Van Manen explains that "thoughtfulness, tactfulness, is a peculiar quality that has as much to do with what we are as with what we do (p. 9). He believes that educators must do everything possible to understand and develop pathic knowledge to the situations of the children we are exposed to. These two women's narratives are informed by an inspiration discourse, where their beings were shaped by teachers who had the pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness to recognize their "uniqueness" as human beings and cultivate the special qualities within them consequently giving Tracy and Lisa the intuitiveness and thoughtfulness needed to pass on to their students.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Similarly as important as key persons in school who influenced how and why participants formed relationships with students was the influence of family background. While Lisa and Tracy found importance in telling stories of teachers who influenced their teaching pedagogy, Master Teacher and Toya specifically shared stories regarding family background as an important factor that influenced their teacher-student relationships. Master Teacher recounted that her childhood growing up in poverty influenced her practice of getting to know students. Master Teacher's first teaching experience was working with disadvantaged students in Florida, and when she worked there she realized that she could use her background to relate to the children, as a result forming relationships with them felt natural to her. In telling her story Master Teacher said:

What I know to be true you've got to get to the whole child. And that's what I try to do. You got to sit down and talk to them. They have a view. They have a story. They all have a story. Some of their stories might be might make your heart hurt a little bit with the story. And my job was to help that story become a better story. And so that's just the way I thought is like whatever and whoever would I don't care if it was the worst child in the school if they came to me I wanted to know their story. The only way you can really know what's going on with a kid coming from a background is just to know their story. Then even if it's a story that's like oh my God- as teachers we communicate with each other. Somebody knows how to help that story so I think that is my job as being a teacher in those areas has been just to get to know their story. And help them make a better story.

Although Toya came from a middle class family she felt the importance of mentioning that her mother's family consisted of 15 siblings. Her mother always made sure that her children knew of the hardships she experienced while growing up and to appreciate the life that God had given to them. Toya was told by her mother not to think that she was better than anyone else and to never boast about material possessions, which is informed by a discourse of solidarity/oneness. Toya's mother could have easily adopted a classist or blame discourse and taught these destructive discourses to Toya-fortunately this was not the situation. Rather Toya used her mother's childhood experiences and the discourses of oneness/solidarity used by her mother as a guide to be kind to disadvantaged classmates and to help them. This act of kindness led to Toya's ability to develop tact and recognize when students were in need of additional assistance.

I have a strong relationship with one of my female students. I think because she reminds me of someone I went to high school with. She's a fourth or fifth child, older brothers, so she puts on this little hard, rough, tough persona but I think deep down she wants to be a young lady. But she has no one to teach her how or what to do. So I did buy her some clothes, I helped her with her hair. She's very appreciative, she's very appreciative. And her mom spoke to me they're appreciative of it, and like I said, she wants to be a good child. She also has behavior problems but when I started helping her, she started coming down, I want to do this, and I want to do that. So she just needed some guidance.

The practice of helping students or developing relationships was evident in Toya's stories regarding teaching practices. She related that her mother on several occasions helped to buy clothes and lend a helping hand to a childhood friend Erica. According to her mother, helping

Erica was not a big deal because Erica and Toya were genuine friends and she was considered a family member; if Toya needed a new shirt to for a night of skating then her mom would buy a new shirt for both Toya and Erica because she was Toya's friend.

Borrowing from bell hooks' (2000) notion of implementing *love* into the classroom which includes a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust all were used by the participants in their relations with students because the components were interwoven in the daily teaching practices and experiences. While listening to the narratives of teachers *care*, and *commitment* were key components that particularly surfaced while discussing relationships with students. Caring was demonstrated in Toya's creating close relations with the student she took under her mentorship. Toya's selfless act of looking beyond the tough exterior of the student and providing her with mentoring which demonstrated to the student an example of how to put love into teacher/student relationships (hooks, 2000). Toya practices discourses of oneness/solidarity, pathic, glorious transformation. Toya recognizes the importance of forming a relationship of solidarity with her students and convincing her students to buy into the notion of oneness. Pathic/Tact discourse informs Toya to look beyond misbehaviors of students and to delve deeper into the feelings and emotions of the inner child. Toya constantly strives to serve as a mentor and as a light to students who come across their paths regardless of social class division she is a primary example of principal Dillard's discourse regarding the glorious transformations that teachers must endure.

Master Teacher told of an experience where teachers would come to her and ask why the same child that would walk in a line for her would not come to their class. She stated that she felt students desired to come into her classroom because she made an effort to learn about them, and

the classroom management style used was firm but fair allowing students to feel secure. Master Teacher attracted students to her classroom, because she confirmed their importance and encouraged shared knowledge of the world (hooks, 2000). Reiterating the act of commitment, Lisa Taylor explains that she made sure the first thing in the school year she did was to know a little about them (students). She explained that she would ask about their involvement with weekend activities. Lisa believed that students needed to know somebody cared about them outside of the classroom and her commitment to make connections with her students. The theme of forming relationships and caring about students as a major focus of the participants' teaching practice supports hook's (2000) argument that Americans need to possess more class sensitivity.

As McLaren (2009) reminds us, critical pedagogy seeks to understand the connection between power and knowledge where dominant curriculum uses knowledge to maintain social relations and class interests. The narratives of the teachers align with this tenet of understanding relationships between power and knowledge. Teachers have the power to determine how they will affect the lives of their students, but more importantly teachers can also use the knowledge given to them through forming relationships with students, and helping to empower their lives. Participants in this study all came from backgrounds that provided foundations for understanding their students' situations, and being sensitive to their needs. The teachers' use of discourses such as glorious transformation, pathic/tact, or inspiration potentially provide what McLaren calls *social transformation* where the worlds of students/teachers change for the better through the pedagogical actions of teachers.

**Stereotypes and assumptions regarding academic ability and behavior
were influenced by the awareness of social (economic capital, cultural
capital, social capital)**

Bourdieu (1977) states that “the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produces habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.....” (p.72). Bourdieu’s statement reflects the significance of institutions such as schools, homes, churches, and other environments that shape social class values, meanings, practices, and social constructions. Participants came from different social class backgrounds and inherited dispositions that were associated with their particular class background and the discourses valued by adults in their childhood lives. The inheritance of class dispositions thus becomes the guide in which teachers form stereotypes and assumptions concerning student academic ability and behavior. Throughout many of the narratives, meanings that participants attached to poverty most often included negative qualities. That is not to say that everything that they heard and stated about the poor working class was negative, and everything they heard and stated about the middle class was positive. There were moments which the women discussed how middle class people should be more accountable for their behavior and actions towards the poor working class. They also discussed how to be Black with division based upon colorism and social class was unique because of Black people’s history (Frazier, 1962; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). However, the meanings that the women collectively placed on social class generally reflected ideas of that social class positions were cyclical in nature and occurred from generation to generation.

All of the women in the study felt that students who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were capable of learning however most firmly agreed that many

students lacked intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn while in school. While discussing student behavior and academic ability most of the women expressed frustration and compassion as they shared stories. All except one of the participants, Brooks, found themselves particularly challenged in facing their attempts to look beyond the influence of parental involvement (or perceived lack of) on academic abilities and behavior in schools. Although Brooks briefly mentioned parental involvement she felt students' academic abilities were more affected by school reform models or ineffective instruction. Brooks felt her students' academic abilities were not necessarily influenced by parental environment but more so by inadequate programs provided by the school. Brooks explains how the reading program at her school is ineffective,

Reading recovery is only for kindergarten first grade. After you finish first grade, that's it with reading and recovery. And I think it needs to extend on to 5th graders because we have a lot of 5th graders that are reading on a 2nd and 3rd grade level.

Brooks furthered explained that many times she and coworkers would prejudge students who had previously attended several schools before coming to her school. Faculty and staff are informed by a social class discourse because they recognize that students who have frequently moved are assumed to come from disadvantaged families. When I asked Brooks whether or not she and coworkers felt students were capable of academic achievement despite transient movement she responded

We did. We did have the attitude that you know you are coming from a poor background, and having a poor background doesn't have anything to do with what you can do in my classroom. And that you are going to perform to your best in our classroom.

