

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

1-1-2009

Perceptions of Race and Academic Success in an Affluent Suburban Middle School

Robyn Ashley Duran
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Duran, Robyn Ashley, "Perceptions of Race and Academic Success in an Affluent Suburban Middle School" (2009). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 801.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/801>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN AN AFFLUENT
SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Robyn A. Duran

June 2009

Advisor: Elinor Katz, Ph.D.

Author: Robyn A. Duran

Title: PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN AN AFFLUENT SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Advisor: Elinor Katz, Ph.D.

Degree: June 2008

ABSTRACT

Public school districts across the nation are organizing to eradicate the racial predictability of academic achievement between African American and Hispanic children and their White and Asian peers, (Ferguson, 2001). This phenomenological study was designed to better illuminate the phenomenon of the racial achievement gap in an affluent educational setting. The story of race and academic achievement was told through perceptions held among minority and non-minority parents in an affluent educational setting.

Parents are a large piece of the bedrock which determines the academic success of all students. The role of the parent is particularly important in shaping the academic identity of students of color. However, parents' perceptions of the educational experience vary between races and thus the stories of parents must be told to gain insight into the nuances which manifest in the pervasive underperformance of students of color—even within an affluent suburban educational setting. Furthermore, the presuppositions, within the social construct of education, assume that parental involvement is limited to volunteer work in parent-teacher associations, and the like, as well as assume the lack of skills and knowledge on the part of minority and poor parents.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the phenomenon of *essence* residing in each parent partner's unique portrayal of the educational

experience at an affluent suburban middle school where a racial achievement gap persists against fervent efforts to eradicate racial predictability in academic performance.

In-depth interviews were conducted with eight parent partners of varied races and cultural backgrounds meeting the criteria of having an underperforming middle-schooler (as evidenced in grades and/or standardized test proficiency levels) in attendance at Red Oak Middle School in Colorado (an affluent suburban middle school which has made keen attempts to eliminate the racial achievement gap). Questions were formed as an invitation for each parent partner to explore their own “lived experience” as a parent of an underperforming student in an affluent middle school where a racial achievement gap persists.

Undeniably, the results of this study suggest that where the rubber hits the road is in the classroom. The role of the teacher is pivotal to the success of students of color. High expectations for learning coupled with the development of positive and meaningful relationships are fundamental factors to the academic success of Black and Hispanic students.

Second to the role of the teacher, having what the researcher calls “system savvy” is essential for parents of color. Holding a clear understanding of systems, structures, data, protocols, and educational language will ultimately support parents of color to navigate a seemingly daunting and somewhat cumbersome educational system.

Acknowledgements

The team helping me to quarterback this undertaking has been unrelenting in their support, critical eyes, “at’a boy’s,” grace, patience, and kick-in-the-pants frankness when needed—Thank you to Dr. Ellie Katz, my advisor and compass—you have the keen ability to always direct me in a way that allows me to arrive at my better self; Thank you to my other committee members, Dr. George Straface and Dr. Linda Brookhart—I am inspired by your generosity of spirit and flexibility to help an aspiring scholar; John Kennedy, my mentor, my friend and my beacon of value-based decision making—thank you for your honest feedback, your (always welcomed) advice, for teaching me to not lose myself and be still in the midst of chaos, and for being a model for leadership with integrity; Thank you Dr. Marisol Enriquez, my best friend and peer through it all—you have always served as my sounding board, my center for truth and balance—I love you always.

To my five miracles: Gabriel, Sierah, James, Mia and Emerson—you are the reason I exist. I hope to provide you with the values of hard work, tenacity, resilience, and follow through. Believe in yourself; believe in your dreams, for I believed enough in you to follow mine.

Finally, to my husband James: I am overcome with emotion when I think of the foundation you have provided me. You are my earth, the bedrock I lay my dreams upon. Thank you for trusting in my capacity to be great. You are largely the reason I can push beyond my own doubts and exhaustion—you have always allowed me to be insatiable in my learning and savor my dreams. I love you.

Table of Contents

Preamble: My Experiences, My Students, My Penance.....	1
Chapter One: Introduction.....	4
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Definition of Terms	9
Methodology.....	11
Organization of the Study.....	12
Summary.....	13
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature.....	15
Introduction.....	15
Achievement Gap in Higher Socioeconomic Educational Settings.....	15
Poverty and the Achievement Gap.....	18
Cultural Differences.....	20
The Influence of the Teacher.....	25
Stereotype Threat and Social Mirroring.....	28
Summary.....	30
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	31
Introduction.....	31
Research Questions.....	33
Research Design.....	34
Qualitative Research.....	34
Justification for Qualitative Research.....	34
Phenomenology.....	35
Literature Review: Phenomenology.....	35
A Phenomenological Study.....	38
Data Collection.....	39
Assumptions.....	39
Selection of the Participants.....	40
Pilot Study.....	41
The Interviews.....	42
Treatment of the Data.....	44
Analysis of the Data.....	45
Limitations.....	45
The Researcher.....	46
Summary.....	46
Chapter Four: Individual Profiles through Interviews.....	47
Introduction.....	47
Misty Lincoln.....	52

Session One.....	53
Session Two.....	57
Sally Crystal.....	62
Session One.....	63
Session Two.....	65
Harry Crystal.....	71
Session One.....	72
Session Two.....	74
Justina Simmons.....	79
Interview Session One.....	80
Interview Session Two.....	82
Diego Martinez.....	85
Interview Session One.....	86
Interview Session Two.....	87
Marilyn Cordova.....	91
Interview Session One.....	92
Interview Session Two.....	94
Pedro Cordova.....	98
Interview Session One.....	98
Interview Session Two.....	100
Delfina Nelson.....	104
Interview Session One.....	105
Interview Session Two.....	107
Significant Statements Gleaned from Transcripts.....	111
Research Question One.....	111
Research Question Two.....	124
Research Question Three.....	135
Major Themes.....	140
Research Question One.....	141
Research Question Two.....	144
Research Question Three.....	147
Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations.....	149
Overview.....	149
Methodology.....	150
Discussion and Implications.....	152
Overarching Research Question.....	152
Research Question One.....	153
Research Question Two.....	156
Research Question Three.....	157
Recommendations.....	158
Parents.....	158
Educators.....	160
Suggestions for Further Research.....	162
Reflection.....	163

The Last Word.....	164
References.....	166
APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY.....	169
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	171
APPENDIX C: AGENDA AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SESSION-ONE.....	174
APPENDIX D: AGENDA AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SESSION-TWO.....	175
APPENDIX E: TRANSFORMATION.....	177

Preamble: My Experiences, My Thinking

I came to this study, in part, because of my utter disappointment in a public education system I felt let me down as a Hispanic student. In response to social justice, my personal integrity as a minority, a parent, and as an educator I felt compelled to seek answers. I was intrigued by the theories and thoughts of some of the prominent achievement gap experts in the field. From Jonathon Kozol's (1991) studies on the effects of poverty and academic achievement, to the insights of Carola Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Fabienne Doucet studies on the "social mirror" (as cited in Banks, 2004), there are many theories to explain why students of color continue to struggle in public education systems. In particular, I am fascinated by the grim fact that an achievement gap exists between minority and non-minority students in affluent socioeconomic educational settings, where students of color with seemingly generous opportunities for success have not demonstrated academic success comparable to their white peers. This facet of achievement gap research has meager information available and few studies have been conducted in this area. Furthermore, I am curious as to how parents feel and experience the achievement gap phenomenon; given that many of them seek out better schools only to find similar results from that which they've fled.

Contrary to my educational experiences as an elementary student in a parochial school in west Denver, I was greeted by a secondary system that seemed to perpetuate

minimal academic rigor, sour peer and teacher relationships, and little relevance to the needs of a majority of the student population.

Low expectations, poor classroom management, peripheral parental involvement, and poor self-image all had a hand in my own low academic achievement and to my high involvement in delinquency. Remarkably, however, I remember obtaining moderately high grades for classes I rarely attended. Upon reflection I understand that the motivators for academic success were highly extrinsic. I learned that in order to receive positive reinforcement, I must acclimate myself to a system, which demoted student participation in the construction of meaning—and promoted the usage of extrinsic motivators to obtain desired results (which were much of the time attached to behavioral rather than academic expectations).

Additionally, I felt myself competing with the reputation of my minority predecessors. Often, the expectation was that of delinquency, sometimes it was that of submission, and rarely the expectation was excellence.

As a first-year teacher in an alternative licensure program, I yearned to be different. Although I was met with considerate administrative support, teachers in my department were stand-offish and offered little help. In spite of this, I was still enthusiastic about my position and the responsibility to my students. Ironically, I taught in the same system, I felt, failed me fifteen years earlier. I taught in the same school that recommended me for expulsion and later suggested my enrollment in an alternative school setting. This school continues to have a high Latino population, similar to when I attended.

I arranged and rearranged my desks several times. I traced my fingers across the Christ carvings etched in the antiquated desks of my own adolescence, wondering if the students whose legacy was forever branded into the souls of the desks carried the same hope that the figures implied. I was determined to be a beacon of light, in essence to vicariously impart a glimpse into their own futures. I was determined to be the kind of teacher to them I so desperately yearned for at their age.

I couldn't recall seeing an abundance of Latinos portrayed positively in the media when I was the age of my students. However, diversity has indeed seeped slowly into media images. While still overwhelmingly white, commercials, movies, and print advertisements were beginning to be more inclusive of different races and cultural groups. While minimal strides are being made in the popular culture, even fewer gains are being made in areas of social justice and equity for all Americans. I am aware that the disease of poverty strikes more minorities than non-minorities, the ratio of minority to non-minority prisoners is heavily weighted to include more minority prisoners, and the education gap between minority and non-minority students is broadening.

However, one area, which little research has been conducted, is the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students in affluent educational settings. I think by conducting research in this area, and weeding out socioeconomic factors relative to a vast number of achievement gap studies, we might gain insight into racial implications of this epidemic.

Chapter One

Introduction

“In contrast to commonly held views that low-income and minority students devalue education, studies suggest that they are more likely to turn away because of a real or perceived lack of opportunities...in a stratified educational system where opportunities are based on ideologies of intelligence and merit that disadvantage some groups and favor others. Are we to just sit by and let conflicts build? Or might research on certain issues reveal ways for Americans to move more harmoniously toward a diverse, high-achieving, and equitable society?” (Oakes, J., Joseph, R., Muir, K., 2002, p. 87)

Many achievement gap studies have implicated low socioeconomic status as a primary contributor to poor student performance across various measures. Equity and achievement have been closely linked and for just cause. The Education Trust (2004) disaggregated the 2003 Grade 8 mathematics scale scores to show discrepancies between poor and non-poor students on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). The data showed statistically significant differences between the two groups across all fifty states. For example, the average scale score of non-poor students in the state of New York was close to 295; as compared to an average scale score of just below 265 for poor students, a thirty point difference. Colorado was similar, whereas a 30 point difference also existed between poor and non-poor students (Ed Trust, 2004).

However, this epidemic does not only exist between lower and higher socioeconomic classes. There are gross racial implications contributing to the academic

achievement of students in the U.S. Specifically significant were the African American, Latino and Native-American ethnic minority groups (Haycock, 2004).

According to Ed Trust (Haycock, 2004), 61% of 8th grade African American students in the United States scored below basic in mathematics on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Fifty-three percent of 8th grade Latino students scored below basic in mathematics on the NAEP. Forty-six percent Native-American 8th grade students scored below basic. This compared to a sparse 21% of White 8th grade students performing at below basic.

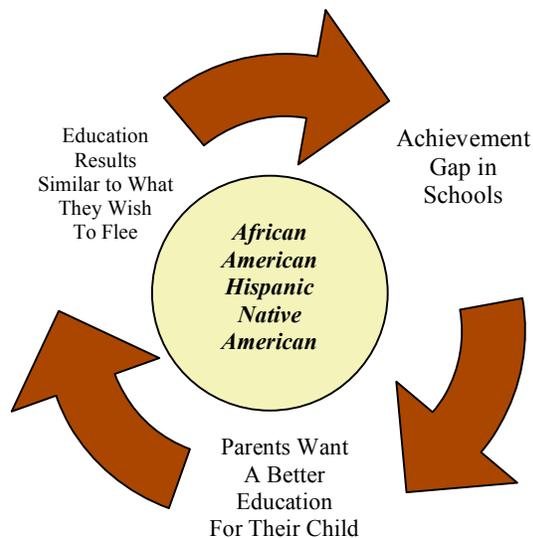
Affluent and middle-class school districts are also reporting gross disparities in achievement between minority and non-minority groups. Red Oak Middle School is a High Achieving middle school (the name of the middle school has been changed) (Colorado Department of Education, 2007), in Willow Brook School District (the name of the school district has been changed), a nationally recognized suburban district, located in greater Denver metropolitan area in Colorado. For the purposes of this study, Red Oak was defined as a high socioeconomic educational setting. This identification was attributed to the average cost of housing in the area at a median price of \$375,000 (city-data.com, 2008), an average household income of \$100,358 (city-data.com, 2008), and a mere .02 percent of students identified as needing free or reduced lunch (Public Schools Report, 2008).

According to the Willow Brook School District Profile (2007), 87% of 8th grade students scored at or above proficiency in reading on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) for the 2006-07 school-year as compared to a state average of 66%. However, the school-wide disaggregated data paints a sad picture.

While 90% of the White students scored at or above proficiency in reading, only 71% of the African American students scored at or above proficiency, and a mere 65% of the Hispanic students scored at or above proficiency (Native-Americans were reported as non-applicable), (2007).

This study is unique in that it attempted to capture the essence of parents who experienced the phenomena of existing achievement disparities between Hispanic and African American students and their White and Asian peers in an affluent middle school in the Denver metropolitan area. Specifically, this study investigated how parents felt and experienced the achievement gap phenomenon; given that many of them sought out better schools only to find similar results from that which they've fled, as demonstrated in the table below (Johnston and Viadero, 2000):

Table 1: Cycle of School Choice



By conducting in-depth interviews with eight parent partners in the study, the

researcher gained insight into parents' perceptions of race and academic success in an affluent educational setting.

The intent of employing the phenomenology method in qualitative research was to better allow for the story of the participants to be told and the essence of their experience to be felt by the reader.

Statement of the Problem

Public school districts across the nation are facing the glaring dilemma of racial achievement disparities between African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students and their White and Asian peers, whereas White and Asian students are outperforming Black, Brown, and American Indian students on standardized tests (Haycock, 2004). The racial achievement gap is not limited to school systems in lower socioeconomic settings—this gap also persists in suburban schools where skill, will, resources, and opportunities are available to promote academic success (Steele, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was divided into two primary focus areas: practical and theoretical. The practical focus of this study was to illuminate the phenomenon of the racial achievement gap in an affluent educational setting to uncover processes, patterns, policies and systems which contribute to depressing the academic identity of students of color in order and to provide direction to promote the achievement of non-Asian minority students. Central to the theoretical focus of the study was to examine the detrimental effects of stereotype threat and social mirroring in the development of a positive

academic identity among students of color—even under the supposed positive atmosphere of a resource laden educational facility.

Research Questions

Aside from the broad question of, “Why does an achievement gap exist between minority and non-minority students in affluent socioeconomic educational settings?” questions central to this study explored the following:

Research Question # 1—What perceptions were held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school?

Sub-questions for consideration are:

1. Did parents hold beliefs regarding the achievement of non-minority versus minority students?
2. Did perceptions of socioeconomic status matter to families of color in affluent neighborhoods?

Research Question # 2—How did parents, specifically parents of color, experience an affluent middle school, where a racial achievement gap exists and what meaning did the experience have for the parent partners? Essentially, did parents of color experience the school differently than White families?

Sub-questions for consideration are:

1. Were the family’s attitudes toward and involvement in the school a factor in student success?

2. What did it mean to be a parent of a student of color in an affluent school setting and how is the nature of the experience articulated and felt by the parent partners? (Van Manen, 1990, p.42).

Research Question # 3—How were rituals and routines different and/or the same for families of color versus White families?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were provided to assist the reader in accessing the context of the study. While mainstream definitions may be provided through traditional denotative methods, the definitions provided in this section were specific to the context of this study.

Academic Success—For the purpose of this study, academic success describes proficient or above ratings on standardized assessments.

Achievement Gap—The phenomena of racial disparities between African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students and their White and Asian counterparts according to standardized achievement test data (Haycock, 2006).

Affluent Educational Setting— The researcher defined this identification according to an average cost of housing (over \$250,000), average household income (above \$75,000), and a low percentage of students identified as needing free or reduced lunch (below 10%).

Colorblindness—A colorblind society is one in which racial or ethnic group membership is irrelevant to the way individuals are treated, (Rist,1981), “The first of these perspectives was given voice by Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan in his

famous call for a colorblind society in his dissenting opinion in Plessy v. Ferguson” (Schofield, 2006, p. 274).

Critical Consciousness—The awareness and respect of ethnic and cultural differences between races along with a hyper-awareness of social constructs which deny a race access to the systems at large, as well as a keen ability to recognize distorted representations, and cultural and institutionalized racism, (Tatum, 1997).

Critical Race Theory—Critical Race Theory (CRL) asserts the discrimination and subordination of a racial group through legislation, laws, policies, and procedures (etc.) by the people in power, rather than the development of legislation, laws, policies, and procedures according to principal and precedent, (Delgado, 1995)

Effective Teacher—According to Kati Haycock, Director of The Educational Trust, an effective teacher is identified by longitudinal data that indicates academic growth for all students (Haycock, 1998).

Essence—“The essence of phenomenon is universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon,” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

Institutionalized Racism—The institutionalization of racist policies and practices, which in turn provide greater access to social, cultural, and economic resources and decision-making, (Tatum, 1997).

Phenomenology—Phenomenology as a research methodology ultimately seeks to describe “basic lived” experience (Creswell, 1998). As a research method it is the study of essences. Research using phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings in our

everyday existence. Its primary aim is "the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (van Manen, 1990, p. 12).

Racism—A system of advantage based on race or “Prejudice + Power”, (Tatum, 1997)

Social Mirroring—Self-image of minorities according to world view—to include media messages, stereotypes, and community messages (Banks, 2004)

Stereotype Threat—“This theory assumes that sustained school success requires identification with school and its sub domains,” thus suggesting that when a racial groups identifies with stereotypes regarding academic achievement there is a threat of accepting derogatory stereotypes which supersede and interfere with academic success (Banks, 2004).

White Privilege—Societal privileges received by Whites—with or without their knowledge of receipt—often associated with the ability to be viewed as an individual separate and apart from being White, (McIntosh, 1990).

Methodology

Studies which employ phenomenology ultimately seek to uncover meaning in our everyday existence. Its primary aim is "the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 12). In this case, phenomenological methodology was selected in order to examine how parents feel about and experience the phenomenon of race and academic achievement in a suburban middle school. By examining the essence of the experiences, the researcher sought to understand, more holistically, the impact of the phenomenon on the academic achievement of students of color.

Organization of the Study

The study sought the participation of eight “parent partners” with varied ethnic and educational backgrounds and a student in attendance at Red Oak Middle School (in an affluent Colorado suburb). Each parent partner’s student had indicators demonstrating academic struggle—for the purpose of this study achievement was determined according to grades and/or the Colorado Student Achievement Program (CSAP).

The role of the structured interview was imperative to this study. Each parent partner was asked a series of questions about their experiences and views regarding educational success the how their student is perceived at Red Oak Middle School. Parents were also asked questions regarding their role and involvement as parents in the educational success of their child. Questions regarding race were of specific importance to the study since the overall purpose of the study was to glean insight into the experience of students of color in an affluent middle school where a racial achievement gap still exists among a perceived plethora of supports. These questions were reviewed by another scholar in the field, tested in a pilot study, and reviewed by a University of Denver, College of Education faculty member. Through the review process the questions have been deemed appropriate.

Given that the purpose of the study could be divided into two primary focus areas: practical and theoretical it was important to organize the questions to eradicate insight into both domains.

The practical focus of this study was to illuminate the phenomenon of the racial achievement gap in an affluent educational setting in order to uncover processes, patterns, policies and systems which contribute to depressing the academic identity of students of

color in order and to provide direction to promote the achievement of non-Asian minority students. Central to the theoretical focus of the study is to examine the detrimental effects of stereotype threat and social mirroring in the development of a positive academic identity among students of color—even under the supposed positive atmosphere of a resource laden educational facility. The researcher developed questions, which examined these domains.

Information gleaned from this study proved valuable to parents of students of color, children, educators and other achievement gap researchers looking for answers and solutions.

Summary

Districts throughout the nation are vigilantly searching for answers to and strategies to address the academic disparities between groups of students gleaned from standardized test and other academic data. Minimal studies have been conducted to investigate disparities between racial groups, which exist amongst affluent educational settings. Of primary importance, was the experience of people directly affected by racial academic achievement gaps.

This study, through a phenomenological lens, attempted to capture the essence of that experience for a select number of participants, leading to the basic and fundamental description of an achievement gap and its meaning for parents and students in an affluent middle school.

Chapter Two framed the research basis for the study through an in-depth review of the literature related to achievement gap and its history, socioeconomic factors,

cultural nuances, and teacher effectiveness with all students. The related literature was reviewed and examined to determine the potential impacts this phenomenon has on parents and students in an affluent middle school, isolating race to further understand the racial implications of the achievement gap.

A description of phenomenological methodology as it relates to the study was defined in Chapter Three, and includes an abbreviated literature review related to phenomenological research. This synthesis was included to assist the reader, who may not be entirely familiar with phenomenological methods, in better understanding the design of inquiry. The chapter also includes information on the process for selection of participants, the protocols for gathering and analyzing data, and the method for determining the validity of the study.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

“One way you can read all this stuff is that this has been a big problem at least since the 1950’s and probably a lot longer than that,” states Harvard researcher Christopher Jencks (1998, p. 42).

Introduction

In sifting through the plethora of research, one thing was glaring—educators have been puzzled over the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students for decades. Theories are abundant, from the works of Ruby Payne and her Framework for Understanding Poverty, to studies on Teacher Quality by Kati Haycock with Ed Trust, and Beverly Tatum and the internalization of messages in the “social mirror”.

The review of literature, specific to this study, found that much of the research conducted in this area has merged academic achievement and low socioeconomic status. For this study, the researcher attempted to isolate race by selecting participants associated with an affluent suburban middle school. Literature related to the research methodology was discussed in Chapter Three.

Achievement Gap in Higher Socioeconomic Educational Settings

Although the research of these gurus and areas of study have implicated various contributing factors to cause an achievement gap, little research has been conducted in

the area of the achievement gap in affluent educational settings. Only two major studies have been conducted in this area.

The late researcher and Professor of Anthropology at Berkley, John Ogbu, took a qualitative approach when he painted a portrait of young Black high school students in an affluent suburban neighborhood in Ohio. Ogbu conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of students at all grade levels to determine factors contributing to the academic achievement and social experiences by African American students in higher socioeconomic brackets. Ogbu identified several reasons for poor academic achievement among the African American students in the Shaker Heights community as well as strategies for the educational promotion of African American students in affluent educational settings, (Ogbu, 2003).

Among the contributors to the academic achievement gap between White and Black students, Ogbu suggested the pervasive internalization of White beliefs and perceptions towards African Americans as a cancer to cultural and racial identity among Black children that ultimately results in poor academic performance.

Some school practices reinforced the internalization of White beliefs that Blacks are not as intelligent as White people. These practices include teacher expectations, leveling, and disproportionate representation of Blacks in special education. We have found our research in Oakland, San Francisco, and Stockton, California, evidence of the contribution of these school factors to the belief by Black people, including students that they are not as intelligent as White people (Ogbu, 2003, p. 74).

Ogbu found these phenomena to ring true in the affluent community of Shaker Heights, Ohio as well. Students in the study commented on their perceptions of leveled class settings, where as college preparatory courses were vastly populated by White students, while Black students were vastly underrepresented (2003).

Students further commented on the perceptions of their teachers with regards to their intellectual capacity and ability whereas they felt the limitations of their skin color. Ogbu referred to this internalization as a result of a Pygmalion construct playing out in the schools and classrooms in Shaker Heights. In a Pygmalion construct the relational construct is reciprocal. In this case teachers and students internalized a set of derogatory academic beliefs towards African American Students.

Shaker Heights informants also reported that some teachers, both Black and White, assumed that Black students could not perform like White students. Those who performed well were perceived as “exceptional.” Black students were aware of the assumptions and to some degree internalized them, and this contributed to their low performance (Ogbu, 2003, p. 112).

Ronald Ferguson of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University conducted a study involving and analyzing the minority student achievement data of fifteen middle- and upper-income school districts across the country. The purpose of his study, similar to Ogbu, was to better understand the educational experiences and trends of achievement of minority students of higher socioeconomic settings, (Ferguson, 2002).

Historically, we have tried to seek answers and provide relief for students living in lower income neighborhoods, attending poorly funded and highly segregated schools. Taking a more quantitative approach in seeking answers to the racial achievement gap, Ronald Ferguson found an even greater achievement gap exists between minority and non-minority student in suburban middle- and upper-income neighborhoods. Ferguson cites the following statistics:

More minority students attend suburban schools than popularly believed; in 2000, 33 percent of African-American children, 45 percent of Hispanic children, 54 percent of Asian children, and 55 percent of white children lived in suburban areas, and the attended both poor, segregated schools

and excellent racially integrated schools with many resources (2002, p. 13).

Although the spotlight has avoided upper and middle class schools in suburban school districts, the above cited census data paints a compelling picture. It is time to shift the focus. While Ferguson's report did not indicate statistically significant racial differences in motivation or effort among students in affluent communities, however, there were significant differences when it came to home resources, skill level and student-teacher relationships (2002).

Poverty and the Achievement Gap

Second to race, often the discrepancies in achievement are attributed to socioeconomic factors. According to 2002 U.S. Census data, 27 percent of Hispanic children and 30 percent of black children live in poverty, compared with about 13 percent of white children (Proctor, Dalaker, 2002).

In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a longitudinal study on the long-term effects of early childhood education (Lee, Burkam, 2002). The study asserted that the average cognitive score of pre-kindergarten children in the lowest socioeconomic bracket was significantly lower than the average score of students in the highest socioeconomic bracket.

The composition of these socioeconomic brackets was closely tied to race; 34 percent of black children and 29 percent of Hispanic children were in the lowest socioeconomic bracket, compared with just nine percent of white students (Lee, Burkam, 2002).

Additionally, studies have shown that dropout rates tend to be higher for children who live in poverty. One study from the U.S. Department of Education indicated that children living in the lowest income brackets were six times more likely to dropout than their peers in the top 20 percent of the family income bracket (2000).

For decades researchers have tried to identify why race and class are such strong predictors of students' academic success. Jonathon Kozol has immersed himself into the schools poverty stricken neighborhoods across America. In his book, *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol explores the connection between the adverse living conditions of students, the government and school systems and student academic performance. In his heart wrenching portrayal of the school system in East St. Louis, Illinois, Kozol states, "Anyone who visits in the schools of East St. Louis, even for a short time, comes away profoundly shaken. These are innocent children, after all. They have done nothing wrong. They have committed no crime. They are too young to have offended us in any way at all. One searches for some way to understand why a society as rich and, frequently, as generous as ours would leave these children in their penury and squalor for so long -- and with so little public indignation. Is this just a strange mistake of history? Is it unusual? Is it an American anomaly?" (1992, 124). Later in the text, Kozol asserts that indeed it is not an anomaly, but an institutionalized segregation of races by class constructs.

One cannot mention the academic achievement gap and neglect to mention the work of Dr. Ruby Payne. In her "must-read" book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Payne attempts to describe the cultural differences and social constructs embedded in poverty, the middle class and the wealthy (1996).

The development of Payne's framework and the explicit description of the "hidden rules" provide important insight in understanding why and why not certain people are behaviorally appropriate and thereby successful according to social norms on one construct versus another. The following description of the "hidden rules" is key to understanding her framework:

Knowledge of hidden rules is crucial to whatever class in which the individual wishes to live. Hidden rules exist in poverty, in middle class, and in wealth, as well as in ethnic groups and other units of people. Hidden rules are about the salient, unspoken understandings that cue the members of the group that this individual does or does not fit... There are hidden rules about food, dress, decorum, etc. Generally, in order to successfully move from one class to the next, it is important to have a spouse or mentor from the class to which you wish to move to model and teach you the hidden rules (p. 9).

Payne describes the differences between financial and emotional differences as a way to understand what areas need to be emphasized and capitalized and what areas cannot be controlled and thereby set aside. An example of resourcefulness, according to Payne, is a school in a poor neighborhood may not have the same access to the capital resources in a middle- or upper-class school; however the emotional resources that comes with positive role models can be found anywhere (p. 25).

Furthermore, Payne attempts to eliminate the idea that acquired skill and knowledge is directly related to the capacity to learn, basic intelligence. Payne suggests looking at teaching and learning for measurements of achievement, rather than relying on assessments that measure an acquired knowledge base that students in poverty may not have the same access to (p. 88).

Cultural Differences

An ideal held by many Americans includes a colorblind society, where an ethnic or racial group membership in any societal facet is irrelevant to their individual treatment or participation (Schofield, 2002). Proponents of a colorblind society argue that to acknowledge one's race or ethnicity may result in the promotion of division and discrimination for or against a group. Both of these results are undesirable according to societal standards. Further argument supporting this philosophy includes striving to ignore race or ethnicity completely in order to maintain an all-inclusive membership in society, whereas people are treated solely as individuals.

According to Psychologist Beverly Tatum, Ph.D., (*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* 1997), the idea of colorblindness is a farce which perpetuates the denial of ethnic and/or racial identity and pride.

As we progress further into the 21st century, we are finding ourselves in more diverse settings. According to the U.S. Department of Education the institution of education has been more impacted than any other system in America due to rapid demographic changes (2001). The fastest growing minority group is Hispanics. This trend accounts for a 7.1% increase in the Hispanic school population (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Although educators, in various class settings, have responded to demographic shifts by calling for culturally responsive curricula and non-biased assessments, Crystal A. Kuykendall, Ph.D. asserts that many individual teachers and administrators have resisted engaging in the change necessary to educate all children effectively, (Kuykendall, 2004).

According to Kuykendall, part of the resistance could be attributed to teacher attitudes. In her “Model for Understanding Teacher Expectations,” Kuykendall describes the cycle of expectations which ultimately lead to student internalization of messages. If a teacher has low expectations of students and further expect poor behavior, they send signals to students that suggest this. Students then internalize these messages and behave accordingly and ultimately go to extremes to avoid such teachers. “All too often, there is a reluctance on the teacher’s part to use educational programs or teaching techniques that will yield positive outcomes and enhance student motivation,” (p. 15). Kuykendall further suggests the default of many teachers that the problem lies in the student; therefore it is the student’s behavior, ability, race/ethnicity, or the student’s financial or family situation which determines their success and not a fault of the teacher, (p. 16).

Racial and cultural differences are indicators of bias held by teachers. Research points to the impact race, ethnicity and gender have on expectations of teachers. “Some teachers continue to hold lower expectations of Black and Hispanic youth and reveal these expectations by giving less praise, encouragement, attention, and interest to these youths,” (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 26). Kuykendall goes on to suggest, “Once teachers can deal effectively with student differences, they can augment and strengthen the academic self-image and motivation so vital to lifelong success,” (p. 27).

Black and Hispanic students, according to the research, develop their academic and behavioral self-image through the internalization of messages they receive in the “social mirror,” (Tatum, 1997). Often Black and Hispanic children will look to their peer group to define their values and self-worth since it is most often this group which has demonstrated acceptance, appreciation and approval for them when such adult

relationships fail to exist. “All too often, the maintenance of a positive ego and requisite self-respect for Black and Hispanic teens requires the support and solidarity of peer associations in the absence of other supportive adult relations,” (Kuykendall, 2004).

Consequently, the images they receive in school result in an academic self-esteem. Unfortunately, studies have shown a dramatic shift in the motivation and academic self-image of Black and Hispanic students as they progress through the education system, (Kuykendall, 2004).

Academic self-image is not the cause of poor academic achievement, but rather the result of a series of attitudes held and perpetuated by some teachers. According to the analysis conducted by associate professor and author, Gail Thompson in her book, *Through Ebony Eyes*, among these attitudes, held to identify and explain the achievement gap and academic differences between Black and Brown students with their White and Asian counterparts are:

- Deficit-Deprivation Theory—This theory describes a hierarchical system of intelligence which places Whites and Asians at the top and Black and Hispanic at the bottom
- Theory of Structural Inequality—This theory suggests that schools were designed to perpetuate class differences between African Americans and Whites, assuming African Americans are “represented among those at the lowest socioeconomic level,” (p. 14).
- Tracking—This theory examines the disproportionate representation of Black and Hispanic students in remedial classes as compared to White and Asian students placed in advanced courses.

- Theory of Discontinuity—This theory describes the Eurocentric emphasis placed on the positive aspects of European culture, “However, the same system has promoted the underachievement for many students of color by ignoring the strengths of their cultures,” (p. 16).
- Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome—This theory suggests that boys of color, specifically, may start out strong early in their academic careers, but by the fourth grade many have been “relegated to special education or labeled underachievers,” (p. 16).
- The “Acting White” Theory—This phenomenon describes what happened when Black and Brown students equate academic achievement with “Acting White”. This perception often leads to rebellion of that idea and ultimately poor academic achievement.
- Peer Pressure and the Lure of Street Life Theory—Researchers have used this theory to help explain poor academic performance. This theory suggests that education must compete with negative peer pressure and the allure of street life.
- Parents Are at Fault Theory—This ideology points to lack of parental involvement by Black and Hispanic parents as the culprit for poor academic performance. This theory is two-fold to include teacher beliefs versus the beliefs held by parents, (Thompson, 2004).

John Ogbu describes the disparities as part of the innate differences embedded in African American and Hispanic cultures and White culture. Ogbu points to

three major factors, specific to the cultural conflict within the African American community as compared to Whites:

Black students face a “triple quandary” in the realm of culture and schooling. The triple quandary is (a) that Black students simultaneously have to deal with different cultural experiences, namely, European American culture and African American culture, which is rooted in African culture; (b) cultural hegemony that arises from their social, economic and political oppression as minorities; and self-contradictory socialization of Black children(Ogbu, 2003, p. 267).

The Influence of the Teacher

Scholars have diligently investigated variable causes to the racial achievement gap. Recently, researchers have explored the effect that certain in-school factors have on student achievement such as class size and access to resources. However, one in-school factor that was overwhelmingly found in the literature to have a significant impact on student achievement was teacher quality, (The Teaching Commission, 2004). It would seem to be a default of the design according to The Education Trust, a Washington-based research and advocacy organization. In their studies, The Education Trust made the connection explicit— that many minority students attend inner-city schools, which are often under funded and as a result, those students tend have access to fewer resources, have fewer high-quality teachers, and receive poorer-quality instruction (Peske, Haycock, 2006).

One could easily assert that effective teachers matter. Even teachers themselves could not dispute that. However, what defines a quality teacher? Kati Haycock, educational researcher and Director of The Education Trust, shares that “effective teachers” are defined by the student achievement data they effect (Haycock, 1998).

Although, accountability, as measured by standardized test data, is key to identifying which teachers are moving students successfully and which teachers still need support, Albert Shanker, leader of the American Federation of Teachers, asserts the importance of beginning with the end in mind. “Unless you start with a very heavy emphasis on accountability, not end with it, you’ll never get a system with all the other pieces falling into place.”

Albert Shanker, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, argues the importance of imparting a “value-added” accountability system to determine teacher effectiveness along with teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities for teachers. This system would allow for district and school leaders to place teachers accordingly. Simply put, “...making sure that low-income children and children of color get the teachers they need to reach state standards,” states Kati Haycock, (1998). She continues to add, “Research now demonstrates unequivocally that such children will achieve if they are taught by highly effective teachers. Once again, identifying such teachers by value-added data is surely a better way than by certification status, years of experience or even college major.”

Another critical factor to student achievement is teacher expectations for student learning. According to a study by researchers at The Education Trust, teacher expectations ranked amongst the top nine elements crucial to academic success (Haycock, 1998). This study asserted that students would rise to the level they are expected to. Thus, high expectations yield high results and contrary low expectations will yield dismal results. In a presentation to educators in the Willow Brook School District (K. Haycock, Public Presentation, July, 2006), Haycock states, “AP (Advanced

Placement) should be the default curriculum,” as opposed to leveling students on an ability continuum. She goes on to say that the argument that certain students will fail can be debated as many of these students are underperforming in their remedial classes due to lack of engagement.

In his ethnographic study of the Black White achievement gap in the affluent Shaker Heights community in Ohio, John Ogbu documents the perceptions of various Black students in relation to teacher expectations (2003). Many of the students interviewed and observed during the study indicated that teachers, regardless of their race, expected Black students to under-perform and further expected them to be disengaged academically and to be “behavior problems in the classroom. Furthermore, they were “surprised” and over complimentary when Black students did well in the classroom.

In summarizing the recurring themes in educational research about teacher expectations, Gail L. Thompson (Through Ebony Eyes, 2004), listed five:

1. Teacher expectations significantly influence the quality of learning opportunities provided to the students.
2. Teacher expectations about students are affected by factors that have no basis in fact and may persist even in the face of contrary evidence.
3. Assumptions about students’ aptitude are difficult to change.
4. Teachers tend to believe that white students and some Asian American students are smarter than other students.
5. Teachers who feel less confident about their teaching ability are more likely than others to have low expectations for students.

Often the low expectations of African American and Hispanic students is minimized or attributed to factors outside of the school. These factors include: socioeconomic status; parent involvement; family structure, and/or educational attitudes of the children. Thompson suggests that some teachers attribute poor

academic achievement of Black and Brown students to “Laziness, apathy, and a lack of interest in learning...” (p. 234). Thompson suggests we replace these attitudes with the likes of the following:

- That all children can learn
- That African American children are not tabula rasa (blank slates); they arrive at school with cultural capital and talents that should be built upon
- That most African American parents do care about their children and often assist them academically in ways that are invisible to teachers
- That it is the teachers’ job to do their best with all students; it is not their job to judge students’ culture, family and so forth
- That it is not wrong to recognize racial and cultural differences among individuals; when it comes to viewing people, colorblindness does not exist (teachers who claim they are colorblind are merely in denial)
- That most African American children do want to learn, and when teachers seek the best in them that is usually what they find (Thompson, 2003).

Stereotype Threat and Social Mirroring

Stereotype threat occurs when the racial (and gender) awareness and identity of people of color results in a rejection of a positive racial self-image, and in an acceptance (at times a preference) towards mainstream White societal establishments and norms.