After years of teaching Lisa came to an understanding that students should not be penalized for the lack of academic ability that they bring into the classroom. Lisa Taylor talked about coworkers stereotyping students' academic abilities:

Everybody really related it (poor performance) to being economically disadvantaged.

But I can't really think of why they say their performance was low other than the parents are not involved and typically they're not doing good in the classroom, don't do well on standardized tests, and in my environment our African-American males, but we're not doing anything.

I find it interesting that Lisa Taylor was the only participant that mentioned African American males in her narrative. Although we never went into an in-depth discussion concerning disparities regarding African American males, I can only make an assumption that this topic deeply troubles her. Despite her concerns, in Lisa Taylor's classroom although her students came from different socioeconomic backgrounds she began to realize that class background did not always determine the ability of a student. In her teaching practice, Lisa accepted the deficiencies of students and used them to achieve success:

Because of what their parents do, having the mixture of kids in your class like that, I had to understand, you know what, she just doesn't have it. She might be not a good reader. I mean she's struggling in these areas, no matter if mom is helping her, but little Billy is raising his brothers and sisters and he scored a 900. You know what I'm saying? So you're going to have those mixtures and once you recognize that- I think the class will be much better because you didn't use those kids that are smart to help the ones that are struggling.

Within this narrative it is incredible that Lisa recognizes that despite the socioeconomic backgrounds of students or the presence of parental support (or perceived lack of), she sees the academic abilities of her students as independent of both factors. In her own words, Lisa recognizes that in her classroom are mixtures of academic abilities that are impervious to the class background of her students. She is informed by a social class discourse where she is cognizant that all students in her classroom are not equal. Again, Lisa uses pathic pedagogy which is informed by a pathic/tact discourse, where her teaching practices are reliant upon her relational perceptiveness and tact for knowing what to do in certain situations (van Manen, 2006). As Vagle (2009) notes, pathic pedagogy should be a recurrent practice in the lives of teachers specifically during the process of wondering about and pursuing their students' understanding.

Participants attributed lack of parental involvement in their students' lives primarily to working multiple hours, or jobs in order to survive. Their communication of emotions reminded me of my own personal struggles to repeatedly attempt to understand how I could provide adequate support such as mentoring and strategies that would promote academic success. My attempts to understand were guided by a pathic/tact discourse in seeking to understand how to make the lives of my students better in some way. Conversely participants who experienced working with students from middle class backgrounds attributed lack of motivation to an absence of parental involvement, primarily failure to require students to be accountable for school work or behavior. The faculty was informed by blame discourse and meritocratic discourse which points fingers to other sources as a contributing factor for the difficulties occurring in class, and holds all students to the same expectation level. Although I was informed by a pathic/tact

discourse and the faculty were informed by a blame and meritocratic discourse, we all could have embraced a glorious transformation discourse to help us change the lives of our students. Toya shared her experiences of what she and coworkers believed attributed to the success of high achievers and low achievers.

High achievers, we think is embedded in them from the start, at home, or the fact that they come from a not so good home and they want to get out, like get their way. And we see that a lot, like, okay, I don't want to work at such and such where my momma works because she's always at work so I'm going to do this and do my work and go to college. We do hear that a lot. I personally think prior knowledge and experience attributes to a lot, but as a teacher, you're supposed to, I think, build up to what they know. And if they only know so much, you build on that, but yeah.

In this narrative Toya believes that although students may come from a low socioeconomic background with little prior content knowledge they have the motivation to achieve academically because they do not want to repeat cycles of parents. Toya further explains that a small percentage of her students came from a middle class background. Most of her students' families received some form of government assistance such as housing vouchers, food stamps, health care, or free/reduced lunch. Toya had knowledge that some parents worked for minimum wage pay and sometimes took second jobs to make ends meet. She also explained how she spoke with a couple of parents who were unemployed as a result of the economy and could not find jobs. Her students were aware that getting an education and taking advantage of opportunities that came to them may possibly provide better material lives in the future. As I listened to this conversation several times through audio I realized that this situation of hearing students say they

would not like to repeat the cycles of their parents brings about complexity. First, as many scholars have suggested (e.g. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, hooks) that educators must be careful in facilitating these types of discussions as not to make students feel ashamed of the conditions from which they come. Second, providing solutions or even better having discussions that will allow students to look at the world through a critical lens, may result in a realization of the possible factors that have led to their parents' (un)employment and economic situations.

Beyond parental involvement there was also awareness with Tracy that she stereotyped students based upon Francis Galton's notion of nature versus nurture, Tracy talks about students who she believes in the nature versus nurture process

Tracy: I think they just were naturally smart, naturally gifted. I do believe in nature versus nurture but I do believe some of it is exposure. A lot of my gifted kids -- let me back up. The gifted children that I've had for the most part always had parental support. I've had very few gifted children who were just smart and their parents didn't come to anything, wasn't involved in anything, and didn't care. They were just smart and they did it on their own. I had very few children like that. However, I know that those particular children exist, but I don't know that it isn't something that was maybe put in them before they got to that point. Like with me, my grandmother raised me to a certain point where I felt like I had to achieve and I had to persevere because that was the expectation. When she died, it was up to me to decide, okay, am I going to keep down this line or am I going to stray? And I think that that may have been the same situation for some of the students that I've come in contact with who've been very, very smart but who haven't really had that parental support. Because I think in that

neighborhood, when you have a smart child, it's almost like it brings you up a notch.

Here, Tracy's notion of nature versus nurture aligns with several discourses such as: social class, blame discourse, deficit discourse, and individualism. If Tracy truly believes in the nature versus nurture model then she can easily be informed by a social class, and deficit discourse to explain why a child may or may not succeed in school as a result of their class position. Tracy could also be informed by a blame discourse which in her narrative she does describe children who are naturally smart but sometimes fail because of lack of nurturing by parents. The nature versus nurture notion further aligns with an individualism discourse because she only includes individual students such as her gifted students rather than looking at all children to assert whether her notion may be true.

Tracy recalls how her grandmother expressed academic expectations and values regarding education in her home environment and notice how Tracy makes assumptions that the students identified as "smart" did not have parental support at home to possess intrinsic motivation, although they never expressly stated their intentions to be successful and achieve. Tracy continues to talk about students who are not considered smart or academically successful. When asked if she felt children who were not considered smart or academically successful ignored she explains:

I don't think that they're ignored because for me, it's hard for me to decipher not as smart. Because I think when you're in that type of environment, everybody has their type intellect. I may not be book smart but I may be street smart. And I may not be street smart, book smart, but I might be street smart. It's something I think that they are blessed with that keeps them, or gives them a place. It's almost like that there's a whole other

class system within their own system. You know what I mean?

Here Tracy speaks of students bringing individual cultural and social capital into the classroom that transcends beyond what is seen as the normalized definition of academic ability. Bourdieu (1984) argues that people often acquire dispositions and use these dispositions to judge the practices of others, he states “when the conditions of existence of which the members of a group are the product are very little differentiated, the dispositions which each of them exercises in his practice are confirmed and hence reinforced both by the practice of the other members of the group and also by institutions which constitute collective thought as much as they express it by language, myth, and art” (p.167). I assert that everyone, despite different cultural locations, is influenced and uses dispositions and dominant discourses to different degrees to make meaning of the world in which they live. As middle class citizens there are more opportunities for the attainment of social capital, and there is also an opportunity to create new dispositions and discourses may come from new experiences and the acquiring of new knowledge (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words middle class citizens are more exposed to different experiences and often acquire new ways of thinking, acting, speaking etc., in different contexts. Therefore, it stands to reason that a middle class teacher with access to knowledge and experiences can become informed by a discourse of glorious transformation and choose to leave space for interrogation and disruption of many middle class dispositions that have been acquired throughout life.

As Tracy previously questioned her actions and thoughts towards her students, it was a moment where as she reflected upon her experiences with students she realized that the expectations placed upon them came from her middle class mentality, and those expectations were not necessarily shared or desired by students. Furthermore, it becomes even more

important to examine the dominant discourse and dispositions that influence how middle class black teachers think about their students and the world around them.