Stereotype threat can be relegated as a looming menace in the air ready to pounce on the achievement of students of color. The generational impact of stereotype threat has proved to be a blow to the academic success of students of color (Steele, 1992). Part of the academic identity of students comes directly from parents, however, if a parent has an innate perception that schools are designed to support the mainstream values of a white society, while neglecting and rejecting the specific needs of their student’s academic identity, the threat of the stereotype of academic depression among students of color will

supersede educational success of their Black or Latino child (Banks, 2004). The threat to educational performance in an academic domain is particularly evident when all of the indicators point to success—when socioeconomic and cultural barriers are not pervasive. The answer is clear—the social psychological phenomenon, stereotype threat, obstructs a student of color’s identification with domains of academia. Furthermore, if the parents of students of color own identification with domains related to education have been slighted it somewhat nurtures the threat of defaulting to behaviors which are propagated by the stereotype (Steele, Aronson, 1994).

Youth of color are very sensitive to the dominant culture’s perception of them. In a recent study, Carola Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, and Fabienne Doucet set out to determine how minority youth internalized the perceptions of the dominant culture on their own race and heritage, hence the phenomena: Social Mirroring (Banks, 2004).

The construct of mirroring was coined by psycho-analyst D.W. Winnicott where as he asserts a child’s sense of self-worth and identity are profoundly impacted and shaped according to the “reflections mirrored back to [them] by their significant others.” Furthermore, Winnicott suggests this “mirror” is not limited to childhood, but that all human beings, regardless of age, are “dependent upon the reflection of themselves mirrored by others.” “Others” include the social world at large: peers; teachers; parents; siblings; people in the community; strangers; images in the media. “If the reflected image is generally positive, the individual (adult or child) will be able to feel that she is worthwhile and competent. If the reflection is generally negative, it is extremely difficult to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth,” (1967, p. 16)

According to a recent achievement gap study which investigated the social-psychological impact of the achievement gap is implied that the mere existence of the racial discrepancy between Black and Brown students and their White and Asian peers was enough to implicate poor academic performance, (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, Master, 2006).

The study concluded that the “risk of confirming a negative stereotype aimed at one's group could undermine academic performance in minority students by elevating their level of psychological threat,” especially in constructs which aim to measure success through “chronic” assessments of achievement, (2006, p. 29)

Summary

The ideas and theories presented in the literature related to the racial achievement gap helped form the framework for this study by highlighting some of the fundamental areas which may influence the educational experience for teachers and students in an affluent educational setting. The impacts related to the achievement gap, documented by previous studies, assisted in the data collection related to the experience and its meaning for the participant as well as the starting point from which the data was analyzed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

“Tell me a story. Tell me a story and you are sharing with me a part of yourself, an experience enlivened by your unique perspective. Tell me a story and you are partaking in humankind's most enduring pastime: conveying not just factual information but also the circumstances under which it was gained and the inspiration that gave it life,” (Ghalagher and Maher, 2004).

Introduction

Phenomenology as a research methodology ultimately seeks to describe “basic lived” experience (Creswell, 1998). As a research method it is the study of essences. "The essence of phenomenon is universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon," (Van Manen, 1990, p.10). Research using phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings in our everyday existence. Its primary aim is "the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 12). In this case, phenomenological methodology was selected in an attempt to examine and understand how parents felt about and experienced the phenomenon of race and academic achievement in a suburban middle school. By examining the essence of the experiences, the researcher seeks to understand, more holistically, the impact of the phenomenon.

Although there is evidence to indicate achievement gaps are not limited to poorer demographic areas, there has not been much research done in this area. In-depth interviews with eight parent partners were conducted to identify patterns of thinking and perceptions of academic success discrepancies between non-minority and minority

students in an effort to understand why an achievement gap exists where students have access to monetary resources and support that the poorer educational facilities lack.

Parents are a keystone in the education of students of color. Clearly their insight and input are critical factors in helping students reach their fullest academic potential. The basis of this study was to capture the essence and the personal reality of parents with students in an affluent suburban middle school. Furthermore, this study aimed to gain insight as to why the phenomenon of a racial achievement gap exists, even when, for all intents and purposes, every resource is available for success. Finally, this study attempted to identify patterns that will assist in guiding further research. Overall, however, the primary charge of the study was to answer the driving question: Why does an achievement gap exist between minority and non-minority students in affluent socioeconomic educational settings?

In scouring the research, it was determined that the bulk of achievement gap studies have included such factors as: socioeconomic status; school funding and resources; parent involvement; single parent homes; mobility; and access to preschool. Although, these are all important variables, this study aimed to disaggregate those factors from the picture, set them aside and concentrate on racial differences regarding the internalization of social messages and their affect on student achievement, similar to the research of two primary predecessors to this study: Ronald Ferguson (2002) and John Ogbu. (2003).

Research Questions

Aside from the broad question of “Why does an achievement gap exist between minority and non-minority students in affluent socioeconomic educational settings?” questions central to this study were deliberate in exploring answers to the following: These questions have been designed to provide insight into perceptions of race and academic success even in high performing schools with a plethora of resources.

Research Question # 1—What perceptions were held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school?

Sub-questions for consideration are:

1. Did parents hold beliefs regarding the achievement for non-minority versus minority students?
2. Did perceptions of socioeconomic status matter to families of color in affluent neighborhoods?

Research Question # 2—How did parents, specifically parents of color, experience an affluent middle school, where a racial achievement gap exists and what meaning did the experience have for the parent partners? Essentially, did parents of color experience the school differently than White families?

Sub-questions for consideration are:

1. Were the family’s attitudes toward and involvement in the school a factor in student success?
2. What does it mean to be a parent of a student of color in an affluent school setting and how is the nature of the experience articulated and felt by the parent partners? (Van Manen, 1990, p.42)

Research Question # 3—How are rituals and routines different and/or the same for families of color versus White families?

Research Design

Qualitative Research

The primary objective of the researcher in this study was to construct a rich description of the *essence* residing in each parent partner's unique perceptions of the educational experience at an affluent suburban middle school whereas a racial achievement gap exists. The rich portrayal of the parent partners is intended to take the reader on a journey of reflection resulting in a deeper understanding of the unique complexities of parents and students of color in an affluent educational setting. Consequently, a qualitative research approach was the best vehicle for building a rich and holistic portrayal of the lived experience and unique perceptions parents of color in an affluent educational setting—the usage of in-depth interviews in a natural setting and analysis of language patterns assisted the researcher in thoroughly understanding the essences of the parent partners' experiences, (Creswell, 1998).

Justification for Qualitative Research

Implementation of qualitative research is entirely defensible based on the nature of the questions, the natural setting, timeliness for understanding perceptions held by parents regarding race and academic achievement, the researcher's role as an "active learner" (Creswell, 1998), and the intentionality in understanding the complexities of an essence.

Research questions framed through “what” and “how” lent themselves to a qualitative research design, whereas quantitative research questions are largely guided by “why” (VanManen, 1990). The questions guiding this study were: *What* perceptions are held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school? *What* was the affluent middle school experience like for parents and students of color and what meaning did the experience have for the parent partners?

Phenomenology

Literature Review: Phenomenology

An extensive literature review of educational research was conducted in order to determine the areas of emphasis within achievement gap research as well as identify the shallow representation of racial achievement gap research in affluent educational settings was conducted. Information was gathered and categorized according to an evolving criterion, based on topical elements inclusive within the body of the questions to the study.

Defined, phenomenology is, “the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it,” (Van Manen 1999, p.9). Phenomenology seeks to gain insight into the personality “everyday experiences” as they are lived. Furthermore, the word phenomena is plural for phenomenon which is defined as a fact, occurrence, or circumstance that is observable or has been observed; an appearance or immediate object of awareness in

experience; impressive or extraordinary (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).

Creswell's description of phenomenology, although simple in form, fit the intent of the study best and thus guided the structure and direction of the study (Creswell, 1988). In his description, Creswell, states, "a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experience for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon" (p. 51)." In this case, the study seeks to examine the phenomenon of racial perceptions and the relational outcome to academic success of minority students in an affluent educational middle school. It was important to maintain the integrity of this description as encapsulating the essence of the experience was central to the study.

German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, often referred to as the "father of phenomenology," defined phenomenological research as a process that allows for the viewing of an object or event within the context of the perceptions of the observer. In essence, seeing and hence capturing the event through their eyes in order to gain insight to the "truth". Husserl's description of phenomenology was devoted to the description of events, things, etc. rather than the invention of theories. Husserl believed true phenomenology uses "pure" description to discover meaning and/or the essence of the experience or object, (Scott, 2003).

Central to this study was the importance of understanding how parents and students experienced the impact of an achievement gap, specifically in an affluent educational setting via their perceptions. Since this study is founded on the role of race and its relationship to the experience, commensurability is central in understanding the role of bracketing in the study. Commensurability specifically plays a part in the

relationship between certain culture studies and phenomenology. The obvious connection between lived experience and the “experience of culture” indicates that social and cultural roles would indeed influence a personal experience. This is especially significant in this study since the role of race is directly related to the experience of the parent partners (Van Manen, 2000).

Critical theory was particularly important to this study as it was directly related to the understanding of social constructs which are evident in philosophical notions in oppression and studies of dominant culture. A dialectical synthesis of philosophy occurs researchers attempt to understand society through a scientific lens.

According to Van Manen,

Critical Theory has identified itself with the Marxist legacy of attempting to forge a dialectical synthesis of philosophy and a scientific understanding of society. Some features of this synthesis are:

- 1. an appeal to a widened notion of rationality,*
- 2. a resistance to all forms of domination,*
- 3. an orientation to praxis, and*
- 4. the centrality of the concept of emancipation, (2002).*

Of particular interest, research which has a critical theory in the realm of education, aims to promote critical consciousness and attempts to eradicate institutional constructs which perpetuate oppressive structures and social inequalities Dixon and Rousseau, 2006).

Critical consciousness and culture were also a central component of the study, the importance of bracketing and/or epoche became even more important. Renowned psychotherapist and author, Clark Moustakas refers to the usage of epoche as the ability

to set aside preconceived opinions and thoughts based on your own relation to the experience. According to Moustakas, entering inquiry with an open-mind allows for a more authentic interpretation of the experience, (1995).

Simply stated, Creswell refers to the importance of bracketing best, “In order to understand the phenomenon through the voices of the informants, the concept of epoche is central, where the researcher brackets his or her own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon,” (1998).

A Phenomenological Study

The researcher arrived at phenomenological research design as the intent of the study was to attempt to capture the essence of how a racial achievement gap is experienced in an affluent middle school through the eyes of parent perception. The purpose of the study was unique, in that it was not designed to develop theories or test strategies, but rather to present the achievement gap as an experience as it was perceived by nine parent partners that lived the experience as parents in an affluent, suburban middle school. In a recent achievement gap study the “experience of the achievement gap” was implied as a social-psychological result of systems in which a racial achievement gap exists (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master, 2006).

Data Collection

Two primary resources were used to obtain information from the parent partners. The first was a demographic survey (Appendix A). This survey was used to demonstrate

the broad composite of participants in the study. A matrix summary of the information is included in this chapter.

The in-depth interview (Appendix C), is the chief resource for obtaining data for this study. On-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the eight parent partners. Van Manen describes the in-depth interview almost in a voyeuristic manner, suggesting that through a properly conducted interview, the reader almost feels as though they are witnessing the experience themselves, (1990).

Assumptions of the Study

A broad assumption of the researcher was that African American and Hispanic students in the affluent area of Red Oak Middle School were less impacted by socioeconomic factors and school funding. However, the fact remains that an achievement gap still remains in higher socioeconomic areas, thereby indicating other factors separate and apart from socioeconomic ones. Although parents were the primary participants of the study, parent involvement and single family homes were not a primary focus of this study either, however, issues specific to these situations still exists in the Red Oak area.

A major assumption of the study was that by choosing an affluent educational setting this will disaggregate socioeconomic status and the issues relative to that will help

to isolate factors related solely to race and expectations held of Black and Hispanic students by teachers.

Selection of Participants

One of the primary foci of the study was to investigate the similarities and differences in racial perceptions and the relationship to academic success between eight different parents of students with varied racial and/or ethnic backgrounds.

The researcher examined these perceptions through a qualitative design, whereas eight, two-part, in-depth interviews were conducted. The researcher sought to obtain the essence of each parent partner's experience of the phenomenon in order to uncover the meaning or structure of these perceptions and how it relates to student achievement.

Participants for the study were selected by the researcher through referrals made by deans, administrators and counselors of Red Oak Middle School. The participant sample includes eight Red Oak Middle School parents of students with varied racial and cultural backgrounds, these include: one White parent with bi-racial children; two White parents with White children; three Hispanic parents with Hispanic children; and three Black parents with Black children. Six of the nine participants are homeowners in the Red Oak Middle School catchment area, the other three have used a School of Choice process to obtain attendance at Red Oak. Specifically, the criteria to participate set forth by the researcher included parents of underperforming students as indicated by grades and/or standardized assessment data.

Furthermore, in order to support the reliability of the study, the researcher conducted one pilot study with a single father of an African American male student (Parent Partner "P"). His student attends a nearby middle school with similar

demographic and achievement data. As part of the pilot study, Parent Partner “P” participated in the demographic survey, two interview sessions and two follow-up conversations. Additionally, the researcher created full descriptions from the transcripts of the interview sessions. In the margins of the descriptions the researcher noted patterns of language to determine the effectiveness of the instrument.

The following table indicates the parent partner demographics as documented in their demographic survey, (Appendix A).

Table 2: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Parent Partner	Age	Own or Rent	Ed. Level	Total Household Income	Marital Status	Race/Ethnicity	Race/Ethnicity of Child(ren)	School of Choice to Red Oak
Misty	40	Own	BA in progress	45,000	Single	White	Bi-Racial	No
Sally	42	Own	MA	Over 100	Married	White	White	No
Harry	43	Own	BA	Over 100	Married	White	White	No
Justina	37	Own	BA	Over 100	Married	Black	Black	Yes
Diego	45	Own	HS	75,000	Married	Hispanic	Hispanic	Yes
Marilyn	35	Own	MA	Over 100	Married	Hispanic	Hispanic	Yes
Pedro	35	Own	BS	Over 100	Married	Hispanic	Hispanic	Yes
Delfina	29	Own	BS	55,000	Single	Black	Black	Yes

Pilot Study

Upon approval from the University of Denver Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) to move forward with the study, a pilot study was conducted that involved an African American parent (Parent P), from a neighboring middle school with similar demographics.

The interview questions were tested with Parent P at their residence. After the interview was held Parent P was asked to give his opinions and suggestions for further questions and possible revisions to the instrument as it stood. Parent P felt that the

questions held substantial weight and thus endorsed the instrument in its entirety. However, after, listening to the tapes I took out the questions regarding perceptions of education in the district, state, and nation. I felt that the questions and subsequent answers were too broad and did not truly glean any insight into the participant's experience with Red Oak. Afterward, Parent P received a card of appreciation for his participation in the pilot study. Furthermore, his autonomy and confidentiality of his answers were assured.

Interestingly enough, however, the usage of the researcher's laptop computer, proved to not be successful. The recordings of the Parent P were muffled and difficult to understand in many places. During the second part of the interview, a small, portable recording device was used and proved to yield much better recording results. This process proved to be beneficial. Through the process of listening and reflection the importance of conducting a pilot study was evidence of the value in testing before trudging ahead.

The Interviews

A primary source for the design of the study was *The Handbook for Phenomenological Research in Education* by Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, and Mulderij, (1983). The authors assert that raw data for any phenomenological study are the descriptions of the experience as it was lived by the subject. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher sought to glean the humanistic attitudes, feelings, beliefs, judgments, and motives as an important means of data collection, (1983). Thus a primary role of the researcher was to always remember that perceptions are reality.

Participants were guided through a series of questions. Although the interview questions were set by the researcher, the interviews also allowed for the participants to expound upon their ideas, thoughts and feelings as they occurred within the context of the interviews.

Throughout the study, the intent remained, to illustrate an accurate picture of the perceptions of the participants. In an effort to minimize skewed data, hypotheses will not be shared with participants prior to the interviews.

The eight parent participants were invited to participate in the study by letter (Appendix B). The letters of invitation include the purpose of the study, anticipated benefits, a statement offering the participants to ask questions and to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as information about the researcher relationship to the university.

The interview questions specific to this study have been influenced from cited texts in the literature. These questions have been divided into two parts, Session One and Session Two (Appendix C and D). Questions specific to Session One are asked for the purpose of rapport and trust building between the researcher and the participants. Questions specific to Session Two are more sensitive and subjective in nature, and include a poem from Ronald Ferguson, *Transformation* (2002), which expresses the impact of a racial achievement gap through the eyes of a child (Appendix E). This poem was selected for two primary reasons: to provide a context of the achievement gap that was easy to understand and relate to; and secondly, to personalize the achievement gap for the participants.

Furthermore, the questions specific to Session Two were aimed to provide insight to the perceptions of race and academic success of Black and Brown students at Red Oak Middle School.

Interviews were held in pre-arranged locations, which are both convenient and comfortable for the participants. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed for further analysis.

Transcripts were analyzed by the researcher to evidence emerging patterns in the language used by the participants. The essence of the experience was captured through the synthesis of emergent themes and patterns and further developed into theme summaries.

Once the descriptions were developed, the researcher provided copies to the participants to check for accuracy of the interpretation of their perceptions. After accuracy was established by all participants, the descriptions will be cross-referenced to explore commonalities and glaring differences in the experiences between the participants.

The participants were contacted by the researcher for a follow-up phone conversation. The intent of this conversation was to share common themes and variances in the experiences as a whole.

Treatment of the Data

Data was collected with the usage of a handheld recorder and immediately transcribed following the interviews. Once all of the interviews were transcribed, the researcher looked for repeated language indicating importance of information.

Analysis of the Data

The intent of the individual descriptions was to synthesize the experience as it is perceived by the participants. Through data analysis, it was supposed that commonalities would emerge while still maintaining the distinction of each perceived reality.

The validity and accuracy of the descriptions were a key factor in analyzing the data. Therefore, the importance of sharing the final copies of the individual descriptions with the participants for reflection, comments and accuracy of meaning was fundamental in validating the responses were what they intended to say and mean.

Limitations of the Study

Because this is phenomenological study, the study was limited to the personal experiences and insights of the participants. Although participants were selected according to a set criterion, bias was always a potential limitation due to the fact the researcher had a prior relationship with all of the selected interviewees.

Additionally, although all participants received necessary education on the terms and history relative to the achievement gap phenomena, they may not recognize their part specifically. The information parents received was general and included the following: definitions of terms; information regarding NCLB and AYP; and the Ronald Ferguson poem.

A third limitation existed, due to the sensitive and subjective nature of the content, the study may have been limited if the participants become offended by the material, history, and nature of the achievement gap data provided.

Another real limitation was time. Since this study was in partial fulfillment for a doctorate degree there were time-constraints, it was important for the researcher to be mindful of the impending time-line.

Finally, since the investigator had a prior relationship with the parent partners and was a student of color herself, this could have led to a biased interpretation of the data, but on the other hand, it also assisted the researcher in understanding the essence of the experience as well as potential areas for exploration. A concerted effort was made to remain objective and unbiased during the collection and analysis of the data.

The Researcher

It is important for the reader to note, the researcher did have a prior relationship with all of the participants. While steps were taken to be objective, essentially to bracket, during the interview process, the risk of bias on the part of the interviewee was a potential limitation to the study. The researcher did not share her personal educational background with the parent partners prior to, nor during the interview, in order to keep the focus of the interview on the parents and not the researcher.

Summary

The phenomenological approach to this study invited a more intimate and true description of the achievement gap as an experience, while drawing on the perceptions and interpretations of the participants to provide further value and sensitivity. It was the hope of the researcher that a broader and deeper understanding of the impacts of the

achievement gap would manifest and would essentially further provide for future areas of research to be explored.

Chapter Four

Individual Profiles through Interviews

“You don't really understand human nature unless you know why a child on a merry-go-round will wave at his parents every time around - and why his parents will always wave back,” (Tammeus, 2009).

Introduction

Through my, somewhat cathartic, journey as an educator I have been fascinated with achievement gap studies. While the theories were abundant, I couldn't help but wonder if families of color experienced school differently than White and Asian families did—in the same building. Although not pure, I drew a parallel to Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, (1859). Dickens, being a champion for underserved in society, and sensitive to social injustice, criticized the gap between the impoverished and the aristocracy of France and warned Britain against causing the perpetual pattern of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer in their own country. Similarly, during these post NCLB times, there is a fear that the gap between students of color and their White and Asian peers will widen—ensuring that access will continue to be denied to the underserved populations.

This curiosity led me to this study, whereas, I felt compelled to hear and tell the tale of diverse families. As we try to eradicate the racial predictability of student achievement, the parent aspect was of particular interest to me because their stories are limited in the research but a valuable perspective, nonetheless. I started talking to friends and colleagues about this idea years ago—the idea of hearing the “tales” of parents,

representative of historically privileged and disenfranchised racial populations. Everyone I spoke with had a story—either as a parent, as a student, in some cases as an educator. After I conducted my pilot study and heard the tale as presented by the interviewee, I had a renewed and intensified charge—to seek out and tell the stories of parents affected directly or indirectly by the racial achievement gap.

All of the interviews took place in the family home. I provided multiple location options to the parent partners, as I felt it important for them to control the environment and the location, but at the end of the day, each parent partner liked the convenience and comfort their home provided. These interviews were about them—their story, so my flexibility was imperative.

Another imperative contributor to the success of the interviews was the rapport that was established between me and the parent partners. Taking the time to go through the seemingly benign questions in session one had two major benefits. The first and probably largest contributor to building the rapport necessary to tackle the questions in the second session was the benefit was getting them comfortable with talking. All of the parent partners found the questions relevant and had enough schema to engage in a meaningful way with the questions. Additionally, trust was established between me and the parent partners, as they felt comfortable with the process and thus, provided extremely candid answers—as evidenced in the transcripts below. The second positive, and somewhat serendipitous, contributing element of the session one questions was the depth of information I received from the participants. I assumed that these questions would be important to laying the foundation for a positive rapport, but I was pleasantly surprised at the themes and patterns found embedded in the answers from session one.

The interviews varied in the time from one and a half to two and a half hours. The longest interviews were with Sally and Harry and Marilyn and Pedro, as they are not only parent partners, but married couples. Both couples felt comfortable with sharing the interview process with their spouse. The four individual interviews ranged from an hour and a half to two hours.

I expected session two of the interviews would be more emotionally laden than session one, and as expected that was indeed the case. Session two is bookmarked by two similar questions—after providing some definitions of terms and relevant achievement gap theories in research, the parent partners were first asked to discuss their perceptions of why the achievement gap exists, while the last question asked them to share their belief regarding if race matters in academic achievement.

Another interesting twist to the interviews was the inclusion of Ronald F. Ferguson's poetic tale of the achievement gap through the eyes of a young African American student, (2000). The poem *Transformation* (below), helped set the stage for some interesting conversations, as documented in the transcripts and significant statements at the end of Chapter Four.

All of the interviews were transcribed word-for-word. The data was analyzed according to a phenomenological process, specifically the analysis methodology process described in *The Handbook for Phenomenological Research in Education* (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, and Mulderij, 1983). Significant statements were extracted from the transcriptions for each parent partner, for all of the research questions, and organized according to the research questions.

APPENDIX E

TRANSFORMATION

I started Kindergarten
Two or three steps behind.
Some classmates understood things
That had never crossed my mind.

The kids who looked real different
Seemed so smart (I can recall).
Kids who looked and spoke like I did
Didn't seem so smart at all.

Of Course there were exceptions,
But on mostly any day,
It was clear those kids were doing best
And we were just okay.

Our teachers liked them better
'Cause they always knew the answers,
So kids like me just tried to be
Good athletes and great dancers.

The years went by quite slowly
And most things just stayed the same
Until our principal decided
It was time to change the game.

She hinted that the reason
When those other kids did best
Was that many knew already
More of what was on the tests.

They learned it from their parents
And from things they did at home.
Much that I and my companions
Never had the chance to know.

That had always been the pattern.
Yes for years it was the same.
But the standards movement came along
To finally change the game.

Now that there's a new prescription
For the way our school is run,
Everybody's got new goals to reach.
It's getting to be fun!

We're learning to get smarter
'Cause our teachers show us how.
They're all serious about it.
Everyone's important now!

Time in class is so exciting
That we seldom fool around.
We might make a joke in passing,
But we quickly settle down.

After school we do our homework.
Often in our study groups.
When we need them we have tutors
And they give us all the "scoops."

If there's something that's confusing,
It's a temporary thing
'Cause the teachers love to answer
All the questions that we bring.

All the counselors and teachers
Work with parents as a team
'Cause they share the same commitment
To connect us to our dreams

I love the way things are now.
It all just seems so right!
We still play sports and we're still cool,
But now we're also "bright."

That first day of kindergarten
Some of us were way behind.
But today I'm graduating
In a truly different time.

Ronald F. Ferguson, June 2000.

Misty Lincoln

Misty Lincoln is a White, single mother of two bi-racial girls in the Willow Brook School District. One of her daughters is a 6th grader at Red Oak Middle School; the other attends an elementary school within the same feeder system. Misty is currently finishing up a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice and is working full-time as an administrative assistant.

Her daughter, which attends Red Oak Middle School, is bi-racial and is indicated on all school records as Black. She has straight A's, but has historically performed Partially Proficient and Unsatisfactory on CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program). She plays on sport teams at Red Oak and is involved in a couple of after school clubs. She has had no incidents regarding poor behavior since attending Red Oak Middle School.

My interviews with Misty took place in her home. I wanted to ensure her comfort as well as accommodate her need to be with the girls since she does not have ready access to a baby sitter. Once we decided on her home, I was confident she would be open about her experiences with the school.

The three of them live in a newer townhome complex in the Red Oak area. The complex is friendly, clean and inviting. They live in a lovely corner townhome atop a two car garage. Inside, the home was simply elegant and comfortable. The artwork was evidently framed masterpieces from her daughters. We snacked and chatted for approximately an hour and 45 minutes at the kitchen island. We were interrupted a few times by one of the girls—usually with questions about homework.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the family roles in your household:

I am a single mom with 2 daughters and as a parent I have the children 70 percent of the time. My role as a parent is to provide everything—food, clothes, and schooling. I am currently enrolled in University of Phoenix to achieve my bachelors. My oldest is a 6th grader and my youngest a 2nd grader so we are all students in our household. Homework is a scheduled time every day.

I have 2 kids, they are sisters. Their relationship is very close, very helpful in all areas—in learning, in school, in games everything. I am a sibling of four and I am the youngest and my family is close. But the three of us at home, the girls and I, are very, very close. They are very close to their dad as well. I would consider them even closer to me.

The kids have a lot of extended family involvement they are with their dad, especially when they lived with him at their grandmother's house. So, there was extended family involvement when they were there, every other weekend. That has since changed, as of May 2008. That is no longer. So basically, on the dad's side of the family they were involved for about two years, heavily, heavily involved and then it just stopped. Then on my side, my parents are extremely involved with the upbringing of the children. We see them about every other weekend. Talk to them on the phone. They are a huge influence as far as their upbringing.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

I don't think in all honesty, that was ever important. I don't want to say it wasn't important, but is never a huge priority before I went to school. So now that I am currently and actively involved in my own academics so it's totally opened up a whole new window for me on how to structure my kids academically because my acknowledgement of and my acknowledgement on how important education is.

Going back to college 25 years later really opened my eyes to how important it is that the kids get every basic structure for a strong foundation. We are all doing homework every night. The kids are in bed by 8:30. We have homework from 7-8:30 every night. And if none of us have homework, than we are reading so none of us disturb the others that do have homework. Occasionally, my 6th grader will help our 2nd grader with reading. It's more of a priority in our household than it ever has been.

One of the things I don't do is rewards, because I don't want them to do it for something. I want them to learn to do it for themselves for them to get that satisfaction of their own accomplishments. That is another thing I have learned going back to school. Is just the reward of knowing you did by yourself, that no one helped you. I am really trying to embed that into the girls instead of, "If you get two "A's" I give you five bucks," or whatever the rewards system is. I really want them to invest in whatever they are studying and feel the joy of getting 18 out of 18 on the spelling test. You did that. You learned how to do that. I think in that way it will push them further in their higher education. Hopefully.

As far as consequences, no not really big in our house either, yet. Of course if the homework is forgotten they have a consequence at school that you need to talk to the teacher about it. You are held responsible. As far as consequences, my oldest has a learning disability. I need to keep her up as much as possible. Instead of pushing her down or punishing her for something because school is so hard for her. So I always ask her did you do the best you can do. She is usually a good judgment of her own self. No I forgot my homework at school, I have to be responsible. Ok well you have to pay for that now. You have to make it up, talk to the teacher, and take a zero.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

The feeder system in general is a plus. I like the fact that the schools work together. They communicate and their curriculum and their educational of course, and the fact that kids go to school with kids they already know. One thing I was surprised, that I actually love about the school, is the diversity. I think I had in my mind that the school was going to be all White.

As a White woman with bi-racial children—their dad is Black—I am always aware of race—it weighs heavy on my mind. I think about what kids they are going to be around, what families they are going to be around. I was afraid that because the school is in a more affluent neighborhood that it would be predominantly White, and I was very pleasantly surprised. It still is predominantly White, however, I was surprised at how diverse it really is and it made me more comfortable to bring my bi-racial child to the school. As far as acceptance, I feel like she is much more accepted for who she is there.

As far as dislikes go, there is nothing I really dislike. At all. You know, I feel heard and I feel like a valued part of the school.

My child has a learning disability as well as an anxiety disorder. Her educational experiences have been very, very tough. So not only does she have to deal with the bi-racial stuff at school but also her learning disability poses some challenges. So I feel like it's really important that I stay in contact with her teachers in order to make sure that she is getting what she needs. Although, in her general ed. classes her peers don't really know that she has a disability, her educational road has been filled with a lot of struggle. But I think being in the school and the district we are in, she has, for the most part, been given the tools and the skills she's needed to accommodate.

I think that the treatment has been great. I feel that Red Oak has been very open and welcoming. I think at the elementary level, I felt some judgment as a single parent of bi-racial children so there is a little bit of animosity on my part. I probably have my guard up and very protective of how my daughter is treated. At the middle school level, it seems like the achievement gap, talking about color, is more welcome and respected among staff members, so I really feel like she has been better off at the middle school.

I would describe my child as an introvert. She doesn't really have a lot of friends. She's not on the phone talking to friends every night. She is very accepting and open to every one but she doesn't put her self out there. She doesn't come home, however, and talk about being mistreated or anything.

Because I am in school and work as a single mom to support my girls, I am not able to volunteer in the school in the parent organizations. However, I am amazed at the amount of parent involvement Red Oak does have. My daughter ran track and I couldn't believe how many parents come to the meets in support of their children and the school in general. It just blew me away. It was so great to see the diversity of the parents as well.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I believe this occurs because it's human nature to see a person first by their color. Once the first impression has entered ones mind then that person's beliefs and values kick in and their reaction would mimic their belief positive or negative. Unfortunately we live in a society that breeds racism and that carries into the classroom. I like to believe that some of it is ignorance and lack of knowledge or different cultures, this all could be taught and addressed. The other portion is just sheer racism and hatred and innocent kid's education suffers because of it.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

Wow, what a great poem. To me, I feel like this is a young black boy. He is talking about White kids being smarter and the focus being on them. I think he thinks the White kids are smarter. But towards the end I get the feeling that it is trying to be addressed. The first line about kids looking different seemed so smart and the kids that looked like he did weren't so smart. Personally in my experience when the teacher liked them better, I think that is true. There are teachers that just assume that kids of color don't know the answers and that makes me mad. Would I like it to be more like the end of the poem? Yes. But I know we are not there yet. You know the part about where the kids are getting smarter but are still cool. I think that is so important. To allow kids of color to have their personalities and talents that make them different and still treat them like they are smart. The kids' feeling cool and smart is how it should be. The first part

makes me feel sad; because I know this poem wasn't written in the 50's—that this is still happening in school. The end of the poem makes me hopeful, that maybe things are getting better. I want my child to have that experience to feel right, and valued, and smart. It's a great poem.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

That my daughter is provided with the resources that will challenge her and that she is getting a well rounded experience. The expectation is that she is provided with things, not just academically. When I think about an educational experience, to me it's not just academic—it's peer, social, emotional, athletic. So I want her to go to choir and her learn about every kind of music there is, like other cultures and languages. Which she is and that's huge to me. The other day she came home and her choir teacher had taught her an African tribal song. I thought that was incredible. I want her to have those experiences in all of her classes. With the resources that Red Oak has, I want my kid to be exposed to every culture, especially their own, instead of being ignored and forgotten in the school.

My expectation, it's hard for me to answer because I feel fortunate at Red Oak to have an African American Principal and a Hispanic Assistant Principal. So I feel like race relations and issues will be addressed and I feel very grateful for that. So now that is my expectation for every school my daughters attend.

I have higher expectations for the teachers too, and I do expect as a taxpayer that the school will have more resources.

I expect the school to provide well for every level, whether it's gifted and talented or Special Education services. I also acknowledge that we are lucky to have what we do compared to other schools and other school districts.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

I totally think social status matters. Since it's a more affluent school, just driving into the parking lot you can see the different economic levels. I do feel that it matters, I don't know if my daughter feels it yet. But I do. There's not any pressure to keep up, but it is about being able to provide a certain level of stuff so that my child is not singled out. I know, however, that the school helps out families that are struggling. But sometimes I feel the pressure with the clothes style and electronics. There is also an underlying weight that I feel because my daughter is bi-racial, because she is different, that I feel like I don't want anything extra to have her singled out.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak?

How important are they?

I feel like the school has very high expectations of all students. My perception of Red Oak is that they are very conscientious of the level of rigor. It's the overall high expectations in the curriculum and for the achievement of the students. I believe that the relevance is very important in these times for kids to like school. But because my daughter is a 6th grader, I don't think I have had enough experience at the school to be able to speak to the relevance in the curriculum. As a parent it's huge, especially at this age. I think relationships between teachers and students are so important at this age. I think the relationship is so important to the child's success and I feel like it's the expectation of the administration that relationships are central.

I believe relationships are the most important key to my children's success because if they don't have a good relationship with their teacher than their concentration, their buy-in, their foundation suffers in the classroom. I feel like if my child does not have a good relationship with her teacher than as soon as she walks into that classroom she shuts down. But when you have a teacher/student relationship that is engaging and the curriculum is relevant to that child's world they will learn so much more than the textbook offers.

You can tell when you walk in the door, Red Oak is centered on kids. However, I must say that at my other child's school there are more examples of different races displayed at her school. I think the expectations are high for all kids but I do feel like walking through the school there is no diversity displayed physically in the school. I was shocked to see the diverse faces of the kids at the school, you know at like registration and the orientation; I was so pleasantly surprised and pleased. But when I walk through the building I don't see representation of kids of color. Like posters you see at other buildings, it seems a little sterile. But I think being more specific with all displays, like art displays and stuff, to be real specific about representing various cultures. The building is very meticulous, but it feels very White.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

Yes and no. I think that she tries very hard and with a disability it is always more difficult—so in that regard, yes. But I also don't want to limit her potential. I think that she doesn't even know what she's capable of yet.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I was a good student. I had some peer issues, but overall, I did my work and got good grades. Yeah, I was a pretty good student.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

I find myself a lot of times reflecting on my middle school experience, now that my daughter is in middle school. I think about my interactions socially and all of the peer issues I had. But maybe because my daughter is bi-racial, I don't want her singled out for any reason. I want her to be better, and I want her to feel confident and understand what it feels like to be successful. I am 40 years old and I am barely starting to learn to feel that way. My experience has a huge impact on my daughter.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

I believe race matters with student achievement...I believe that students of color in any classroom setting or educational environment will be addressed by the instructor based on the color of their skin. This may be a generalization; however I feel that it's human nature to recognize a person first by their color. Not necessarily is a negative response, but there is a response. So when my daughter is sitting in a classroom for the first time, I believe that her race is the first question or observation when a teacher meets her. Regarding the achievement, I personally don't feel that her race has affected her success in any way positive or negative simply because she has a learning disability that puts her in a separate classroom environment.

Sally Crystal

Sally Crystal is a White female, mother of two and married to Harry Crystal. Interestingly enough, Sally is also an 8th grade teacher at Red Oak Middle School. Her first daughter is a freshman at the neighborhood high school and attended Red Oak as a 7th and 8th grader. Currently, Sally's youngest daughter is a 6th grader at Red Oak.

Sally's youngest daughter is on the advanced team in 6th grade. She obtains above average grades, and is described by her mom as being a, "hard worker". However, for the purposes of this study, this student is historically underachieving according to her Partially Proficient ratings (Parent B attests these ratings to test anxiety). She is involved in school athletics and clubs and is a junior member of the Student Council. She has had no dean's incidents this year.

The family lives in a large, five-bedroom, four-bath home in a subdivision directly across the street from Red Oak. We agreed to conduct the interviews at their home due to the convenience of the location and more importantly to ensure confidentiality and comfort of the family.

When I arrived at the home, I was joyfully greeted by two dogs. Sally gave me a tour of the home, during which I discovered they also had two cats, a hamster, a turtle, and a fish tank with three fish. Their home is spacious and lovely with comfortable country accents adorning the walls. We sat and snacked at the dining room table where we conducted the interviews with both Sally and Harry. The interviews took approximately two and a half hours.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the family roles in your household:

Trying to hold the line. You know we're struggling a little bit with the high schooler. But our role is to establish values, morals, teach them responsible behavior, follow through, pride in what you do, provide consequences, consistency. I think bringing home the paycheck and teaching them to be productive members of society.

The kids in our house have varying chores and we expect them to contribute to the family and the running of the family and at times that works better than others because being the age they are they are so ego centric. We don't really see them get past their own needs and wants and that can be a struggle at times. We struggle to get them to understand the benefits of contribution to the success of our family.

There's not a lot of extended family involvement. Harry's father lives in the city, but we only see him a couple times a month. As far as involvement as a mentor or as a guiding force with the children—he never was. His mom was but she died five years ago. My parents don't live close so we only see them occasionally. We're not real close, relationship-wise either, but there are a lot of dynamics that make that difficult. So no we really are very individualist, like we talk about at school. It's very much that mindset of take care of your own needs and don't rely too heavily on extended family to help you out. We had some ugly situations with Harry's parents early on when we first had the children and needed help to watch them and were flat out told, "Nope you had kids you watch them."