The issue of whether schools provided adequate resources and learning environments for students who came from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds was prevalent in our conversations about student academic and abilities. All participants agreed that school systems were not providing adequate resources for students who were economically disadvantaged to succeed academically. Master Teacher directly addressed what she felt was her school's inability to provide, motivate and rewards towards students to achieve she explains,

From my observations I think that the people in the powers that be they are not rewarding them for their efforts. And I feel like to me that take a bit away from you because everybody wants to be rewarded. And I think these kids whether they might not know as much as the kids in the more affluent areas whether they might not read on the same level they try just as hard. And I think that there are not incentives for these kids to come to school every day. It is always do this, do that, you've got to make this you've got to have that. And that's it. And it's nothing saying I'm excited for you to do this because this is what a reward is. It's when you work hard you get a reward. A lot of the kids that are in these low socioeconomic schools are very bright. But they are like what's the point. I'm not getting rewarded for my efforts. I'm sitting in the same class with the same young man that is acting up and my teacher is spending so much time on that until I just what's the point. And we lose a lot of them like that. And so I just don't think they are rewarded.

Master Teacher in accordance with other participants believes that parents have the power to motivate students, to receive motivation from the teachers, and accept help from the

teacher. In addition she also mentioned that peers are often factors for motivation and achievement within the culture of the school. As I listened to Master Teacher discuss her points about parental involvement and the effects of peers in the lives of middle school children a component of critical pedagogy, classroom community models, which has been practiced by Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) and aligns with a discourse of solidarity and oneness. The promotion of community is also imperative in the process of implementing critical pedagogy and creating holistic agency. Both researcher educators believed classroom community was important to establish a counter cultural community of practice among students and collective teamwork and learning was stressed. In addition, students were encouraged to involve parents/guardians and community members in the collective learning occurring in the classroom.

Sasha seemed to be the most adamant about students who were socially promoted to the next grade she felt students came to her who couldn't read or write and were socially promoted and passed throughout the years. Sasha has taught students from economically disadvantaged homes as well as students from middle and upper class homes. When asked to explain the differences she observed as a teacher who worked with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds she responded:

The differences that I saw was: in the middle class school that the parents were there behind them pushing them. And the parents stood behind me. And the students really wanted to learn. But when I started working at the other schools where the students were not as well off as the other students I didn't see that. I saw that students were made to come to school. They had to come to school they knew they had to come to school. But the focus was not on learning the focus

was on sometimes coming in there and being the clown and coming to eat basically and going home. Not to learn.

Sasha worked in an elementary school for twenty-two years before her school closed and she was transferred to a middle school. During her years of teaching she says that she has witnessed students who come into to schools not motivated. She says:

And I think it's from the fact that their parents are not educated and not pushing them to learn. They get a lot of free things and they think that everything for them is supposed to be free and given to them.

I sat intently listening to Sasha as she spoke about this topic. She was speaking with a great deal of frustration, and I felt that she wished that the perceived situation was different. The realization of concepts such as critical race theory and ideological state apparatuses both reoccur throughout my conversations with participants. Crenshaw (1995) argues that a consequence of racist ideology and hegemony was symbolic subordination. Symbolic subordination served as a reinforcement of race consciousness through such problematic actions as providing inferior facilities, limited job opportunities, lower pay, and hard work. Crenshaw describes white race conscious efforts that kept blacks from promotions, better and higher paying jobs, and characterization of blacks in negative ways-lazy, intelligent, ignorant, criminal, and shiftless. Subordination of blacks continued through ongoing beliefs, and stereotypes of blacks. Whites were associated with positive images and characteristics while blacks were viewed as lazy and criminal providing an excuse for whites to oppress and withhold opportunities for growth. As the civil rights movement came along visible symbolic subordination was removed (i.e.

black/white only signs) but racial consciousness still existed and continued throughout the country (Crenshaw, 1995).

As I analyze Sasha's two sentences, I try not to judge or point fingers because quite honestly - I remember how I once felt and thought. However I am aware that these stereotypes and ideologies have managed to permeate into the black community (Crenshaw, 1995) and Sasha was not the only teacher who used discourses of classism and the deficit model that perpetuate negative stereotypes that have been associated with African Americans living in poverty. I have observed racial inferiority's continued existence in classrooms and through teacher practice and discourse. The normal and dominant view of the oppressed group has always been reinforced through negative stereotypical images of blacks related to laziness, criminal and low intelligence (Crenshaw, 1995). While deconstructing various scholars (hooks, Bell, Crenshaw, Calmore) discourse around issues of racist ideology, racial subordination, and hegemony I have formed the contention that teachers as participants of dominant culture may embrace negative stereotypes as a part of personal educational beliefs.

Glimpses of childhood helped to make meaning of teacher discourse regarding teaching philosophy, duties as a teacher and measure of success.

The theme of childhood memories, and how these memories helped to make meaning of teaching philosophies, teaching duties, and indicators of success evolved as I read through the transcripts. Participants generated compelling stories concerning childhood that related directly to their personal teaching philosophies and duties as teachers. Also out of these conversations came how teachers measured their success as educators. I wrote about this data from these conversations in my reflection journal,

As I read through the stories of participants it seems very apparent that many of them have been duly influenced by upbringing and these particular values are fused into their duties and philosophies of how they should treat students and the tolerance level for children with different backgrounds is high.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Below I share a portion of the transcripts which demonstrate the teaching philosophy of participants. Brooks explains her philosophy,

That I know it's such a cliché but all kids that all kids can learn. And that education should be fun. It should be exciting. And I try to engage my students to figure it out themselves. I will not just give you the answer. I tell you how you can go about to get the answers and then you're going to have to figure it out. So that's kind of the way I teach. And now that technology has really gone in the classroom I use the internet a lot in teaching and I use a lot of internet games so that it's fun for kids learning but they don't realize it. They think they are playing a game but they are really learning. And I'm a visual teacher.

Brooks goes on to explain how she sees her role as a teacher of economically disadvantaged African American students:

I do a lot of teaching of black history so that these children will know what they have come from. And we do talk about if you don't pay attention in class (during instruction time) you know I ask them: So you want to be homeless on the street? Or you want to go to jail? You know I keep it real with them so that they will know there are consequences

to their bad choices. And it starts at second grade. Like for example second grade we go into counting money. And I'll say: So you want to get ripped off? You know, do you want somebody to come and steal your money because you don't want to sit up here and pay attention and learn how to count this money? So I try to put real world experiences into my classroom to help them understand how important education is.

In this narrative Brooks shares the importance of knowing how to count money with her students. In her narrative she explained earlier how her mother taught her the value of money and how to spend it wisely. I find it interesting that she is teaching those same life skills to her students. Brooks had shared that many of her childhood friends who came from disadvantaged families were placed into lower level classes and never received the skills needed to obtain jobs which paid decent wages. Brooks did not want what she perceived as a dismal future of unemployment, jobs with low wages, or financial hardships for her students. Brooks is informed by social class, hierarchy, and meritocratic discourses in this narrative. She has made a decision in her mind that living in poverty is not acceptable and that her students must pay attention and work hard to become successful. Brooks assumes that if her students do not pay attention in class then the consequences of their choices will result in a life full of economic and personal hardships. However scholars such as Apple, Althusser, Bowles & Gintis, and Anyon would argue that even if Brooks' students consistently paid attention, and made great academic strides in our public school systems their chances of successfully conquering the obstacles of classism, racism, and sexism are slim.

Master Teacher's teaching philosophy has more to do with being a family and nobody is above no one else. Here she talks about her learning environment.

Because in my class you are taught that everybody is on the same level. Like that is something that I impress upon my favorite words is you ain't better than nobody in here. So it's like unfortunately in other classes it might be different but in mine acceptance is the one thing that we discuss from day one. You know you are not allowed to talk about what somebody has and you are allowed to help them but you are not allowed to talk about them. You are a family. That means you go through any of my classes my theme of teaching my whole 17, 18 years but for one thing that she always says is we are a family. And you know you don't let anybody in your family do you wrong. So when they come to my room it's a whole different perspective.

Master teacher's discourse of solidarity/oneness guides her practice that all are accepted and no one is different. Master Teacher came from a single parent family background however she spent a lot of time living with her father's family as well. Her mother was working class and could not afford many of the luxuries Master Teacher desired and as a result, Master Teacher's experienced feelings of inadequacy while in school though she never mentioned being teased by other children. Her childhood experiences of poverty morphed into her mantra of "we are a family," so that her students would not have to go through the same feeling of inadequacy and could experience family unit at school

TEACHER DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As I spoke with participants about the duties and responsibilities of teachers, they gave variations of similar responses. Toya's response probably was the most memorable response that invoked Toya believes her duties as a teacher:

I think I have the responsibility of exposing the children, teaching them a life that's better. Showing them that no matter where you come from, you can be successful. Because I was not, I didn't come from a high class or a rich family but I'm able to succeed. Just exposure and showing them what they're capable of. Because everyone is always saying, let's help, let's change the world, let's do better but if nobody is changing it, then why you talking? I feel that we need to change it. This is our generation. These are our doctors and lawyers and nurses. But if this is the path they're heading on and nobody's helping them, then we're in trouble. So why not help them?

Because Toya's parents had busy work schedules, her aunts and uncles exposed the children in her immediate family to traveling and other activities. Similarly to her aunts and uncles assumed roles as second parents, Toya assumes the role of serving as a second parent/guardian to some of her students. During school and afterschool, she exposes her students to different outlooks of life, because she believes that experiences with her aunts and uncles gave her the inspiration to extend support towards her students; thus applying the concept of "it takes a village to raise a child", which aligns with a solidarity/oneness discourse.

MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS

An issue of concern amongst teachers was standardized test scores as a measurement of student and teacher success. The teaching careers of the most of the women were affected by student test scores. In the state of Georgia teachers are held accountable for student progress which is assessed through test scores and most of the participants feel that standardized tests are unfair for students as well as teachers. Master Teacher describes CRCT scores as a "bunch of bullshit" and that some of the teachers have been tricked that this one test is the "be all know all" to

measure how much learning has taken place in the school year. In most instances participants did not measure their success as a teacher based upon student test scores. She recalls taking norm based tests as a child so standardized testing is meaningless to her as a teacher. She explained further that once student's promotion depended upon test scores teachers then started teaching the tests and teachers took on a different perspective on teaching- increased administrative control over teaching. Brooks mentioned a similar frustration to administrative demands of teaching students contents of the CRCT test and not teaching life skills which she felt were important such as learning to tell time, properly heading and writing formal letters, and conversational skills. As she described her day to day skills, I observed her frustration with school policy in teaching curriculum; she explains "*it's not fun to teach any more. It's not a fun teaching environment any more. It's too much paperwork it's too much collecting data. It's like just trust me to do my job and I'm going to make sure that these kids learn their core lessons.*"

Sasha who has taught for twenty-five years did not seem to have a problem with teaching her students contents of the test. In fact Sasha measures her effectiveness as a teacher through the results of student test scores and uses a deficit discourse when discussing the lack of student motivation in regards to social studies content. Sasha teaches social studies and feels that students as well as administration place less importance on social studies and science content.

Because Sasha takes her content area seriously, she is offended and irritated regarding the perceived lack of seriousness for social studies. Periodically Sasha discusses her lack of motivation to teach students who are aware of the insignificance of the social studies test. Here she explains

I measure my success by the CRCT test. And last year my success rate was not good at all. Because the state doesn't take it seriously because it just got to be in the GPS last year when everything else was a GPS Georgia Performance Standard they already had those and social studies did not even have any performance standards until last year. We are not part of- social studies is not a part of AYP and the students don't think that they have to pass it.

Sasha does not measure individual grades and classwork as a reflection of her success as a teacher, however according to Sasha she believes the progress that she makes with students would be better judged through the results of standardized tests. Sasha did not voice any complaints against the administration of the CRCT and how it affects her instruction or student learning. Sasha is rather miffed that in her school district the content area in which she teaches, social studies is not taken seriously as other contents. Sasha also talks about the irresponsibility of social promotion. She uses a blame discourse as she further explains why her students are not taking the work seriously. She believes individual progress and teacher decision making is often hindered by social promotion. Sometimes she has been left frustrated and baffled because of administrative decisions regarding the promotion of students although they failed to meet academic requirements. She says,

I don't think that's right. That's social promotion and I thought that they had stopped social promotion. But they haven't. It's called something else. By the time that child gets in the 8th grade they will have failed and failed and failed you pass them on and on and on. They think when they get to the 8th grade and they have to take the CRCT test to get out of the 8th if they fail it doesn't matter because they just go to summer school and

they are just going to get pushed on. By the time they get to high school it doesn't happen that way. And then they end up being drop outs. The illiteracy rate in the system that I worked in is very high because of that.

According to Sasha she grew up in a middle class family where she was not familiar with those who lived in poverty, and her parents expected great academic performances in school and work hard for everything that she wanted. Sasha's use of a discourse of meritocracy – a discourse important to her family during her childhood - to explain her own success influences how she perceives her students. She feels that her students should work hard and desire a change from the current environment in which they live.

While Sasha was the only participant who measured her success through test score results other participants used other criteria of measurement to judge their success during the school year. Tracy's measurement of success is personal to her and she continuously expresses the importance of keeping in contact with former students. In fact three of her former students called during our interview. She said "they always want to know who I am with and what I am doing as if I must answer to them" as she giggles. Tracy is flattered and humbled that she has been able to maintain close and endearing relationships with many of her students. Since transferring to a school in another part of the city she has found it necessary keep in contact through social media as well as cell phone communication. Previously, her students were accustomed to stopping by to say hello, chat, or even get a hug. Tracy's narrative extends a discourse of solidarity and oneness where she views her students as a continuous part of her life. Tracy addresses how success is measured in her classroom,

Well, I measure my success by how many of my children were successful and feel confident about going to the next grade and what they did once they got there? I'm not really sure what other teachers do. I mean, the state and the system has ways to measure as far as the data is concerned, which I don't trust. So my whole measurement is personal. I'm still in contact with most of my students; I know how they're doing, where they are, how they're progressing. And to me, that lets me know if I've been effective and it lets me know that I've been effective as a teacher but also as a mentor because a lot of my students got a lot of things from me that I didn't know they were getting.

A revelation within the participants' narratives was that most were very frustrated in the way standardized testing has changed classroom instruction and policy. This was especially true for Master Teacher and Brooks who felt teachers taught more of the test to students than having opportunities to incorporate life skills into lessons. Tracy and Toya mentioned ways in which they went beyond teaching the test by implementing critical thinking skills, and activities that captured real life connections in their lessons.

All of the women felt that NCLB and standardized testing also gave unfair pressures and comparisons to their counterparts in more affluent areas and better resourced schools. In Katz's (1995) work, he concluded that public schools were assigned great expectations to solve social ills of society but actually were being set up for failure. Master Teacher remembered that administration at her former school made teachers feel incompetent constantly questioning instructional approaches to teaching test curriculum despite adequate student achievement. Toya shared a similar story that her principal was never satisfied with goals that students and teachers met and always demanded more of an increase in scores. Toya felt administrative scrutiny kept

teachers on edge at all times making teachers frustrated, and questioning their own professional capabilities.

Paulo Friere argues that there are oppressors and the oppressed in public education and the oppressed includes students as well as teachers. In the narratives teachers felt dehumanized by administrators in their schools as well as the school district. NCLB/standardized testing is an example of the banking model of education where facts and information is recycled and repeated – the antithesis of critical pedagogy and what I call teach to the test discourse. The result of the banking model is a number of frustrated teachers and uninterested/unmotivated students. Friere (2005) suggests “Those who use the banking approach knowingly or unknowingly fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality” (p. 227). Education serves as a means to dominate with the intent of making students become accustomed to being oppressed. Nevertheless, many teachers have been conditioned to teach information that will be on the test and repetitive instruction has more credence than meaningful dialogue.

Confronting all of these issues with the critical pedagogical lens; school administrators, teachers, or students are not to blame for these issues, but blame must be placed on a system created to continue class division. As Friere reminds us, *problem posing* and *dialogic relations* is an important practice that teachers and students can execute to combat the issues of disconnection between students/teachers, and teacher’s feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) view critical pedagogy as an opportunity and a responsibility for teachers to create a space that will embrace conversations and practices that are counter-hegemonic especially regarding social processes. This action would demand teachers to critically analyze school and classroom policies that promote classist thinking and policies.

African American middle class teachers discuss and contextualize social class in varied contexts especially regarding the African American community.