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

When the kids were younger, both in elementary school, we actually had a, “No TV on School Night,” policy. It was a little rough at first, but they seemed to adapt pretty well and that led into better homework time and as they’ve gotten older they’ve learned to self-manage a little more so that has gone by the waste side, but for a couple of years it was no TV during the school nights and that helped. We’ve typically always had the girls do homework at the kitchen table while one of us was cooking dinner. In elementary school it was our homework as well as the kids’ homework because they weren’t very independent as far as getting it done so one of us would always be there.

As they’ve gotten older and wanted more autonomy with that it’s gotten to the point where it’s like fine, “you do it, let us check over it.” Fortunately, they’ve been able to integrate those habits so it’s really never been a struggle to get them to do their homework on the other hand sometimes we’ve had to go back and have them redo because it’s wrong and we know they can do better and we’ve had to fight that battle.

I think it all goes back to kindergarten which lays the foundation of this is the expectation we’re going to set aside the reading time and not just sign the reading log and say we did it and you know hold them accountable. This was hard, because it was work for us, it took away time from other things that maybe we felt like we needed or wanted to do. Now it’s more like they start on their homework on their own and we trust them to get it done. Sometimes we’ll help with vocabulary.

We have done some contingency reward type things like one daughter wanted her ears pierced and it was contingent upon good grades.

Harry and I do disagree though sometimes on how they should be consequence. I was a straight “A” student and so I have very high expectations. So when they get a “B” or “C” and I think they are capable of getting an “A” we will disagree on how to handle it.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

I like the structure of some of the classes where it’s ability and not necessarily just their grade and that was different than the other middle school our older went to where math was on the team and not by ability and maybe it was divided up in the classroom by ability but it still seemed very limiting. I think that everybody is really receptive really open to questions, really invested in kids and what’s good for kids.

I really don’t really think I can come up with much bad. I was disappointed with the awards assembly with my oldest daughter. My daughter was eliminated from being recognized just because she didn’t meet a certain comprehensive criteria. There are a lot of hard working, deserving kids that because of the structure of that awards program don’t get recognized. That is a disappointment and I’ve heard other kids express that as well. Other than that, I think there’s a lot of opportunity to have leadership roles and get involved.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I think it’s interesting to look back now with a different perspective. Because I think as kids we weren’t aware so much. I grew up in a small town that was predominately Hispanic, and I was in kindergarten, and there were huge racial issues at

the high school. My parents were worried about, “if it’s this bad now, what was it going to be like when I got to high school.” There were so many Mexican/White racial issues.

By the time I got to high school I was so unaware of these issues. I remember, very clearly, when I was in the third grade being called “Honkey Girl,” and that was hurtful. With that past, and it being a small town it was very cliquish so you tended to hang out with kids that were more like you. But looking back, like I said I was a very motivated student and had higher level classes, but now that I look back, there were more White kids in those classes than Hispanic but there were more Hispanic kids in the school. I wish I could remember exactly who was in classes with me, but I’ve had students where I went to school with their aunts and uncles and when I looked at the yearbook, I didn’t even know those kids. If the expectation was that you would go to college you were put in certain classes but if you weren’t you were put in other classes. Kids just took what they needed to graduate and work on the family farm. Or like my husband said, maybe they just did what their parents always done.

I think maybe being in a small town some kids felt like their role was predetermined. You would either take over the farm or be a laborer. I don’t remember taking many classes that weren’t leveled, but the ones that were, there weren’t a lot of Hispanic students in them. There were no Black students in the school. I didn’t even see Black people until I went to college.

I guess it’s kind of like, what’s the expectation or what’s the hope of your family? I have a friend who is still working at the city market. She’s worked at the city market since we were in high school. I just think she felt like that was her goal, maybe. So I don’t know. But I also have a Hispanic friend that’s a doctor now, and his family was

pretty darned dysfunctional. But he still excelled. In high school would I have pegged him to be a doctor? No, but that's where he wound up going.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

I thought it was a child of color. And I don't know why, but I think it was a boy. I think the author is talking about being passed over. I was really struck by the line where the kids were still "cool" but also "bright. I think a lot of kids think that "cool" and "bright" are exclusive, like you can be cool or you can be smart but you can't be both. You can be an athlete or you can be smart. I don't see that there are a lot of kids, especially minority kids that feel like they can have it both ways. I think that they think they can have one role or the other. They can be a jock or cool because that's more expected or accepted, than to be bright. I also think that they are shocked when you say, "I expect a lot more from you. I'm not gonna just let you skate by. I know you can do better." I sometimes think that some kids don't see that in themselves. They think they can just choose one role.

I feel hopeful after hearing this poem. I think we've come so far in education. In the past the teachers were there for the high achievers and now we are more equipped to meet all kids' needs. I think it's coming around. It's not perfect, but there's hope. At first the poems is depressing but it gets hopeful in the end.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood,

what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

I expect fewer behavior problems and less tolerance for behavior problems. I would have to say that's colored by the experiences we had with our older daughter's

experience at another school. I think teachers are not there to be there friends. They are there to maintain rigor, as well as relationships, but still maintain boundaries. It bugs me when some teachers seem to have too much of a casual relationship with their students. There was an incident where a student referred to her as something real casual and I was shocked that this teacher would let the kids address her like that. I thought it was inappropriate. You can be friendly with the students but my child doesn't need a friend. She needs a mentor or someone she can go to if she has a problem but she doesn't need a "grown up" peer.

We expect that most of the kids at the school are college bound, and academically oriented. I think we expect the kids at the school to also be more socially responsible. I think one thing that's notable about being in a higher socioeconomic school setting, that our assumption, whether proven or not, is that you're going to have a healthier environment because there are fewer kids that worry about basic needs types of things. And coming from another middle school with our other daughter it seems that there is less of that. The kids also seem to be more age appropriate and healthier in general. They're not part of the penal system. That's played out as expected. Overall it seems to be a more mentally healthy population.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

I think social status definitely matters. Moving here really meant a lot to our older daughter in regards to status. I know we first thought we were a little ostentatious, it's not like we're snooty, rich people—we just work hard and have made good financial decisions. I don't want to give the impression that we're rich, because we aren't. But for our older daughter, she was so thrilled to move here because of the notoriety of the

neighborhood and the far cry from our old one. I think our older daughter felt the pressure to keep up because she so much wanted to be a part of that group.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak?

How important are they?

I think it's got to be challenging. Otherwise the kids can't really develop a self esteem or confidence in your abilities if everything's easy. I firmly believe you develop those attributes and resilience by trying, by failing, by evaluating, and trying again. It's that process that shows you that you can persevere. If kids are given whatever they want and they don't have to earn it, then there is no value placed on that for the child.

Challenge them. I think there's been rigor. Our daughters have had a lot of rigor.

I think of relevance more immediately. In middle school it's hard to get any buy in so we have to show them how it relates to them now. But maybe showing them that it's the process of understanding that makes it relevant than the content of itself.

I think the reality is that our kids aren't going to have a close relationship with every teacher. I think it's important, but not that realistic. I think they need to learn how to work through that experience because that is real life.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why

not?

I think there are certain subject areas where she had weak teachers for several teachers in a row. When that happens, in the long run, her overall understanding has suffered. So in a way no, but in a way, it wasn't entirely her fault.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I was very good student.

I worked very hard and I earned very good grades because of it.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

I think because I was such a strong performing student, I project those expectations on my kids. But then that places a strain on our relationship. Maybe what I have to learn to do is let go of my baggage. Like maybe what I want and expect her (the high school student) to be is different than what she wants. I think the self reflection is helpful. I had to realize that if she doesn't get to go to the college she wants to go to then she'll have to deal with that and see where that leads her. There are a lot of paths that lead to the same destination and maybe she won't take the direct route like I want her to take but she'll figure out a way to get there.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

I think that often race does impact academic achievement. For example, a person belonging to a race that is marginalized may have a harder time finding relevance and value in what he/she may see as a primarily "White" environment. That same person may also have personal circumstances that interfere with academic success--having to take care of siblings and not being able to focus on studies, having to work to help support the family, teen pregnancy, etc. Unfortunately, some minority students consider being academically successful being "White" and feel that if they are successful in school, they won't be accepted by peers of the same race or even sometimes their own families; that they think they are better than other members of their race who haven't been academic achievers. Minority students (students of color) may also have to fight negative stereotypes that society in general has about their race, which, I assume, would be

discouraging and either serve as motivation to achieve even more or basically give up on formal education.

Race can also positively impact academic success. Minority students may be motivated to be academic achievers to obtain a better position than that of their parents, relatives, and friends. They want more financial security and career opportunity.

Harry Crystal

Harry is a White male, father of two and married to Sally. His oldest daughter is a freshman at the neighborhood high school and attended Red Oak as a 7th and 8th grader. Currently, Harry's youngest daughter is a 6th grader at Red Oak. He is a supervisor in the field of construction for a large corporation.

Harry's youngest daughter is on the advanced team in 6th grade. She obtains above average grades, and is described by her mom as being a, "hard worker". However, for the purposes of this study, this student is historically underachieving according to her Partially Proficient ratings (his wife attests these ratings to test anxiety). She is involved in school athletics and clubs and is a junior member of the Student Council. She has had no dean's incidents this year.

The family lives in a large, five-bedroom, four-bath home in a subdivision directly across the street from Red Oak. We agreed to conduct the interviews at their home due to the convenience of the location and more importantly to ensure confidentiality and comfort of the family.

When I arrived at the home, I was joyfully greeted by two dogs. His wife gave me a tour of the home, during which I discovered they also had two cats, a hamster, a

turtle, and a fish tank with three fish. Their home is spacious and lovely with comfortable country accents adorning the walls. We sat and snacked at the dining room table where we conducted the interviews with both Sally and Harry. The interviews took approximately two and a half hours.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the following family roles for your family:

Just to be good role models for them and teach the children to do that also. We want them to become productive, healthy people to society, we would like them to excel and have ambitions of going to college and to get degrees because they will be better off to go to college than not to go to college. There isn't too much extended family involvement.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

As far as rewards both of us don't subscribe to the whole—an "A" is worth so much money, a "B" is worth so much money. You know we want them to work on their own merit and not expect something. When they do do good on the grades we'll go out to dinner or something and tell them we're always supportive and great job. We don't really go out of the way to reward good grades. We really want it to be an intrinsic reward to have pride in good work.

I think I am more lax about consequences than Sally. I wasn't the straight "A" student I was happy with "B's" and "C's" even though my parents would push me but again for them school was school and home was home so worked out great—I got my act together in high school. But just like for me there are consequences.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

One of the things I really like is that Sally is over there. One of the things I really like as well is that they are getting a good education. They are supported; if they need the help they can get the help. Sometimes we need to make them get the help we need. They can go before or after school. I feel very comfortable that if my daughter needed help she could get it.

I think the teachers have went above and beyond in helping her achieve good grades and reach her goals. There was one particular teacher that did so much in helping my daughter go to the next level and that will always mean a lot to me. I think they have always been very open and welcoming to me—students seem to be able to get involved in whatever sports or clubs or whatever they want to do. There always seem to be something going in, whether it's an event, or track meet. When I was in middle school they didn't have that. All afterschool type functions were after school.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I think that a lot of it is the expectations of the family. I know that when I was in elementary school, the school served the kids in the local neighborhood through 5th grade. It was pretty much just White. We had one Black student, [says name], and he was a real nice guy, no real problems but he always had to be the tough guy. We just always took that for what it was.

Sixth grade we started bussing. That year, I had no problems with any students; I got along with pretty much everybody, that's just the way it was. But it was different, because that year the bussed in students were Hispanic students and that was new.

I knew some Hispanic people, so it was not that big of a deal to me, but it was different because their expectations from their families were different. If they got in trouble in class it was just like, "Just stop doing that," all of a sudden. But before that if we acted up it was a big deal because all of the parents got involved. The expectations just were different than from the White families than the Hispanic.

When I went into junior high the demographics changed again in the school. There were definitely more Black students. I remember those students, for the most part being pretty aggressive, males and females. As far as stating who they were and why they were there, there wasn't a big academic push, but I think they felt like they had to make their presence known and show that they were part of the student body. Again, there really wasn't a lot of racial tension. There weren't any riots, all of the fights were White-on-White, Black-on-Black. But again, there was a difference between the students. I think the teachers back then expected more from the White students than the Black students.

Going into high school it was a total switch. It was like 52 percent Black, one to two percent Hispanic, and the rest right. Again, it was very peaceful, there were no riots, it was a situation where everybody pretty much got along at a very friendly level. But you did notice some students, well the Black students, their parents were more into saying, "You gotta work hard because you don't want to be where I am on food stamps and all that," and then there was another racial section or set of parents that were like,

“Do what I do. I’m doing ok, I’m happy, the government’s supporting me. You’re Black so you’re never gonna go to college so do what you want to.” It was interesting.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

First initial thought was, I related to the person who wrote the poem. I was never in the high group, I was labeled as having a learning disability and even had teachers tell my parents that I would never be of any social benefit, so why was I even in school? So I was never asked to excel and never pushed to excel. In the poem the kid excelled sooner than I did, I didn’t have any academic self-esteem until I was in college. I relate to the poem.

I think this poem is about being singled out as not being able to succeed. They’re just there, they’re just filling a space, but the teacher’s direct attention is on the White students. I remember being in school and there were (his voice inflects to mimic a female teacher), “The good kids that want to learn and the other kids that don’t want to learn.”

The whole first part I really related to. I also am drawn to the part in the poem that says, “Our teachers liked them better.” I just really and fully relate to that. I feel kind of sad that it even had to come to this. But then again, I’m relieved that the dreams and wishes at the end of the poem are coming to fruition.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

I expect that the administration be available and be leaders in the community. I think they need to set a good example. I expect them to attend and be visible at school

events like sporting events. I do notice when I am at these events. It's nice to see the principal participating and attending the events. I expect the teachers to be leaders for the students. I would like to know that they are there for all the students and teach all the students at a high level. I expect them to push the students to reach their potential. I think for both of my daughters, the teachers in the school do do that.

I expect that the kids will behave better but it's not necessarily what I have to see. I think kids follow each other and sometimes make some bad decisions everywhere. I do expect that the students in the school are more collaborative and support each other reach their goals.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

I would say social status matters in the neighborhood. If someone moved into the neighborhood and didn't take care of their lawn or their home it would call attention. So yeah, to a point I do.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak?

How important are they?

I think rigor's extremely important. They need to learn that it's ok to struggle. If they get to old without learning that and they struggle—they shut down. "If I don't get it on the first try, than I'm giving up." Academically it's valuable, but also in life. You need to learn how to figure out how to problem solve and persevere when things don't go perfectly.

It's so important that the curriculum be relevant. That was one of my problems in school. I didn't understand why things were important in the real world. I'm a motivated

person and a goal oriented person, so I figured it out, but now I think things are different. Kids need to see why it's relevant to them and their world.

I think about the teachers I had good relationships with, it made me want to learn content that maybe I didn't have any interest in. I look back at teachers I had that I had good relationships with, like Ms. Jones. She was a Black lady and she wanted everybody to learn. I remember having another teacher and I was totally out of it and didn't care at all about the content.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

I think for the first year of middle school, she is learning the game of the new level. She's comfortable right now, but as she gets into the swing of things she is going to really excel. I see her as really growing in the coming years.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I struggled. I had a learning disability so after years of struggling in school, I learned to cope, or sometimes I would shut down. I think my grades in later years were closely related to the connection I had with the teacher.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

I am much more understanding, I think, because I had such a hard time in school.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

Maybe relevant, maybe not—I also think that the academic success of a child's parents can have the same effect as race on a student. Parents who were not academically successful may not feel that education is valuable, and they did just fine without going to college, finishing high school, etc. Conversely, the lack of parental academic success

may be a factor in them helping to motivate their kids to strive for more opportunities-- opportunities denied them due to their lack of academic success.

People tend to stereotype others and by doing so we allow ourselves to say that a person's race affects their success not just academically but in life in general. I feel that it is a person's environment that determines the outcome of events. For instance, a person that lives in a prosperous situation where basic human needs are supplied daily will have a better chance to succeed. This same person placed in an impoverished environment would need to work to maintain basic needs, thus the environment is inhibiting success. I believe that a person in the above scenario could be of any race and it is the environment that shapes the future.

Justina Simmons

Justina Simmons is an African American woman with three children in the Willow Brook School District. She mentioned moving to the area specifically for the schools; based on its reputation according to friends of the family. She has one child high school, middle school and elementary school. She has been married for 16 years and has a degree in finance and works for a brokerage firm in the Denver Tech Center. Her husband travels abroad frequently on business and was in fact gone on business during the interview.

Justina's 8th grade son is a B/C student. Although his grades are average, mom suggests he can do better. Historically, her son has performed in the Partially Proficient range on the reading and math portions of the CSAP and in the Proficient range in

writing. He is involved in athletic and out of the school. He has had a few deans' referrals, primarily for horseplay.

After a bit of phone tag we finally narrowed our interview setting to their home. The family lives in a mid-century, 4 bedroom, 2.5 bathroom, tri-level in an older part of the area. Although older, their home was very comfortable with innumerable updates to the interior of the home. We selected their home as the interview site to minimize discomfort and to ensure confidentiality. We conducted the interview in the comfort of the living room, where Justina put out a nice spread of cheese, meats, and crackers. We visited for approximately one and a half hours.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the following family roles for your family:

In our family, the roles in the family are somewhat blended. Our extended family is really involved in the upbringing of our kids because I work outside of the home. Also, my older kids help watch the younger one at times. We try to keep that at a minimum because we don't want it to interfere with their studies, but there are times that we really rely on their help and it sacrifices their time alone, or to study, or to do the things they want to do. My husband and I are very strict. The kids usually know where we stand and how we will answer regarding some of the questions they ask. Our middle child is in middle school now and he is trying to spread his wings and try different after school activities, as well as hang out with friends after school. Because he has watched how we responded to his older sister, I think he's a little more savvy in his approach.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

Our kids get home at different times because we have three kids at three different levels, so when they get home they usually settle in by getting a snack and starting homework at the dining room table. I get home later than my husband, when he's not traveling for work, so he usually helps them with questions when they need it. Once they are done with homework they each do their chores and get ready for dinner. We try to eat dinner as a family at least three times a week, but there are times when the kids eat at the island in the kitchen. Our two younger children take their showers at night and then hit the sack by 8:30. Our oldest daughter plays competitive sports and has a different set of responsibilities so it works better for her to shower in the morning and be in bed by 10.

We don't really reward the kids for good grades, we expect them to do their best, but I think the follow through with consequences is probably more noticeable. We consequence by taking away electronics—cell phones, game boys, TV.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

We have been pretty happy with the school in general. Our son has a lot of friends and he likes her teachers. I like all of the ways we are kept in the loop. Like the newsletter, the website, PTO emailer, blackboard. I think we feel informed and that helps. I also feel like we are welcomed and encouraged to come to the school. The principal is also African American and that helps, I think, with approachability. The counselors and office staff are always very nice and helpful.

There have been a couple of times that I've felt like teachers could have communicated more with me. I don't enable our kids, but a few times I have asked

teachers to contact me and they respond with, “Check Power School.” I wouldn’t be contacting the teachers if I weren’t aware of their progress in school. I feel like I have tried to reach out a few times and instead of working with me these teachers were patronizing. I don’t know, I guess I am still pretty confused and hurt by that. It colors all of the good things that have gone on in the school and makes me a little suspicious of some teachers and their treatment of my child.