With these discussions it became clear that the social class background impacted the personal and professional experiences of participants but also guided course of the conversation. The interviews provided an opening to learn about ways that social class affected the lives of everyone in our society as a whole. The discussions around social class allowed me to learn from each participant about matters and situations within the African American culture and apply the information to our past and present experiences. The discussions moved back and forth between the challenges the African American community face with social class division and also the challenges our children face living in poverty.

Providing a candid perspective, Sasha detailed an interesting viewpoint concerning the parents of her students. During Sasha's interview she explained that the parents of her students often baffled her regarding their actions and thinking. Sasha explains how she sees social class affecting the African American community,

I think it [social class] affects the black community very negatively. Because of the fact that what I have seen over the last maybe 7 to 8 years that the decline of the students and they are not motivated to learn. And I think it's from the fact that their parents are not educated and not pushing them to learn. They get a lot of free things and they think that everything for them is supposed to be free and given to them.

Sasha's perceptions ideas maintain several discourses such as classist, blame, and hierarchical discourse. Sasha blames students' absences of motivation to learn as a result of uneducated parents and she perceives those who are living in poverty at the bottom of the social

class ladder have a sense of entitlement. In this conversation I can only assume that Sasha does not consider systems of oppression and economic downturn in the African American community (Wilson, 2009) as the basis for her perception of the lack of parental support and involvement. However, Sasha continues to discuss how she as a successful African American educator could give back to the community. Sasha finds it difficult to vocalize her thoughts and she took some time to answer the question. She shares,

I do but I just don't know what I can get them to stop. You know stop having babies very young. Stop being on welfare they kind of took away welfare but they replaced it with something else. So they are still on welfare basically. I don't know how to stop it. It's a cycle. If you are middle class basically you want to stay middle class. You are not trying to go backwards you are trying to be solid in that class or move up. And if you are in this lower class some of them may want to move up but then don't know how, and they just kind of stay there. What their thing is that I'm from B_nkh_ad I'm from here I'm from there I'm like that's a building that's a name I'm like it doesn't have action it. You don't have to act like that because you are from there. That's what they used to say when I was actually working in the projects. Well I'm from B_nkh_ad and am from B_aylo_k and I'm from Ma_na_d C_urt and I'm from B_w_n H_m_s and this is the way we act. I'm like you just named all nouns and nouns don't have actions. I'm like you don't have to act like that because you are from there.

Sasha continues to expand her perceptions of her students through a hierarchical discourse as she believes the best course of action for students is to change class positions by moving up to a position she perceives as better. Even as Sasha questions what she can do to help

her students succeed with the best of intentions, her narrative makes me more sensitive to the division that class liberation has caused in the black community. Although class liberation has catapulted many blacks into another world of living, it is also viewed as a divisive force that separates the have and have not's. Calmore (1995) views class division as an imposed danger that removes middle class blacks from relating to the daily lives of poor black people. Further analysis of this narrative also reveals Sasha's assertion of meritocracy as she believes the parents of students have chosen their life fate. Meritocracy refers to American beliefs that everyone has equal opportunities and allowances to succeed in education and occupationally (Brantlinger, 2007; Urrieta, 2007; bell hooks, 2008). Brantlinger (2007) argues although middle class people didn't associate with low income individuals they quickly made assumptions regarding deficiencies (intellectual/work) possessed by the working class. Middle class thoughts reflect an idea that working class and poor are responsible for their own challenges and the middle class lifestyle is a goal they should strive to achieve. Sasha believes that many of her students enjoy the status and lifestyle of living in certain neighborhoods and communities and have no desire to change their class dispositions.

Providing a different viewpoint Master Teacher noted an interesting perspective concerning the role of social class and how it affects African Americans in the past and in the present. During Master Teacher's individual interview she explained that at times she felt deep sadness for the state of African Americans and working with children of poverty helped to relieve the concern she felt about issues that troubled her during her lifetime. Master Teacher explains her thoughts about social class division,

It affects us through our community. We used to have a very, very strong sense of community and we could pretty much determine where we would go just by when I was coming up our community. Your community showed you what it would be like. You saw people working hard. You saw people trying to make a better life because they came from other circumstances. Now there is not a strong sense of community any more. I don't see any unity any more. I don't think that we go above and beyond to help each other anymore. And I think it's true with other races because I think that before they would see another person of their race suffer they would lend a helping hand. We as black people I don't understand it. I don't think that we help each other enough.

This was a powerful and insightful critique of the history of Black struggle with classism and colorism from Master Teacher. In this narrative, Master Teacher is engaging a discourse of crab in the bucket discourse, and critically questioning the intentions of both poor and middle class blacks, other race's acts of unity, and lack of solidarity in black community. It was a reflective narrative and represents a thought out moment because unity within the community is something that she has considered this topic for a while and is continuing to process.

Lisa Taylor has chosen to candidly about the situation, involving her upper middle class neighborhood where she admits to occasionally raising her eyebrows at the behavior of some residents. Lisa uses a classist discourse as she freely places labels on her neighbors despite their assumed socioeconomic positions because she has experienced varied dispositions in both working and middle class lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1977). For example, Lisa makes a reference describing a neighbor who lives in a half a million dollar home, but chooses to dress in hip hop style clothing and drives an SUV with large, shiny tire rims. The label she places on the neighbor

is “corporate thug” because he is employed by a corporation, but has the disposition of what Lisa calls a “thug”. It is apparent in her narrative that she believes that despite movement between classes people will not drastically change their mentality. Another indication of her actual recognition is when she explains middle class status versus middle class behavior (Bourdieu, 1977). She shares her thoughts about moving from one class position to another saying,

it has a big influence but how big I don't know because you have a nice neighborhood and you can still have the same issues in that neighborhood just because where you live doesn't take -- it doesn't take the fact away from you that's how you were brought up, because you can still take those same habits into that new environment and it's the same way. What is a sheep in wolf's clothing or something like that? I mean it depends on a lot of factors. You can look the part, but deep down inside you may still act a different way. I think it's going to affect whatever issue or whatever environment regardless until you get in there and figure out what's going on and figure out ways to deal with what's going on. I think it's all middle class, but what we call middle class versus like middle class behavior, I don't know that you would be like that's not how we're supposed to be acting if we have this type of house or drive this type of car. People tend to think just because you live this way that you're supposed to act a certain way. They don't know how you got there and your behaviors are probably are not going to change just because you're living a certain way. We think middle class people should act -- or how you should act because you have a degree. Using the term corporate thug- You have that degree. You work at the stock market or whatever, computer field, but you still bump

around in your truck with your loud music, you've got your rims, and people have no idea what you do or how you got there, but you're middle class now.

Lisa Taylor's narrative brings attention to the discourse that is occurring in conversations that I have heard in the African American community. Lisa believes that no matter how much you change your physical appearance if you are accustomed to behaving in a certain manner you continue your behavior. Her beliefs coincide with a saying that I hear often but with varied word choices: "you can take a person out of the (hood, ghetto, country,) but you can't take the (hood, ghetto, country) out of a person. The work of Bourdieu (1984), examines the social class division and the practices associated with particular class positions. Bourdieu (1984) states

The division into classes performed by sociology leads to the common root of the practices which agents produce and of the classificatory judgments they make of other agents' practices and their own. The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification of these practices (pp. 169-170).

Bourdieu continues to further discuss how class positions and the economic/social classifications that accompany them are understandable to us through the construction of habitus. *Habitus* becomes the guideline to describe and justify classifiable practices, products, and judgments into a system of symbols and distinctive signs. He also argues that habitus is internalized and changed into a disposition that creates meaning-giving perceptions and practices. From these accepted perceptions and practices transformations may also occur; where one could adopt and implement dispositions of one class into the class in which they are a member.

Lisa Taylor believes that a middle class position has numerous practices and dispositions that are associated with it. To exist as a member of the middle class, one must act, look, behave a certain way, and consume goods that are used by members in the middle class. Lisa has internalized this judgment and can recognize when someone is “behaving” middle class, but may not truly be a member of the middle class. For example, Lisa used the term *corporate thug*, which is a common term used in the African American community. A corporate thug can derive from two situations: A person who is middle or upper class but chooses to adopt the supposed dispositions and practices of the poor working class or a person who comes from a poor or working class position and has adopted the supposed dispositions/practices of the middle upper class.