My son has always been a pretty good student. He had a hard time with reading in elementary school, but now he’s in regular classes and is doing pretty well—like B’s, and some C’s, a couple A’s. I have gotten a few calls for behavior because he likes to act like a fool in the hallway.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I don’t know. When you talk about it though, I can’t help but think about when I was in school. It could have been because it was a poor neighborhood, but, I thought the stuff we learned in middle and high school was pretty irrelevant. When I went to college I wasn’t prepared. It seemed like the White kids in my classes seemed so much more together academically than I did. I don’t know, maybe it has to do with low expectations.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

Wow. Listening to the poem, I remember what it was like as a kid in school. I was like that kid in the poem.

Although there were not a lot of White kids at the schools I went to, I remember thinking they were so smart, because my teachers seemed to make comments and comparisons all of the time. Especially, like I mentioned, in college. I was very aware of that.

Specifically the part about them seeming so much smarter stood out to me.

I also liked the feeling of hope at the end. I was already out of school when the standards movement came about, but I am hopeful for my kids that they get better and do better than I did. At first, listening to the poem, I felt angry. You know, like this doesn't have to happen, that these kids are smart, I was smart. I can't help but feeling like I was a little jipped. Towards the end, and maybe even the middle, I started to feel hopeful. I hope, for my children that they will never have to feel like they are less than anyone else.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

I expect a lot. Just like a lot of other parents I know at the school, we moved to the district for the reputation of the schools. I wanted my kids to attend a good school. In fact, we felt good about our son going to Red Oak because of its reputation. I expect that they have all of the things, like resources and stuff, to support the kids learning. I expect that they will hold my kids to a higher standard and that they will contact me when my kids are not meeting the standard. Our daughter went to a school in another district—it wasn't good.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

Kind of. I think that a lot of the kids at the school live in some huge homes, but there are other neighborhoods, like ours, that are nice too, but not huge.

My son is starting to be more aware of what we have or don't have in comparison to his friends and that is kind of frustrating. Our means are our means and he doesn't understand that yet. He desperately wants, or even feels like he needs, to keep up with those other kids.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak?

How important are they?

I think Red Oak is very rigorous. I think the classes are hard and the stuff the kids come home with make them think more than stuff I did in school. I think the staff is very caring and I think most of the teachers care about all of the kids. I think there is a very high expectation that kids will achieve and I would hope that there is a belief that all of them can in no matter what their race. As far as relevance goes, I am not too sure he's really found the relevance yet. He doesn't really see the value of some of the assignments.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

I think that he could do more. Not only is he a class clown, but he kind of picks and chooses what classes and teachers he will perform for and that is so frustrating. If he doesn't like a teacher or thinks the teacher doesn't like him—it's like pulling teeth to get him to try her best. He will give the bare minimum to get by. On the other hand he works very hard for teachers he likes.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I was an ok student. I think I was a lot like him. I worked hard for teachers I liked and didn't for teachers I didn't like. I think the biggest difference was that I went to schools that had a lot of other minority kids and was in a poorer neighborhood.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

I think I am more aware. You know, because, I don't think my education was the best and because we moved to this district for the kids, I am very sensitive to how they are treated and their grades and stuff. I am even a little, some teachers might think, aggressive. I email them all of the time if I feel like he is being treated unfairly.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

Absolutely. I think race matters in everything. Like I said, that is why I am so aware of everything that goes on in the school. I don't think it's right if certain kids get a different or better education than mine. Not that that goes on too much at Red Oak, but it does happen, and you better believe, I call them out on it when it does.

Diego Martinez

Diego is a Hispanic father with five children, ranging in ages from two to 13. He has one daughter in the 7th grade at Red Oak Middle School. He has two children in the neighborhood elementary school that feeds into Red Oak and two children in daycare. Diego is a contractor in the construction field and has been married for 12 years. His wife works in pharmaceutical sales.

Although Diego's daughter is on the advanced team, she struggles academically. She has historically scored high on CSAP but since he has attended Red Oak her grades

have not reflected her ability. She participates in school and neighborhood sports and is heavily involved in the drama club; she has performed in two plays this year. She has had no dean's incidents.

The setting of the interviews was at the family home. We agreed this would be the most comfortable environment. Their home is on a cul-de-sac in a subdivision outside the catchment area for Red Oak. The neighborhood has modest homes that are beginning to run down. A lot of the homes in the neighborhood are for sale and there were a couple that seemed abandoned (when I asked Diego about this he confirmed that a lot of his neighbors have walked away from their homes due to job loss and the economy).

When I drove up, I immediately noticed the impeccable lawn. Of twenty-some homes on the block, this one appeared to have a proud care-taker. Inside, although modest, the home was equally impeccable. We sat comfortably at the dining table for an hour and a half—Diego was as compassionate and proud of his children as he was of his home.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the following family roles for your family:

Parent involvement with the kids, you know, we take the kids to school, we pick the kids up. You know basically direct them with household chores and home work. Can I jump all over here? We have small children that my mom watches at her home. Additionally, my wife's parents take the kids on weekends; they have them over for the weekend. Siblings, well since our family is so big our older kids help out a lot. Our

oldest daughter kind of gets the brunt of everything, but our middle kids help a lot too. It's kind of like a very normal family. I think that's it.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

One of the biggest routines we have is for homework. When the kids get home they know they have a place for backpacks, Backpack Central. The kids know to get on it right away. Of course they're still kids of course still have to be on 'em. As far as rituals, we have consistent bedtimes, religious bedtimes—the older kids go to bed at 8:30 and the younger ones go to bed at seven.

With our daughter at Red Oak we've been following up with the teachers, even with the two other ones in school we follow up and email the teachers constantly. We try to stay on top of that, figure out what are they missing, what's going on. We are in constant communication with the school. When the kids are home they do their homework and we are there to help them.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

One thing I really like about the school, well first off, we went from a private school to Red Oak and it seems like they have a lot more rigorous work for our daughter. It seems like they have a lot more forward thinking as far as the school work, the way they give homework, they assignments in general seem like they're a lot harder for her.

The downside I guess is that she's one of the only, well it seems like there are very few minority kids there. In particular, she's in a program for advanced kids and it seems like there aren't any minority kids in that program with her, in fact you talk to her

and she says there aren't really very many minorities in it at all. I know of one and that kid happens to be her friend. But other than that, the teachers have been very responsive.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I think the achievement gap occurs because you have teachers who aren't expecting much from the minority kids. I don't think there's high expectations. My experience though is that I went to a school where there were a lot of other minority kids, I didn't really see any difference and I went to a private school. Then I went to a private high school and I did see a big difference, it was mainly affluent White kids and I still didn't realize that there was a difference. Now that I think about it, I think the biggest thing that makes a difference is the expectations from the teachers all the way to the principal.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

Pretty cool poem. But it's pretty sad in the beginning you know because I think that's true for a lot of kids because I think they just get left behind. But it's pretty cool, good poem. I picture a little a little Mexican kid talking.

The opening line about being two to three steps behind and the other kids knew stuff that they had no idea about. I think it's because, like when I went to that private high school there were some things I couldn't relate to like traveling or just certain things like that. That just really stuck out at me because I couldn't relate to a lot of stuff. I felt

pretty angry in the beginning (of the poem), because I've been there, but it gets better in the middle and when it finishes I felt more of a sense of hope.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

My expectations are pretty high. I expect her to be more advanced than the schools that are closer to us. I expect her to be higher than other 7th graders than of kids at the schools by us. My expectations are high; she's in the advanced program, so I expect a lot.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

I do think social status matter at her school. Those kids all live in big homes and drive nice cars. I think the way my daughter tells me things about what matters to the kids there, like doing certain things and having certain things. With the kids and the parents. I absolutely think there's pressure to keep up with the Joneses. I think there a few kids at the school that she's friends with that make it a big deal about how big their house is or whatever. Parents and students probably have that pressure. I somewhat feel that too. When her friends come over, we want to make sure she's proud of our house, sure.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak (Rigor, Relevance, Relationships)? How important are they?

I think it's extremely rigorous there. Like I said, I keep saying it, but she's in the advanced classes there and I know they're teaching high school material to her. It's very rigorous.

I think the material is very relevant. That's kind of what I was speaking about before, we had her in a private school and all they did was hand outs and work that was really easy. Now she's doing these advance science projects.

I think the relationships are really good with her peers and fine with her teachers. From what we hear everyone loves her but I don't really hear her talking about them. Just a couple here and there. But overall I think the relationships are pretty good. From what I understand, if you are in this advanced program all students matter. If you aren't in this program, it doesn't seem as prevalent in the school. Maybe I'm wrong but what I've seen and gathered from my daughter so that's what I think. Again I'm just speaking about my daughter, but I think because she's in the advanced program she is getting high expectations. But there was a math teacher that didn't think she could do the advanced math, but I think we got that worked out.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

She's struggled to get good grades at Red Oak, coming from the private school. But she's a hard worker, and I think she'll get it eventually. She'll put in the time, put in the work and she'll really go after it when she wants to. Not that she's slow but sometimes she'll take longer to study than her friends are.

I think the school really pushes her. When she wants to go for it she does, but just like any other kid she gets lazy, but I do think the school is pushing her harder than he's ever been pushed. And then like, as parents at home we are always on her.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I was a mess up. I did ok academically, but I was always clowning around, you know? Anyway, I think I was a lot like she is now.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

Like I said, when I was in high school, I think we kind of went through a similar experience, I know she's in middle school, but with the kids around her, they're all not minority kids just like at my high school. I think she's finding her identity, figuring out who she is as a Latina. And I think it was a little hard for me when I was in school so it's trying to get her to get that it's ok to be proud of who you are racially. I think she'll get it.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

Yeah, absolutely. I think race matters because it affects everything you do, I think the way people look at you whether you're Brown or White they look at you different. I think it matters because the expectations of people of color are less. I think it makes it harder for kids. They have to push harder and work harder just to form an equal ground.

Marilyn Cordova

Marilyn Cordova is a Hispanic female, mother of one son and married to Pedro Cordova. Additionally, Marilyn works in education at a neighboring district whereas she's held several leadership positions. Her son is a 6th grader at Red Oak Middle School. The family went through an Intra-District School of Choice process to gain attendance at Red Oak.

Marilyn's son is an above average student, however, he has not demonstrated his academic ability on CSAP—he has historically performed in the Partially Proficient range in reading and writing and Proficient in math. He is involved in athletics and after school clubs. He has had two dean incidents so far this year.

The family lives in a lovely, relatively new home in a subdivision in a neighboring middle school's catchment area. We agreed to conduct the interviews at their home due to the convenience of the location and more importantly to ensure confidentiality and comfort of the family.

Upon my arrival, Marilyn offered a tour of their home. They have 4 bedrooms; one is converted into an office for Pedro as he works out of the home, and 4 bathrooms. We conducted the interviews in their living room while their son played outside with kids from the neighborhood. The interviews took approximately two and a half hours.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the following family roles for your family:

I think my role is to guide my son the best way that I can and make sure that he has all the tools he needs to be successful.

So that means, making sure that he is successful in school, and that includes ensuring a consistent environment including rituals and routines expected schedules making sure we provide opportunities for extracurricular activities. Our extended family is always around. Their role is to provide love and support.

I think the role of my son is to be a child. Kids grow up in our society sooner and sooner they don't really enjoy their childhood. We are always pushing them.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

I think that he knowing what to expect everyday reinforces a safe environment because he knows what's going to happen every day. Plus going to be at the same time every day ensures he will get enough rest and can better concentrate and pay attention at school. Reading every night also reinforces the expectation from the school. We try to make sure that we have a lot of reading materials around and we like to have him involved in extracurricular activities

I don't think we make rewards very explicit. We really haven't had a need to reward because it's just expected. But I think as he gets older we are going to have to get more creative about that.

His consequences are mostly around video games. Like last Friday he wasn't paying attention in Spanish class he was being disruptive so now he won't play video games for some time because that will be what will hurt him—that is the biggest consequence to him. Anything else isn't much of a consequence because that is what he cares about.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

I think there are a lot of events to bring the community into the school. There are parent coffees. The fundraisers are bit. There was a district fitness festival to promote fitness. I think it's almost overwhelming sometimes. I get a PTO email almost daily asking to volunteer for this or that or give money for this or that. Or donate food for dances or CSAP snacks.

There have been a few incidents, not recently but last year I had an incident where last year the cafeteria people were accusing my son of stealing food. I was really infuriated that they would accuse him of that.

As far as teachers go, he has a history of going out of his way for teachers he likes and contrary for those that he doesn't. So it can be a very good year with a particular teacher or a very bad year. Some of his behavior issues are around him wanting to look cool in front of his friends.

Our interaction with the staff has been mostly positive, but there have been times that I have been disappointed with how the dean's office has handled things, where they have tried to strong arm my son with intimidation tactics. What's most frustrating is they have done this without contacting me.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I think to a certain extent background factors play a role. But I think it might be more complicated than that. I think every child has an innate personality and that personality influences how they do in school. I think part of it is that students are bored. I don't think that teachers do enough to engage students in the way they're interested. Not everybody learns the same way.

It seems like we have a factory model of education in the United States. I think it's more geared toward White students because culturally there are a lot of differences. Like I think a lot of minority kids are growing up in households that are loud and then

they are stuck in this classroom where they are expected to stay still and be quiet and that is definitely a cultural difference to what they have at home.

I think that low expectations have a lot to do with it as well. A friend of mine calls it the “pobre sito” syndrome. A lot of teachers, unfortunately, don’t hold as high of an expectation for all kids. A lot of minority parents don’t have an education so they don’t know how to mentor their kid through the bureaucratic hoops.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

I hope the conclusion of this poem is true. I don’t think the standards movement has done much for student achievement. At this point I think it’s just shed light on certain students. In the beginning where the author talks about starting two or three steps behind, I know it was true for me when I went from my neighborhood to a magnet school, I was behind my peers. I had a lot of catching up to do.

Still to this day it makes me very angry. It makes me angry even with my son that I have to be proactive that I have to seek out a school that will set high expectations for my child.

It’s unfortunate to me that not every child has this opportunity and that all of their parents don’t know how to best advocate for their child. It shouldn’t be that I have to look for a school he should have that same education. I have a memory of a Black teacher and at the end of first grade failed me and I had good grades.

I remember my mother came to the school, she was infuriated. Apparently it was wrong information, but looking back I had a sense of being treated differently. I will always question if it were truly an oversight or if she was trying to hold me back. The

whole event was a devastating experience. The phrase that some kids understood things that never crossed my mind. That phrase reminds me of kids that don't speak English and how a lot of times they come to this country strong in math and just because they don't speak English they don't have access to higher level classes and are stuck in a remedial track. There is a judgment made just because of their language. In the beginning of the poem I felt angry. It seems unfair and I think especially for kids that can't or don't know how to advocate for themselves—that just really resonates for me and makes me mad. The inequality at the beginning of the poem is really obvious. I hope that the end of the poem ends up as the case for all schools.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

When I described the school earlier, I neglected to point out that most importantly, my son likes the school and that has been the biggest change I've seen in him. My expectations are high and I think that school should be and has been on their toes because the community demands it. If something is going on it just can't be hidden, it has to be addressed. I think there's pressure to be involved at the school for parents. My son is a trendsetter so I don't think he feels pressure to keep up with his peers as far as material things.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

Simply stated, no I don't feel that pressure to keep up with the Joneses per'se, maybe it's because we don't live in the area. I think the kids at his school are very conscious about who has what though.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak (Rigor, Relevance, Relationships)? How important are they?

I think rigor is extremely important—it goes back to the comment about access to be able to learn certain topics—how can you learn certain things if you are not even given opportunity to learn them? Rigor goes back to high the teacher’s expectations are.

I think relationships are high there as well. For the most part, I think all the teachers work well with the kids. I also think the instruction, mostly, is relevant—it’s part of what makes my son engaged in what he is doing.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

I always think he can do better. I wonder if our shared custody situation causes him to struggle but, I know he is very smart and can do whatever.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I was a very good student. I worked hard and earned high grades. I think I was more driven than my peers because I knew education would set me apart. I didn’t know exactly how to navigate the hoops, but I knew I wanted to be educated.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

I think that it makes me more proactive about ensuring that my son is in the best possible school. I don’t want him to go through the same things that I went through. I don’t want him to be behind. And I don’t think it’s just the school. I think teachers have their part too. Teachers, I think make the biggest difference. It makes me more sensitive that he’s being held to high expectations, that what he’s being taught is relevant to him and he’s interested in it and that he has every opportunity to excel. I think that if I had all

those opportunities I could have gone to an Ivy League school. If I had someone to mentor me and walk me through the hoops I could have went a different path. I am thankful that I had the opportunities I had, but if had good schools all along I would have had more opportunity.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

I think race matters in most instances. We've been pretty fortunate up to this point because we're aware. I'm sensitive to racism and that my son is exposed to low expectations. I think race plays a role in achievement in general—in the U.S.

Pedro Cordova

Pedro Cordova is a Hispanic male, stepfather to one son and married to Marilyn Cordova. Pedro has a degree in business and works out of the home; currently he is applying to Law School to study Immigration Law. His stepson is a 6th grader at Red Oak Middle School. The family went through an Intra-District School of Choice process to gain attendance at Red Oak.

Pedro's stepson is an above average student, however, he has not demonstrated his academic ability on CSAP—he has historically performed in the Partially Proficient range in reading and writing and Proficient in math. He is involved in athletics and after school clubs. He has had two dean incidents so far this year.

The family lives in a lovely, relatively new home in a subdivision behind Red Oak. We agreed to conduct the interviews at their home due to the convenience of the location and more importantly to ensure confidentiality and comfort of the family.

Upon my arrival, Pedro's wife, Marilyn, offered a tour of their home. They have 4 bedrooms; one is converted into an office for Pedro as he works out of the home, and 4

bathrooms. We conducted the interviews in their living room while their son played outside with kids from the neighborhood. The interviews took approximately two and a half hours.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the following family roles for your family:

Family roles...well, my role in the house is I sometimes pick up my step son sometimes during the week whenever he comes back home, I always help him study, I help him with his vocabulary words or he will ask my questions and we'll talk about upcoming projects at school. His mom helps him with homework when I'm not available and vice versa. I take him to school in the mornings for the most part.

He's not under our supervision at all times, he's at his father's during the weekend and sometimes during the week where he's exposed to movies we'd normally not let him watch and other activities we wouldn't let him engage in at the same token he plays video games intended for a mature audience and he plays them more often than not so in that sense he doesn't fulfill the role a child should. His grandparents care for him on the weekends and on occasions his aunt.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

Well upon coming home from school my stepson knows the routine, he has several chores he has to do first. He has been given the chore of cleaning out the kitty litter box and taking out the recycle those are his chores. After that he starts his homework, which I am available to help him with if he needs it. After which he usually

has a snack and then can go play video games or um play with friends. We eat dinner as a family and after that he knows immediately he needs to take a shower and then read. It's like clockwork after that time he takes his medicine for asthma and then it close to bedtime.

He is used to the routine at our house. As for his dad's house or when he's with his grandparents we can't speak to that. Rewards aren't real explicit because he gets what he wants and if it's not from us it will be from his grandparents. I mean there's really no point to rewarding. He is very self sufficient.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

I like the parent involvement in the school. They seem to care a lot about the kids at the school. There's a lot of PTO participation and um their ability to raise money for the school is amazing. On top of that there are a lot of activities available that range from athletics to art club or drama club. On that front I think they do a great job. There are a lot of options to get parents involved in the school. If there's one thing you don't like there's something else that will interest you.

I haven't had any problems with the school. He does well in school. He's had some behavior problems. He likes to be the class clown. He is always trying to impress people. He craves the attention because he wants to be like by his peers. Sometimes he seems a little ADD. If it's something that doesn't interest him his mind wanders.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I believe it all starts with the foundation at home. I know for a fact coming from a Mexican background, I had no support at home. If I wanted to do well it was because I wanted to well. It wasn't because I had my mom or grandma because my dad didn't live with us to help me.

In terms of racially, I imagine in Caucasian households there is a hope and help for the kids more often than not. It think for boys especially, middle school is an age where they hit a fork in the road where they have decided what they are going to do...if they have an interest in school and will excel in that or if they will go in the other direction. I remember getting straight A's until then and then I started to disengage until I went into high school and got into sports and that motivated me. In the Mexican household, especially for boys, it is expected that when you are old enough to work you should work and contribute to the household. If you at least get through high school it's good, but then you need to go to work.

My mom gave birth to me when she was 16. She got a GED when she was in 10th grade. My dad is from Juarez and never went to high school. He had no formal education at all so I had no one to teach me how to navigate my way through.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson

(Appendix E):

It sounds like the character in the poem came from a family not of privilege...along came NCLB at which point he was able to experience a change in his education. When I started school, I didn't really know English. Going in it wasn't easy. There were many times I was ostracized for not speaking Eng so well. It was sink or swim so when the author speaks of being two or three steps behind, I can relate to that.

The phrase—Kids that looked so different seemed so smart makes me recall many of the white friends I had had a lot of help at home whereas I didn't have any help at home. When I listen to this poem I feel anger and maybe even nostalgic I can put myself in the poem. I can identify with the poem and the parents. I remember I used to kind of dwell or bury my emotions in sports. I would find solace in football. On the field we were all equal—that is what we had and who were and it was based on our athletic ability not our skin color.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

Pretty high considering the fact that we decided to choose him into the school. We felt that we chose a school that had test scores which were reflected as pretty high in the district. I feel that my expectations had been met as far as faculty and classes. The classes, the way they're offered are pretty top notch.

I feel that my son has responded compared to the other school he went to where he wasn't performing as well. I don't think he was doing near what this school has expected of him. I think the parents are heavily involved and problems get magnified because of it.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

I think social status matters, especially because when I drop off my kid I'll see moms talking together and comparing notes about what's going on in the school. I don't think there's pressure to keep up with the Jones'—we do right by our kid and do the best we can we don't need to perform to someone else's expectation of us. I think our son has

some pressure because he is starting to recognize brands and wants those. I think that comes from school.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak (Rigor, Relevance, Relationships)? How important are they?

I think there's a certain level of expectation at the school. I feel that each student is held accountable. I don't think they will allow students to fall behind. I genuinely feel that they care about each student there. I don't think students will get away with mediocre school work. There are a lot of teachers that make my son feel like his participation is welcomed and necessary to whatever they're learning. I think they do a good job.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

No, I do not. I think he has a lot more to go. I think he's a smart kid. I think he won't meet his full potential until he's older, but he's a bright kid. I think his achievement dips when he's not home with us.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

It's kind of weird for me. I would go up and down. I struggled when I first started school because I didn't speak English. Then I did fine until middle school. I kind of stopped caring in middle school all the way through. When I started sports in high school I started to do better again.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

I almost feel because we are of color that we have to try that much harder to make sure that my son is that much more prepared for school. That we have to go that extra mile just to make sure that it's done, in my opinion.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

Yes, I do. We like to think we live in a society where race or color's blind and it's not. It's unspoken and I think it's still very much around. Depending on what school you go to or depending on what part of the city you live in you are going to be seen as whatever color you are and it's very unfortunate and very sad and I don't think it's something we're going to be able to solve for many years if ever.

Delfina Nelson

Delfina Nelson is an African American single mother of two. Her oldest son is a 6th grader at Red Oak Middle School and her younger daughter attends an elementary school in a different part of the district. Delfina elected to "school of choice" her son into Red Oak based on its reputation for academic excellence. She holds a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Medical Administration and is currently unemployed and living with her father after divorcing her husband of 13 years.

Delfina's son is on the general 6th grade team and receives below average grades. He has historically performed in the Partially Proficient high to Proficient low range on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). He is involved in athletic programs outside of the school. He has had several referrals to the dean's office for classroom disruption and horseplay by various teachers.

Delfina lives in a modest home outside of the red Oak area with her father and two children. We agreed to conduct the interviews at their home due to the convenience of the location and more importantly to ensure confidentiality and comfort of the family.

While modest in size the home had a lot of state of the art amenities within. The largest piece of furniture is a 60 inch plasma TV surrounded by a large sectional sofa. There are four small bedrooms and one very small bathroom in need of some repair. Despite the amenities, and the disrepair of some parts of the home, the home was inviting and clean. We started the interview in the kitchen and shortly soon after moved to the comfort of the living room to complete the two hour interview.

This was, by far, the longest of all eight individual interviews and certainly the most emotionally laden.

Delfina has a long history of being disappointed by school officials and despite the reputation of Red Oak; she's still not convinced the adults care about her child. Delfina had to stop the interview twice in order to compose herself after a tearful response.

Interview—Session One

1. Explain the following family roles for your family:

As a parent my role is basically to take care of my kids. To take care of them, to love them, to take them to school. Basically, because I'm a single parent, I do everything. I provide all of the things, and love and care for them.

My kids' role is to do well in school. To take it serious. They need to go to school, and do their homework everyday. They need to understand how important school is for them.

My dad is really involved with their upbringing. We live with him so he does a lot. He helps them with their homework and reminding them to do their reading. He helps them a lot with their math. My sister, brother, and mom are also involved in helping me raise them.

2. What rituals and routines are embedded in your household to promote responsibility and academic success?

The kids do homework on nightly basis, and we set an hour or two aside every night for that. They have to do their homework before they do anything else—before they can do their homework. They also have a pet that they have to take care of as well as chores like doing the dishes, and making their beds. They have the same bed time every night—they have to be in bed by nine on weeknights.

Consequences are definitely embedded. My son is a little older than my daughter so he needs consequences more than she does. Like he likes watching wrestling on TV so if he gets in trouble at school then he's not able to watch wrestling at night. As far as rewards, he is motivated by money. He really likes money so he can buy what he likes. I have also given him magazines. Like, this year we got his CSAP results and he did well so I got him a subscription to a wrestling magazine.

3. Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak

It's been up and down. I like the school because I don't really know any different. I talk to friends of mine with kids the same age and some of the stuff they talk about happening at their kid's school is pretty bad, so in that regard I guess the school is ok.

I have been disappointed though. At the beginning of this year my son had some issues with one of his teachers and I believe it was kind of racial because he was one of the only minorities in his class and it seemed like this teacher was always targeting him for what he was doing wrong and there would be white kids in the class messing around and the teacher would ignore it. It seemed like I was getting a call or email every day about his behavior. I feel like she kind of treated him like an outcast because he's a minority.

There have been a lot of things that have bothered me. I feel like I am there all of the time, picking my son up and it looks like other parents are more welcomed than I am. I don't feel comfortable in the school. I guess that could be my fault too because I don't put myself out there, but I don't think they do much to reach out to me either.

I think maybe too, because I'm a young parent, I don't get much respect from the teachers because they don't think I care about school or whatever. I also think because we're minorities they think less of us. I'll see teachers talking to some of the parents with no problem, but they don't try to get to know me unless he's in trouble. There are a lot of times that I've felt uncomfortable, because I am a single parent and a minority.

I think academically, he's doing ok. I think he's always like going to school because his friends are there, but I think there are other times when he gets discouraged. I think he gets frustrated because he doesn't get recognized when he does well. I think he is smart. He reads well, and he writes well but he doesn't get rewarded for it. I also think he only has a few friends from his classes because they are one of the few minorities there. He's always hanging out with the same three friends because that's who he feels comfortable with.

Interview—Session Two

1. Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.

I think it's happening because teachers have low expectations and they think that we don't care about education as much as White parents. I think they judge students by how they look. Like in my son's case they judge him by how he looks or how I dress. I think he's just as smart as any other kid but he's not treated the same. I think some of the teachers have low expectations and think that I don't care so why should they.

2. Thoughts and reactions to *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson (Appendix E):

I like it. The beginning part, I was like poor kid. I think of my son when I hear this poem. They're talking about race here. The kids that were the same as him weren't so smart but the other kids did seem smart. Like in kindergarten, that's the first time they start to pay attention to race, but when they go to school they start to notice how some kids are treated according to race. The part about how we become good athletes and dancers because a lot of minorities do do that. Like, the kids think, I'm not good at school so I'll just play football or something like that.

I feel like I'm going to cry right now. I'm holding it in. You know, we don't like to hear this stuff but it is happening. It's a different time though now so hopefully it gets better. I feel anger when I listen to this, our kids are struggling in kindergarten, actually right from the get go. It's just so sad that our kids have to deal with this. Towards the end I feel hopeful.

3. Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?

I expect my kids to get the best education. I choiced to that school so I expect because I am taking them so far for a better education than it better be better. I expect better everything; better teachers, better administrators, better technology, everything. They should offer better courses for my kids and have better curriculum for them.

4. Does social status matter in your neighborhood?

No, I don't think so. Maybe I just don't pay attention to that or care, but no. But for my son, I think maybe there is.

Especially because he's one of the only minorities. I think he worries about how other kids are doing academically so he tries to be more cooler than they are. He thinks if he has Jordan's or certain clothes than he's on a level playing field with them. I think he thinks that if he can't outsmart them then he'll out flash them and that's better to him.

5. What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak (Rigor, Relevance, Relationships)? How important are they?

I don't think they push him enough academically. I think I push them harder at home than they do at school. I think he's much more capable than what he's required to do. He zips right through all of the work that they give him. I bet he could be in advanced classes but they just keep him there and don't push him harder or expect more from him. I think the work is too simple for him.

I don't think he finds the work relevant either. He doesn't think the work is important to his life. I don't think he sees the importance of a lot of things he does in

school. He's doing a science project right now, and I even think it's pointless. And if he doesn't see the point than he just does the bare minimum.

I think the relationships have gotten a little better, because I have had some words with some of the teachers. But still sometimes the teachers will call me and try to sprinkle some sugar on top before they start telling me how badly he behaves in the class. He has one teacher though that he loves to death, so he does whatever she wants. But there's another teacher he thinks is out to get him so he shuts down.

6. Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? Why or why not?

Not at all. Because I see how smart he is and how the work doesn't seem to be that hard for high grades. He gets through his homework really fast. But he has a little mouth on him and when he's asked to work harder or do something beyond the bare minimum he talks back. So no, I don't think he's reaching his potential at all.

7. What type of student were you in middle school?

I was fairly good in middle school. I would stay above average. Not smart but higher than grade level.

8. How has your educational experiences shaped that of your child?

It's the same kind of thing. I just wanted to get through and teachers were just there to get you through. There wasn't a real priority to connect to us or connect us to what we were learning. It was pretty much just compliance. I don't want that for my kids. I want them to feel like they are really wanted here and that the teachers are going to teach them everything and more that they need to know—and I didn't get that for sure.

9. Do you think race matters with student achievement?

No. Well from who's point of view, I guess. I don't think it should make a difference. The kids are all learners. I don't think it should matter, but it does. But to teachers it does and to parents it does. I think Black and Brown kids are getting a different education where White kids are seen for what they are or for what the teachers think they are, like better or something., But it shouldn't matter because they all want to learn, but I don't think they do. My son is kind of an outcast so I guess race does matter.

Significant Statements Gleaned from the Transcripts

Research Question # 1—What perceptions were held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school?

Parent Perception of Why the Achievement Gap Exists:

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I believe this occurs because it's human nature to see a person first by their color. Once the first impression has entered one's mind then that person's beliefs and values kick in and their reaction would mimic their belief positive or negative.”
- “Unfortunately we live in a society that breeds racism and that carries into the classroom.”
- “I like to believe that some of it is ignorance and lack of knowledge or different cultures, this all could be taught and addressed.”
- “The other portion is just sheer racism and hatred and innocent kids' education suffers because of it.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think it's interesting to look back now with a different perspective.”
- “I grew up in a small town that was predominately Hispanic and I was in kindergarten and there were huge racial issues at the high school.”
- By the time I got to high school I was so unaware of these issues.
- “I remember, very clearly, when I was in the third grade being called “Honkey Girl” and that was hurtful.”

- “But looking back, like I said I was a very motivated student and had higher level classes, but now that I look back, there were more White kids in those classes than Hispanic but there were more Hispanic kids in the school.”
- “If the expectation was that you would go to college you were put in certain classes but if you weren’t you were put in other classes.
- “I think maybe being in a small town some kids felt like their role was predetermined.”
- “You would either take over the farm or be a laborer.
- “I don’t remember taking many classes that weren’t leveled, but the ones that were, there weren’t a lot of Hispanic students in them.”
- “I guess it’s kind of like, what’s the expectation or what’s the hope of your family?”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think that a lot of it is the expectations of the family.”
- “I knew some Hispanic people, so it was not that big of a deal to me, but it was different because their expectations from their families were different.
- If they got in trouble in class it was just like, “Just stop doing that,” all of a sudden.”
- “But before that if we acted up it was a big deal because all of the parents got involved.”
- “The expectations just were different than from the White families than the Hispanic.”
- “I remember those students [Black students], for the most part being pretty aggressive, males and females.”
- “As far as stating who they were and why they were there, there wasn’t a big academic push, but I think they felt like they had to make their presence known and show that they were part of the student body.”
- “But again, there was a difference between the students.”
- “I think the teachers back then expected more from the White students than the Black students.”
- “...you did notice some students, well the Black students, their parents were more into saying, “You gotta work hard because you don’t want to be where I am on food stamps and all that,” and then there was another racial section or set of parents that were like, “Do what I do. I’m doing ok, I’m happy, the government’s supporting me. You’re Black so you’re never gonna go to college so do what you want to.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "...I can't help but think about when I was in school."
- "It could have been because it was a poor neighborhood, but, I thought the stuff we learned in middle and high school was pretty irrelevant."
- "When I went to college I wasn't prepared."
- "It seemed like the White kids in my classes seemed so much more together academically than I did."
- "I don't know, maybe it has to do with low expectations."

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I think the achievement gap occurs because you have teachers who aren't expecting much from the minority kids."
- "I don't think there's high expectations."
- "Now that I think about it, I think the biggest thing that makes a difference is the expectations from the teachers all the way to the principal."

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I think to a certain extent background factors play a role."
- "I think every child has an innate personality and that personality influences how they do in school."
- "I think part of it is that students are bored."
- "I don't think that teachers do enough to engage students in the way they're interested."
- "Not everybody learns the same way."
- "It seems like we have a factory model of education in the United States."
- "I think it's more geared toward White students because culturally there are a lot of differences."
- "Like I think a lot of minority kids are growing up in households that are loud and then they are stuck in this classroom where they are expected to stay still and be quiet and that is definitely a cultural difference to what they have at home."
- "I think that low expectations have a lot to do with it as well."
- "A friend of mine calls it the "pobre sito" syndrome."
- "A lot of teachers, unfortunately, don't hold as high of an expectation for all kids."
- "A lot of minority parents don't have an education so they don't know how to mentor their kid through the bureaucratic hoops."

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I believe it all starts with the foundation at home.”
- “...coming from a Mexican background, I had no support at home.”
- “If I wanted to do well it was because I wanted to do well.”
- “I imagine in Caucasian households, there is a hope and help for the kids more often than not.”
- “I think for boys especially, middle school is an age where they hit a fork in the road where they have decided what they are going to do...if they have an interest in school and will excel in that or if they will go in the other direction.”
- “I remember getting straight “A’s” until [middle school] and then I started to disengage until I went into high school and got into sports—that motivated me.”
- “[My father] had no formal education at all so I had no one to teach me how to navigate my way through.”

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think it’s happening because teachers have low expectations and they think that we don’t care about education as much as White parents.”
- “I think they judge students by how they look.”
- “...in my son’s case they judge him by how he looks or how I dress.”
- “I think he’s just as smart as any other kid but he’s not treated the same.”
- “I think some of the teachers have low expectations and think that I don’t care so why should they.”

Parent Reaction to the Poem: Transformation (Ferguson, 2000):

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “He is talking about White kids being smarter and the focus being on them. I think he thinks the White kids are smarter.”
- “The first line about kids looking different seemed so smart and the kids that looked like he did weren’t so smart.”
- “There are teachers that just assume that kids of color don’t know the answers and that makes me mad.”
- “You know the part about where the kids are getting smarter but are still cool, I think that is so important.”
- “To allow kids of color to have their personalities and talents that make them different and still treat them like they are smart.”
- “The first part makes me feel sad; because I know this poem wasn’t written in the 50’s—that this is still happening in school.”
- “The end of the poem makes me hopeful, that maybe things are getting better.”

- “I want my child to have that experience to feel right, and valued, and smart. It’s a great poem.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I thought it was a child of color.”
- “...but I think it was a boy. I think the author is talking about being passed over.”
- “I was really struck by the line where the kids were still “cool” but also “bright. I think a lot of kids think that “cool” and “bright” are exclusive, like you can be cool or you can be smart but you can’t be both.”
- “I don’t see that there are a lot of kids, especially minority kids that feel like they can have it both ways.”
- “They can be a jock or cool because that’s more expected or accepted, than to be bright”
- “I sometimes think that some kids don’t see that in themselves.”
- “I feel hopeful after hearing this poem.”
- “I think we’ve come so far in education.”
- “In the past the teachers were there for the high achievers and now we are more equipped to meet all kids’ needs.”
- “It’s not perfect, but there’s hope.”
- “At first the poems is depressing but it gets hopeful in the end.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “...I related to the person who wrote the poem.”
- “I was never in the high group, I was labeled as having a learning disability and even had teachers tell my parents that I would never be of any social benefit, so why was I even in school?”
- “In the poem the kid excelled sooner than I did, I didn’t have any academic self-esteem until I was in college. I relate to the poem.”
- “I think this poem is about being singled out as not being able to succeed.”
- “They’re just there, they’re just filling a space, but the teacher’s direct attention is on the White students.”
- “I remember being in school and there were (his voice inflects to mimic a female teacher), “The good kids that want to learn and the other kids that don’t want to learn.””
- “I also am drawn to the part in the poem that says, “Our teachers liked them better.”
- “I feel kind of sad that it even had to come to this.”
- “But then again, I’m relieved that the dreams and wishes at the end of the poem are coming to fruition.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was like that kid in the poem.”
- “Although there were not a lot of White kids at the schools I went to, I remember thinking they were so smart, because my teachers seemed to make comments and comparisons all of the time.”
- “Specifically the part about them seeming so much smarter stood out to me.”
- “I also liked the feeling of hope at the end.”
- “...I am hopeful for my kids that they get better and do better than I did.”
- “At first, listening to the poem, I felt angry.”
- “You know, like this doesn’t have to happen, that these kids are smart, I was smart.”
- “I can’t help but feeling like I was a little jipped.”
- “Towards the end, and maybe even the middle, I started to feel hopeful.”
- “I hope, for my children that they will never have to feel like they are less than anyone else.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Pretty cool poem.”
- “But it’s pretty sad in the beginning you know because I think that’s true for a lot of kids because I think they just get left behind.”
- “I picture a little a little Mexican kid talking.”
- “The opening line about being two to three steps behind and the other kids knew stuff that they had no idea about.”
- “...like when I went to that private high school there were some things I couldn’t relate to like traveling or just certain things like that.”
- “I felt pretty angry in the beginning (of the poem), because I’ve been there, but it gets better in the middle and when it finishes I felt more of a sense of hope.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I don’t think the standards movement has done much for student achievement.”
- “In the beginning where the author talks about starting two or three steps behind, I know it was true for me when I went from my neighborhood to a magnet school, I was behind my peers. I had a lot of catching up to do.”
- “Still to this day it makes me very angry.”