Lisa’s narrative is an example of how humans have been indoctrinated by the dominant class to believe that certain practices, behaviors, and dispositions permanently belong to each social class position. So it stands to reason in regards to teachers, that they will possibly make judgments about their students simply based upon the habitus guidelines that have been set before them by society. As previously discussed, Tracy questioned her motives in wanting to make her students think and behave a certain manner, and I assert that if Tracy asked Pierre Bourdieu if this was the case, his may possibly agree that it would be.

Brooks, the only participant who was a mother to more than one child, talked in depth in her individual interview about the role of society and its influence on African American youth. During one moment in the conversation she made a reference to comedian Bill Cosby’s thoughts on parenting and the societal influences on the African American community. For her, being an educator and a mother not only served as a guideline for personal experiences but also provided a

tactic to evaluate her teaching pedagogy. She identified personally with Cosby's sense of ambivalence whether African American's will bring more of a commitment to come together, focus on education, and move past the materialism that exists in America. She relates,

I think they could do more. And I just thought of this too. You have to think about the media. It's like they are showing the wrong things to these kids to strive for. You can look at a rap videos you know and what the girls and the money and the cars that's what they its more to life than that. Think of the rappers. With their first check what do they do? They go out and buy a \$200 dollar pair of tennis shoes and a car. It (the focus) needs to be placed on helping the community giving back to education. You know you could have given \$200 to a teacher so she could buy school supplies for her classroom instead of buying some \$200 tennis shoes that you don't need.

Also lower and upper class should be able to come together and not judge. You see a lot of the lower class people hating on the other class that they have things that they don't have. And the upper class looking down on the lower class but really we need to quit being crabs in a bucket and help each other. Help each other along.

The last part of Brooks' narrative is informed by two discourses- the crab in the bucket discourse and the solidarity/oneness discourse, which leads me to reflect upon previous discussions that I have had with other African Americans. A part of the conversations include what some blacks may call "the crab in the bucket syndrome" where black people can never unite as one and we try to hold each back. The poor working class is jealous of the material lives of the middle class and wealthy and the middle class/wealthy look down on the poor. Although Brooks is criticizing both class positions, she reflects a dominant ideology in her

assumptions/stereotypes. Could it be possible that poor working class people do not harbor resentment towards those who are rich and have material wealth? Could it also be just as possible that middle class/wealthy people make attempts to help those less fortunate? Some scholars such as Calmore and Crenshaw believe the black community cannot avoid the stereotypes and assumptions that have developed within their race.

Calmore (1995) provides some insight as to why black individuals adopt dominant discourse and stereotypes. He suggests it is natural as a black race to confront dominant cultural ideology but black individuals who have joined forces with dominant thought must also be confronted. Calmore further states: These colored intellectuals are prone to suffer a race-image anxiety, rely on a Eurocentric cultural frame of reference, and adopt a model of resolving racial conflict that emphasizes assimilationist and integrationists' goals and value orientations....." (p. 326). According to Crenshaw (1995) she believes that in the 1960's the move to integrate resulted in a removal of formal barriers that created new opportunities for some blacks, but were not shared by poor working class blacks. Crenshaw continues to discuss that class is an issue in the black community where blacks (according to your class position) began to have different layered experiences of racism in various contexts, and class creates difficulty in uniting as one racial group to combat different issues facing black America.

Interestingly, Tracy, who often struggled with her actions of framing how students should behave and think through her middle class lens, discusses how she believes middle class African Americans should be more aware of their verbal influences on working class African Americans. Similar to Tracy's views which are informed by a social class discourse and a solidarity/oneness discourse, Eric Dyson (2006) believes that middle class/wealthy African

Americans must make wise decisions of engagement when speaking publicly about various issues that concern their community. Dyson reiterates this point in *Is Bill Cosby Right?* (2005) when he speaks about Bill Cosby's public attack of poor blacks:

While Cosby took full advantage of the civil rights struggle, he resolutely denied it a seat at his artistic table. Thus it's hard to swallow Cosby's flailing away at youth for neglecting their history, and overlooking the gains paid for by the blood of their Ancestors, when he reneged on its service when it beckoned at his door. It is ironic that Cosby has finally answered the call to racial leadership forty years after it might have made a constructive difference. But it is downright tragic that he should use his perch to lob rhetorical bombs at the poor (p. 3)

In these remarks, Dyson challenges ideologies and discourse perpetuated by prominent blacks in middle/upper class positions. While interviewing I ask the question what should be done by middle class African Americans to unite with poor working class African Americans, and Tracy begins to instantly speak about division in her community and a part of a sermon from her Pastor. She spoke at great length about the conversation, so here I offer a substantial excerpt from her remarks in that conversation:

I don't know about helping them as much as exposing them or talking to them or not separating ourselves from them. Even thinking about it as you pose the question, it's always us and them, instead of just we. Just like in church today they were talking about how Obama took over this country in such shambles and he caught and killed Bin Laden, he ended wars, and everybody is still saying he's not doing a good job. No man did what he has done, nobody, not one president. Bush started the fight. Obama ended it. But

everybody keeps talking about what has not happened, because we are not united as a people. It's not about how good he is or what he's done as a president, it's about the fact that a black man has been doing more than we could do, so that can be seen that way. I think everybody is entitled to their own opinion, but I think you should be able to substantiate what you're talking about. I think that you need to realize what you do when you open your mouth as an affluent African-American, because some people don't read. Some people are not smart, and they're going to take whatever you say and they're going to go with it. You know that, so you use that to your benefit, but let's be real. Let's put everything on the table when you talk about this person, that person, children in general. Put it all out on the table. Don't say the kids at B_ckh_ad do better than the kids on the south side when you're not saying all of the exposure and influence the kids in B_ckh_ad have compared to none of what kids on the south side have and they still compete with you all, they're just not as high as you all. It's the same situation. Don't say that Obama is not a good president when you need to put every president on the table and talk about the same stuff that they've done that he's doing now and who has been more successful.

Likewise as Brooks, Tracy reiterates the detriments of class division, and the positive effects of class solidarity. She says “*I don't know about helping them as much as exposing them or talking to them or not separating ourselves from them. Even thinking about it as you pose the question, it's always us and them, instead of just we*”. Tracy touched on the topic of the responsibilities of middle class blacks in regards to speaking publically about issues within the black community. She argues, “I think everybody is entitled to their own opinion, but I think you

should be able to substantiate what you're talking about. I think that you need to realize what you do when you open your mouth as an affluent African-American, because some people don't read. Some people are not smart, and they're going to take whatever you say and they're going to go with it". Her comments echo the solidarity/oneness discourse of scholars such as Dyson and hooks, who would agree with Tracy that the remarks and sentiments regarding the African American community should come from a place of careful and well thought reflection.

Towards the end of Tracy's narrative she also touches a bit on the meritocratic ideology that persists in her school district. As I listened to Tracy vent her frustrations about the unfair practices placed upon her students, I too began to reflect upon my previous experiences with the unrealistic expectations given to my students by local and state mandates. Administrators, faculty, and students were aware of apparent disparities between schools located in the southern region of town compared to the northern region of town, however *all* students were held to the same standard. Central office, teachers, and administrators held fast to the belief that with increased study time and hard work those who attended schools with educational inequality could be successful in life with a good education. This view of disadvantaged students could have been further from the truth because hard work and great education rarely helped students to escape from their class positions. Brantlinger (2007) further discusses schools and social class "An unfortunate aspect of the American capitalist system and its meritocratic schooling is that they depend on social hierarchy and on uneven resource distributions of resources rather than on equality" (p. 263).

Indeed I would become angry with those who believed all children could learn equally despite class and cultural differences. As Bowles and Gintis (2005) points out education serves

as a great role in the social process. Education perpetuates legitimate inequality in a meritocratic manner by rewarding and promoting students placing them in various positions of occupational hierarchy. Schools maintain patterns of social class, racial and sexual identity which allow them to accept their status and positions in the production process.

Most of the women commented on what they perceived as a cultural emphasis on entitlement of the middle class, imposed discrimination upon the poor working class, and the conflict that the split between the two causes. Toya describes an instance where an entitled middle class parent was allowed certain privileges that other parents may have not had the opportunity to have. Toya recalls, “One parent in particular, she would come every day, bring her daughter outside lunch from fast food restaurants and I guess that's a part of her being wealthy, she knows we have not so tasty lunches so she comes in every day, she's bringing outside lunches. In this instance, the parent used a classist discourse to gain special privileges for her daughter. Toya adds “she also brings us little snacks or little treats too but it's an everyday, ongoing thing. And she just comes in, she knows everybody, she sneaks food to her. Her daughter's not a behavior problem but you see her a lot. I mean, she walks around, she does whatever”. Obviously, the middle class mother’s social capital allows the daughter to have certain privileges not shared by other students. As Lareau (2002) notes that middle and upper class parents use a strategy of “concerted cultivation” to influence school personnel and often operate from a class based sense of entitlement. Using concerted cultivation parents facilitate individual and collective social interactions with school faculty. The student’s mother demonstrated that her middle class social network can provide the resources needed to have faculty (Ream & Palardy, 2008), ignore the misbehavior of her daughter.

Toya shared her experience of speaking out against a veteran teacher whose actions perpetuate a classist discourse, and is known to deliberately choose students from middle class backgrounds to participate in the talented and gifted program. In addition to the existence of a classist discourse, the teacher also uses a hierarchical discourse to determine that only middle class students are capable of learning a challenging curriculum. Although the teachers actions were very evident to other teachers as well as students discrimination against other students continued. Toya says,

I would say that most of the parents are those students who are in the TAG programs probably come from wealthy homes. Some are middle but for the most part, we see those parents who, like I said, may be doctors, lawyers or work for the government, work for the city. I don't know if it's a drive they instill in their children or I can honestly say sometimes too, they want it for their child and their child really doesn't have it. And because of the positions the parents have, of course school administrators or even further up, at the superintendent, they're going to voice their concerns and they're going to listen because of who those parents are. I think about one particular student from a low socio-economic background in the talented and gifted program (TAG) program but they were misbehaving and so the teacher has to always threaten the child, I'm going to put you out of the program and sometimes the child is like, oh well, I don't care but they were honestly -- or that child was honestly gifted. Whereas with middle class students they would say- I'm going to call your mom. They know that that parent would be there first thing. It's almost like a pick and choose. I think, too, the fact teachers kind of set herself or himself apart from the other teachers, kind of how some of the schools are with the

better than you attitude. So sometimes teachers are their attitude and then when it's time to choose those students or test those students, I seen him around. I'm not going to test him. Don't test him because he's a behavior problem when the behavior problem could be boredom. And at my particular school, the TAG teacher is a seasoned teacher, has been in the building for several years so it's kind of what I say goes or if it's not how I want it to be, then I will complain. And I've been here longer than you so, I win.

TEACHING IS WHO I AM

For each of the women teaching in school settings where a majority of students came from low poverty situations in returning to school was part of a calling to better the lives of their students. Each considered her relationships with students a necessary foundation for a successful school year. Not one woman mentioned her teaching career as a mistake or that teaching didn't provide some type of personal growth. Although several said that they were dissatisfied with administrative micro managing and unrealistic expectations from central office, none of the women desired to go into another field and at least one said that she may take a break from teaching, but would not leave the field altogether. In addition, teaching for them was not an avenue to earn a paycheck, but an opportunity to help mold next generation of future leaders. The obstacles that they encountered as middle class teachers in school were no different from those experienced in their daily lives. Since half of the participants had experienced a switch in class positions it was easier to identify with and understand their students.

In conclusion, from the narratives, themes, and discourses analyzed here, it was clear that the participants often conceptualized and discussed dominant discourses about social class within the black community, and class division. However, generally there was a limit on how far they

would discuss these boundaries. Thus while the participants were able to realize that obstacles do exist as a result of class division, neither middle class blacks or poor working class blacks were spared from criticisms of both classes not doing enough to promote solidarity. Rather, participants believed both classes of people should initiate conversations with each other and move dominant ideologies that exist within each class position. Nonetheless, participants showed that they are conceptualizing, critiquing social class division, and encouraging solidarity in complex ways.

CHAPTER SIX

FOR MEMBERS ONLY-AN EDUCATION WITH CLASS

Children were not just to be the recipients of academic instruction; rather, school was to be a place where all the varied needs of their (school) student body could be addressed. Students needed role models, they needed to see people who could bridge their current life with the possibilities their lives might hold in the future. (Faculty and Staff of CCTS cited in Siddle-Walker, 1996)

In this chapter I return again to my research questions: Does the social class background of a teacher inform student-teacher interactions in the classroom and pedagogical relationships when students are economically disadvantaged- If so, in what ways? What discourses are used by teachers when talking about their economically disadvantaged students and their academic potential? In what ways might themes of critical pedagogy benefit from explicit attention to social class?

As I reflect on this research experience, I realize that the life paths that are chosen for us and by us can make a significant impact on the world. The decision to teach and become an educator is a path that will impact generations of people. Interviewing the participants, teachers allowed to me confirm how having dialogue and discussions around issues of class, race, or gender are as important as analyzing the data of your student's CRCT scores. These participants welcomed me into their space at times revealing candid thoughts and feelings regarding their students and education. Sharing dialogue opened the door for me as a researcher and participants as respondents to be reflective and expressive in the communication process.

The participant's descriptions of their social class ranged from living in poverty to wealthy. Social class differences provided possible indications of how family backgrounds informed student teacher interactions in the classroom, and pedagogical relationships. My critical

pedagogical perspective allowed and required me to understand that social class background does not solely influence classroom interactions and relationships with students, but rather social class background can be explored through the racial identity does not operate within a vacuum that is divorced from other intersecting identities but rather racial identity can only be explored through the interconnections of other factors such as morals, and values. While I looked at past and present social class backgrounds, I discovered that the majority of the women's relationships and interactions were guided by a moral compass within that prompted them to form positive relationships with students. For example, a considerable amount of the participants who considered themselves coming from a middle class background were told by parents/guardians to always help those less fortunate and not look down on anyone. In addition, participants who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were told by parents to always treat others how you would want to be treated.

Regardless of social class backgrounds teachers stepped into the classroom with a goal of forming relationships with students as a major part of their practice. They provided students with support and care through a myriad of approaches such as: mentoring, providing supplies, providing additional academic assistance, attending events outside of the school, providing and monetary support. Because teachers experienced different class backgrounds, their stereotypes and assumptions regarding the academic ability and behavior of their students reflected social class awareness. All of the participants believed that students were academically capable of learning regardless of class backgrounds. However, the teachers also were aware that children who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds had more challenges in school than their middle class classmates as a result of living in poverty. All but one of the participants

believed that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds could obtain success in life despite the circumstances.

The various discourses used by participants in our discussions allowed the great importance of openness and reflection. Participants not only discussed issues of social class regarding students in the classroom, but also discussed issues of social class in the African American community. A meritocratic discourse was a heavily used throughout the narratives; however I will argue that the context of the discourse did not correspond with the standard notion of meritocracy. For example, most of the participants truly felt if students worked hard they could be successful but they also expressed the need for students to have advocates who would mentor and guide them to the road of success. Most of the participants were aware of the obstacles that students faced in their journey through life. This shows how the complexity of discourses of the narratives would not allow meaning making to be precise but varied and messy.

Although participants did not expressly discuss the issue of colorism in the black community, the crab in the bucket discourse was frequently mentioned. As previously mentioned historically, division began in the African American community when lighter skinned blacks kept their positions as the colored elite, thus placing themselves into a separate community while discriminating against darker-skinned blacks. Participants were adamant in speaking their minds about the division of blacks in the community because participants did not believe that any type of division should be perpetuated. Frequently mentioned throughout narratives was a solidarity/oneness discourse. Participants believed that in the black community ALL needed to come together for the greater good of the race. Participants deemed the middle class as the ones who should be more influential in helping to improve the lives of those living in poverty.

Participants also recommended that those who were economically disadvantaged in the community look past the material lives of the middle class and accept assistance that may be offered to them.

The third question examines how theories of critical pedagogy might benefit from explicit attention to social class. A major theory of critical pedagogy is that the lived reality of schools is constructed through symbols, social interaction, or relations (race, gender, class and culture). If the lived reality of school experiences are closely examined especially with explicit attention to social class the constructions of students and teachers may possibly be disrupted and challenged. For example if there is a constructed lived reality that at a certain middle school only children who come from middle class or wealthy families can participate in talented and gifted programs. When we start asking questions how this classist idea began and why has it been allowed to continue then another form of knowledge has been produced thus benefiting a theory of critical pedagogy. McLaren also argues that teachers should recognize power relations as connections to forms of knowledge that produce accepted truth and knowledge based on exploitation and oppression. Hence teachers having honest and reflective discussions especially around discourses that guide their practices and pedagogy will allow teachers to make meaning of new connections between knowledge and power.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND TACTFUL PEDAGOGY

According to McLaren (2009) critical pedagogy seeks to understand the connection between power and knowledge where dominant curriculum uses knowledge to maintain social relations and class interests. He maintains that school knowledge is ordered, structured, and

socially constructed through symbols, social interaction, or relations with others. Van Manen (1991) asserts that tactful pedagogy includes the concepts of understanding, thoughtfulness, and pathic knowledge. The interconnectedness of both critical pedagogy and tactful pedagogy may involve a teacher using reflection as a means to transform both student and teacher. When tactful pedagogy is incorporated into critical pedagogy educators are allowed to be intuitive and sensitive the needs of students; always keeping in mind what is best for the student. The narratives of participants were influenced by a classist discourse specifically in regards to assumptions about “what course of action is best for the student?” For example, Tracy would place her middle class assumptions on students because she felt they were not happy living in a life of poverty. One possible opportunity for tactful pedagogy and critical pedagogy to merge and enter into Tracy’s classroom may be to become more sensitive and thoughtful to the needs of the student and engage in a discourse of solidarity or oneness. Instead of imposing her middle class values on students she could possibly create discussions informed by a solidarity/oneness discourse in her classroom

I have argued that tactful pedagogy is something that doesn’t come naturally to some teachers and it is a purposeful, conscious effort to make and that it seems to be intuitive and in a sense it is something that one can grow into. I continue to argue this point simply because I believe that as a teacher either you have the “it factor of tactful pedagogy” or you do not. Most of the participants of the study were inclined to a) possess an intuition to help and care for their students b) were open to receive the gift of tactful pedagogy. I will also argue that tactful pedagogy is obtainable and one must be open- minded to receive it. Indeed, it is a precious gift to

incorporate thoughtfulness and mindfulness as a normative, consistent presence into teacher practice.

CONTRIBUTIONS

One of the contributions that my study makes to critical race theory is by including how social class background informs pedagogical practices and discourses of teachers into the discussion of critical race theory. Much of the research that has taken a critical race perspective often focuses on issues around color, gender, class, and sexual preferences. The purpose of CRT is to: expose the usage of color blindness as an expression of color consciousness, reveal racialized power and its insertion into practices and values, and to recognize neutral policy as a return to an unfair system of racial power (Crenshaw, et al 1995). Although class is often discussed in critical race theory, as well as the discussion of an adoption of dominant ideologies into the African American communities, the implications of social class and how it affects teacher's practices are not discussed. Yet within this observation of the exclusion of how social class background informs pedagogical practices, and discourses of teachers, I would add that the discourse from middle class African American teachers represent a distinctive aspect, one that needs to be included when exploring intersections of class, gender, and race. If scholars within the critical race framework looked internally into class divisions within the African American race to include how it affects education, and a teacher's pedagogical relationship yet another layer could be added to the tenets of critical race theory especially when considering the adoption of dominant ideologies into the African American community.

Similarly, my study's contribution to the broader range of literature will make a considerable impact. Scholars such as Frazier, Wilson, McCoy-Patillo, Gregory, hooks, and

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell have examined class division within African American communities including churches and educational institutions. However none of the research specifically aims to understand how social class affects the pedagogical relationships and practices of middle class African American teachers and their low income students which create a gap in literature. This lack of focus on social class and its' influence on middle class African American teachers in the classroom is significant.

IMPLICATIONS

Recently, I have returned to the classroom to teach seventh grade math and I am mindful that we as teachers need a forum to discuss issues that affect our lives, our careers, and ours students' lives. I currently work in a school where there is ongoing frustration regarding student behavior, and academics. Just the other day I heard an administrator say "I know teachers get angry with me and say that I am too nice, that I give the students too many chances, but these children need us because they come from a zip code that supplies the largest number of inmates in our state's prison system". This statement confirms why my study has great importance to the field of education. As I reflect on the purpose of my study and the administrator's statement, I think about hook's (2000) call to the African American community to produce "visionary black thinkers" that will create and embrace empowerment for all classes. Hooks asserts that "visionary black thinkers" should also generate opportunities for class solidarity where black people living in poverty will have their needs addressed and verbalized. Because class solidarity must began at some point I argue that teachers can be the "visionary black thinkers" used to create opportunities for class solidarity. I have come to a conclusion that one of the first relationship experiences a black student living in poverty will have is with a middle class African

American teacher. Pondering the significance of this situation I ask the question: What type of impression can a teacher make on this young moldable mind? What practices can be put into place that will ensure the nurturing of the student and the discourse of oneness?

In my study, participants had their own ideas of how class solidarity could occur. Ideas ranged from providing training and employment assistance to parents, creating a space for both social classes to come together for social functions, and exposing children to different experiences.

These acts of thinking about class solidarity answers hook's call for "visionary black thinkers". "Visionary black thinkers" must think about how the black community must come together to provide support and assistance to those who face a life of poverty and those whose wealth has dramatically decreased in the recent harsh economic times that have devastated the country. In 2011, it has been reported that the foreclosure rate among African Americans is at 7 % (white community is 4%), and while African Americans make up 11.5 % of the labor force, the Bureau of labor statistics report that they account for 16% of the unemployed in America (CNN Money, 2010; U.S Department of Labor, 2011). A solidarity of oneness can result in numerous solutions to these problems because as history as shown it is not enough to depend on others outside of the black community to provide solutions to problems.

The vision of solidarity thus signifies that division in the African American community whether it consists of colorism or classism must come to an end. As I read newspapers and observe occurrences in the black community I am aware that it will not be an easy task, but everyone must be willing to work. For example, recently I read a newspaper article that described the disgust and outrage expressed by black communities regarding a supposed skin color contest that was held at a local St. Louis nightclub. According to the article the promoters

of the show advertised in a flyer that all black women come to represent their skin colors to judge which one was the best. I was not surprised about this particular occurrence because negative discourses regarding colorism are still perpetuated in the black community despite all of the positive gains that have been made.

However, I believe the true course of action for teachers as well as members of the black community are to begin or continue a discourse of oneness/solidarity. To have open discussions about the dominant discourses that are perpetuated in the classroom and in the community would include discussing how family class backgrounds inform teacher pedagogy and what actions can be taken by members of both classes to achieve the goal of solidarity. The examination of various discourses used by teachers in the classroom can assist in the dissection of how dominant ideologies can be determined and disrupted. According to McLaren (2009) critical pedagogy seeks to expose knowledge that misrepresents lived reality, but informs the daily lives of people. If this tenet of critical pedagogy is true, then the inclusion of teachers in the process of examining discourses and disrupting ideologies is a certain action that must be taken. I believe when teachers are included in such a process then they may believe that lived reality has been exposed and that a change must come. Afterwards I assert that teachers may begin the process of glorious transformation within the classroom. Teachers may undertake the glorious tasks to guide, direct, motivate to academically achieve.

In conclusion, I think it is important to add that when a teacher walks into a school building he/she is being observed and watched carefully. Under the careful scrutiny of students we are watched and despite Charles Barkley's declaration- teachers ARE truly role models. The influence we carry as educators is tremendous and I believe many have forgotten the power

within us to change lives for better or worse. In my past of unconscious behavior I hope my actions did not leave any harm inflicted upon a child's interest to learn.

I agree with Calmore (1995) that class differences within the black (educational) community must be discussed especially if we are to connect black middle class teachers to poor black students. I urge black middle class teachers who have had opportunities to examine the various discourses that inform their relationships with students take up the commitment to initiate similar conversations with fellow colleagues. I am conscious that adult conversations regarding race and class may possibly be difficult, but one could not imagine the possible outcomes that come from sparks of conversation- Maybe pedagogy of solidarity?

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