- “It makes me angry even with my son that I have to be proactive that I have to seek out a school that will set high expectations for my child.”
- “It’s unfortunate to me that not every child has this opportunity and that all of their parents don’t know how to beset advocate for their child.”
- “It shouldn’t be that I have to look for a school he should have that same education.”
- “The phrase that some kids understood things that never crossed my mind. That phrase reminds me of kids that don’t speak English and how a lot of times they come to this country strong in math and just because they don’t speak English they don’t have access to higher level classes and are stuck in a remedial track.”
- “There is a judgment made just because of their language.”
- “In the beginning of the poem I felt angry.”
- “It seems unfair and I think especially for kids that can’t or don’t know how to advocate for themselves—that just really resonates for me and makes me mad.”
- “The inequality at the beginning of the poem is really obvious.”
- “I hope that the end of the poem ends up as the case for all schools.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “There were many times I was ostracized [in school] for not speaking English so well.”
- “It was sink or swim, so when the author speaks of being two or three steps behind, I can relate to that.”
- “The phrase, ‘Kids that looked so different than me seemed so smart...’ makes me recall many of the White friends I had that had a lot of help at home, whereas I didn’t have any help at home.”
- “When I listen to this poem I feel anger and maybe even nostalgic, I can put myself in the poem.”
- “I can identify with the poem.”
- “I remember I used to kind of dwell or bury my emotions in sports. I would find solace in football. On the field we were all equal—that is what we had and who we were and it was based on athletic ability not our skin color.”

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “The beginning part, I was like poor kid.”
- “I think of my son when I hear this poem.”
- “The kids that were the same as him weren’t so smart but the other kids did seem smart.”

- "...in kindergarten that's the first time they start to pay attention to race, but when they go to school they start to notice how some kids are treated according to race."
- "The part about how we become good athletes and dancers because a lot of minorities do do that."
- "I feel like I'm going to cry right now."
- "You know, we don't like to hear this stuff but it is happening." I
- "I feel anger when I listen to this, our kids are struggling in kindergarten, actually right from the get go."
- "It's just so sad that our kids have to deal with this."
- "Towards the end I feel hopeful."

Parent Perception of the Socioeconomic Importance

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "(I expect) that my daughter is provided with the resources that will challenge her and that she is getting a well rounded experience."
- "When I think about an educational experience, to me it's not just academic—it's peer, social, emotional, athletic."
- "With the resources that Red Oak has, I want my kid to be exposed to every culture, especially their own, instead of being ignored and forgotten in the school."
- "I feel fortunate at Red Oak to have an African American Principal and a Hispanic Assistant Principal."
- "...I feel like race relations and issues will be addressed and I feel very grateful for that."
- "I have higher expectations for the teachers too, and I do expect as a taxpayer that the school will have more resources."
- "I totally think social status matters."
- "...just driving into the parking lot you can see the different economic levels."
- "I don't know if my daughter feels it yet."
- "...I feel the pressure with the clothes style and electronics."
- "There is also an underlying weight that I feel because my daughter is bi-racial, because she is different, that I feel like I don't want anything extra to have her singled out."

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I expect fewer behavior problems and less tolerance for behavior problems."
- "[Teachers] are there to maintain rigor, as well as relationships, but still maintain boundaries."

- “She needs a mentor or someone she can go to if she has a problem but she doesn’t need a “grown up” peer.”
- “We expect that most of the kids at the school are college bound, and academically oriented.”
- “I think we expect the kids at the school to also be more socially responsible.”
- “I think one thing that’s notable about being in a higher socioeconomic school setting, that our assumption, whether proven or not, is that you’re going to have a healthier environment because there are fewer kids that worry about basic needs types of things.”
- “The kids also seem to be more age appropriate and healthier in general. They’re not part of the penal system.”
- “Overall it seems to be a more mentally healthy population.
- “I think social status definitely matters.”
- “Moving here really meant a lot to our older daughter in regards to status.”
- “I know we first thought we were a little ostentatious, it’s not like we’re snooty, rich people—we just work hard and have made good financial decisions.”
- “I think our older daughter felt the pressure to keep up because she so much wanted to be a part of that group.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I expect that the administration be available and be leaders in the community. I think they need to set a good example.”
- “I expect them to attend and be visible at school events like sporting events. I do notice when I am at these events.”
- “I expect the teachers to be leaders for the students.”
- “I expect them to push the students to reach their potential.”
- “I expect that the kids will behave better but it’s not necessarily what I have to see.”
- “I do expect that the students in the school are more collaborative and support each other reach their goals.”
- “I would say social status matters in the neighborhood.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I expect a lot.”
- “...we moved to the district for the reputation of the schools.
- I expect that they have all of the things, like resources and stuff, to support the kids learning.”
- “I expect that they will hold my kids to a higher standard and that they will contact me when my kids are not meeting the standard.”

- “My son is starting to be more aware of what we have or don’t have in comparison to his friends and that is kind of frustrating.”
- “Our means are our means and he doesn’t understand that yet.”
- “He desperately wants, or even feels like he needs, to keep up with those other kids.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “My expectations are pretty high.”
- “I expect her to be more advanced than the schools that are closer to us. I expect her to be higher than other 7th graders than of kids at the schools by us.”
- “I do think social status matter at her school.”
- “Those kids all live in big homes and drive nice cars.”
- “I absolutely think there’s pressure to keep up with the Joneses.”
- “I think there a few kids at the school that she’s friends with that make it a big deal about how big their house is or whatever.”
- “Parents and students probably have that pressure.
- I somewhat feel that too.”
- “When her friends come over, we want to make sure she’s proud of our house, sure.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “When I described the school earlier, I neglected to point out that most importantly, my son likes the school and that has been the biggest change I’ve seen in him.”
- “My expectations are high and I think that school should be and has been on their toes because the community demands it.”
- “If something is going on it just can’t be hidden, it has to be addressed.”
- “I think there’s pressure to be involved at the school for parents.”
- “My son is a trendsetter so I don’t think he feels pressure to keep up with his peers as far as material things.”
- “Simply stated, no I don’t feel that pressure to keep up with the Joneses per’se, maybe it’s because we don’t live in the area.”
- “I think the kids at his school are very conscious about who has what though.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Pretty high [expectations for an affluent school] considering the fact that we decided to choice him into the school.”
- “I feel my son has responded pretty well compared to the other school he went to where he wasn’t performing as well.”

- “I think social status matters, especially because when I drop my kid off I’ll see moms talking together and comparing notes about what’s going on in the school.”
- “I don’t think there’s pressure to keep up with the Joneses. We do right by our kid and do the best we can, we don’t need to perform to someone else’s expectation of us.”
- “I think our son has had some pressure because he’s starting to recognize brands and wants those...I think that comes from the school.”

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I expect my kids to get the best education.”
- “I expect better everything; better teachers, better administrators, better technology, everything.”
- “No, I don’t think so,” in response to question regarding if social status matters.
- “But for my son, I think maybe there is.”
- “I think he worries about how other kids are doing academically so he tries to be more cooler than they are.”
- “He thinks if he has Jordan’s or certain clothes than he’s on a level playing field with them.”
- “I think he thinks that if he can’t outsmart them then he’ll out flash them and that’s better to him.”

Parent Opinion as to Whether Race Matters in Academic Achievement:

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I believe race matters with student achievement.”
- “I believe that students of color in any classroom setting or educational environment will be addressed by the instructor based on the color of their skin.”
- “...I feel that it's human nature to recognize a person first by their color.”
- “I personally don't feel that her race has affected her success in any way positive or negative simply because she has a learning disability that puts her in a separate classroom environment.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think that often race does impact academic achievement.”
- “...a person belonging to a race that is marginalized may have a harder time finding relevance and value in what he/she may see as a primarily "White" environment.”

- “That same person may also have personal circumstances that interfere with academic success--having to take care of siblings and not being able to focus on studies, having to work to help support the family, teen pregnancy, etc...”
- “...some minority students consider being academically successful being "White" and feel that if they are successful in school, they won't be accepted by peers of the same race or even sometimes their own families; that they think they are better than other members of their race who haven't been academic achievers.”
- “Minority students (students of color) may also have to fight negative stereotypes that society in general has about their race, which, I assume, would be discouraging and either serve as motivation to achieve even more or basically give up on formal education.”
- “Race can also positively impact academic success.”
- “Minority students may be motivated to be academic achievers to obtain a better position than that of their parents, relatives, and friends.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Maybe relevant, maybe not—I also think that the academic success of a child's parents can have the same effect as race on a student.”
- “Parents who were not academically successful may not feel that education is valuable, and they did just fine without going to college, finishing high school, etc.”
- “Conversely, the lack of parental academic success may be a factor in them helping to motivate their kids to strive for more opportunities--opportunities denied them due to their lack of academic success.”
- “People tend to stereotype others and by doing so we allow ourselves to say that a person’s race affects their success not just academically but in life in general.”
- “I feel that it is a person’s environment that determines the outcome of events.”
- “...a person that lives in a prosperous situation where basic human needs are supplied daily will have a better chance to succeed.”
- “...it is the environment that shapes the future.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Absolutely (in response to question regarding if race matters to student achievement).”
- “I think race matters in everything.”

- "...I am so aware of everything that goes on in the school."
- "I don't think it's right if certain kids get a different or better education than mine."
- "Not that that goes on too much at Red Oak, but it does happen, and you better believe, I call them out on it when it does."

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I think race matters because it affects everything you do, I think the way people look at you whether you're Brown or White they look at you different."
- "I think it matters because the expectations of people of color are less. I think it makes it harder for kids."
- "They have to push harder and work harder just to form an equal ground."

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I think race matters in most instances."
- "We've been pretty fortunate up to this point because we're aware."
- "I'm sensitive to racism and that my son is exposed to low expectations. I think race plays a role in achievement in general—in the U.S."

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "Yes, I do," in response to question regarding if race matters to student achievement.
- "We like to think we live in a society where race or color's blind and it's not."
- "It's (racism) unspoken and I think it's still very much around."
- "Depending on what school you go to, or depending on what part of the city you live in, you are going to be seen as whatever color you are and it's very unfortunate and very sad and I don't think it's something we're going to be able to solve for many years, if ever."

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "No. Well from who's point of view, I guess," in response to question regarding if race matters to student achievement.
- "I don't think it should make a difference."

- “The kids are all learners.”
- “I think Black and Brown kids are getting a different education, where White kids are seen for who they are or for what the teachers think they are, like better or something.”
- “My son is kind of an outcast so I guess race does matter.”

Research Question # 2—How did parents, specifically parents of color, experience an affluent middle school, where a racial achievement gap exists and what meaning did the experience have for the parent partners? Essentially, did parents of color experience the school differently than White families?

Parent Descriptions of Their Experiences at Red Oak:

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “They communicate and their curriculum and their educational of course, and the fact that kids go to school with kids they already know.”
- “One thing I was surprised, that I actually love about the school, is the diversity. I think I had in my mind that the school was going to be all White.”
- “As a White woman with bi-racial children—their dad is Black—I am always aware of race—it weighs heavy on my mind.”
- “As far as dislikes go, there is nothing I really dislike.”
- “...I feel heard and I feel like a valued part of the school.”
- “...not only does she have to deal with the bi-racial stuff at school but also her learning disability poses some challenges.”
- “I feel that Red Oak has been very open and welcoming.”
- “I probably have my guard up and very protective of how my daughter is treated.”
- “At the middle school level, it seems like the achievement gap, talking about color, is more welcome and respected among staff members, so I really feel like she has been better off at the middle school.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I like the structure of some of the classes where it’s ability and not necessarily just their grade...”

- “I think that everybody is really receptive really open to questions, really invested in kids and what’s god for kids.”
- “I really don’t really think I can come up with much bad.”
- “I was disappointed with the awards assembly with my oldest daughter.”
- “I think there’s a lot of opportunity to have leadership roles and get involved.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “One of the things I really like as well is that they are getting a good education.”
- “They are supported; if they need the help they can get the help.”
- “I think the teachers have went above and beyond in helping her achieve good grades and reach her goals.”
- “I think they have always been very open and welcoming to me—students seem to be able to get involved in whatever sports or clubs or whatever they want to do.”
- “There always seem to be something going in, whether it’s an event, or track meet.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “We have been pretty happy with the school in general.”
- “Our son has a lot of friends and he likes her teachers.”
- “I think we feel informed and that helps.”
- “I also feel like we are welcomed and encouraged to come to the school.”
- “The principal is also African American and that helps, I think, with approachability.”
- “There have been a couple of times that I’ve felt like teachers could have communicated more with me.”
- “I don’t enable our kids, but a few times I have asked teachers to contact me and they respond with, ‘Check Power School.’”
- “I feel like I have tried to reach out a few times and instead of working with me these teachers were patronizing.”
- “...I am still pretty confused and hurt by that.”
- “It colors all of the good things that have gone on in the school and makes me a little suspicious of some teachers and their treatment of my child.”
- “My son has always been a pretty good student.”

- “I have gotten a few calls for behavior because he likes to act like a fool in the hallway.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “One thing I really like about the school... it seems like they have a lot more rigorous work for our daughter.”
- “It seems like they have a lot more forward thinking as far as the school work, the way they give homework, they assignments in general seem like they’re a lot harder for her.”
- “The downside I guess is that she’s one of the only, well it seems like there are very few minority kids there.”
- “In particular, she’s in a program for advanced kids and it seems like there aren’t any minority kids in that program with her, in fact you talk to her and she says there aren’t really very many minorities in it at all.”
- “...the teachers have been very responsive.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think there are a lot of events to bring the community into the school.”
- “I think it’s almost overwhelming sometimes.”
- “There have been a few incidents, not recently but first quarter I had an incident where last year the cafeteria people were accusing my son of stealing food.”
- “I was really infuriated that they would accuse him of that.”
- “As far as teachers go, he has a history of going out of his way for teachers he likes and contrary for those that he doesn’t.”
- “So it can be a very good year with a particular teacher or a very bad year.”
- “Some of his behavior issues are around him wanting to look cool in front of his friends.”
- “Our interaction with the staff has been mostly positive, but there have been times that I have been disappointed with how the dean’s office has handled things.”
- “...they have tried to strong arm my son with intimidation tactics.”
- “What’s most frustrating is they have done this without contacting me.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I like the parent involvement in the school.”
- “They seem to care a lot about the kids at the school.”
- “... there are a lot of activities available that range from athletics to art club or drama club.”

- "...I think they do a great job."
- "There are a lot of options to get parents involved in the school."
- "I haven't had any problems with the school."
- "He does well in school."
- "He's had some behavior problems."
- "He craves the attention because he wants to be like by his peers."
- "If it's something that doesn't interest him his mind wanders."

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "It's been up and down
- I have been disappointed though.
- "...my son had some issues with one of his teachers and I believe it was kind of racial because he was one of the only minorities in his class and it seemed like this teacher was always targeting him for what he was doing wrong and there would be white kids in the class messing around and the teacher would ignore it."
- "I feel like she kind of treated him like an outcast because he's a minority."
- "There have been a lot of things that have bothered me."
- "I feel like I am there all of the time, picking my son up and it looks like other parents are more welcomed than I am."
- "I don't feel comfortable in the school."
- "I guess that could be my fault too because I don't put myself out there, but I don't think they do much to reach out to me either."
- "I think maybe too, because I'm a young parent, I don't get much respect from the teachers because they don't think I care about school or whatever."
- "I also think because we're minorities they think less of us."
- "I'll see teachers talking to some of the parents with no problem, but they don't try to get to know me unless he's in trouble."
- "There are a lot of times that I've felt uncomfortable, because I am a single parent and a minority."
- "I think academically, he's doing ok."
- "I think he gets frustrated because he doesn't get recognized when he does well. I think he is smart."
- "He reads well, and he writes well but he doesn't get rewarded for it."
- "I also think he only has a few friends from his classes because they are one of the few minorities there."
- "He's always hanging out with the same three friends because that's who he feels comfortable with."

Parent Perceptions of Teaching at Red Oak:

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I feel like the school has very high expectations of all students.”
- “My perception of Red Oak is that they are very conscientious of the level of rigor.”
- “I believe that the relevance is very important in these times for kids to like school.”
- “I think relationships between teachers and students are so important at this age.”
- “I think the relationship is so important to the child’s success and I feel like it’s the expectation of the administration that relationships are central.”
- “I believe relationships are the most important key to my children’s success because if they don’t have a good relationship with their teacher than their concentration, their buy-in, their foundation suffers in the classroom.”
- “I feel like if my child does not have a good relationship with her teacher than as soon as she walks into that classroom she shuts down.”
- “...when you have a teacher/student relationship that is engaging and the curriculum is relevant to that child’s world they will learn so much more than the textbook offers.”
- “You can tell when you walk in the door, Red Oak is centered on kids.”
- “I was shocked to see the diverse faces of the kids at the school, you know at like registration and the orientation, I was so pleasantly surprised and pleased.”
- “I don’t see representation of kids of color.”
- “...it seems a little sterile.”
- “The building is very meticulous, but it feels very White.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think there’s been rigor.”
- “I think of relevance more immediately.”
- “In middle school it’s hard to get any buy in so we have to show them how it relates to them now.”
- “But maybe showing them that it’s the process of understanding that makes it relevant than the content of itself.”
- “I think the reality is that our kids aren’t going to have a close relationship with every teacher.”
- “I think they need to learn how to work through that experience because that is real life.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think rigor’s extremely important.”
- “They need to learn that it’s ok to struggle.”
- “You need to learn how to figure out how to problem solve and persevere when things don’t go perfectly.”
- “It’s so important that the curriculum be relevant.”
- “That was one of my problems in school.”
- “I didn’t understand why things were important in the real world.”
- “Kids need to see why it’s relevant to them and their world.”
- “I think about the teachers I had good relationships with, it made me want to learn content that maybe I didn’t have any interest in.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think Red Oak is very rigorous.”
- “I think the classes are hard and the stuff the kids come home with make them think more than stuff I did in school.”
- “I think the staff is very caring and I think most of the teachers care about all of the kids.”
- “I think there is a very high expectation that kids will achieve...”
- “...I would hope that there is a belief that all of them can in no matter what their race.”
- “...I am not too sure he’s really found the relevance yet.”
- “He doesn’t really see the value of some of the assignments.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think it’s extremely rigorous there.”
- “I think the material is very relevant.”
- “... we had her in a private school and all they did was hand outs and work that was really easy.”
- “I think the relationships are really good with her peers and fine with her teachers.”
- “From what I understand, if you are in this advanced program all students matter.”
- “If you aren’t in this program, it doesn’t seem as prevalent in the school.”
- “Again I’m just speaking about my daughter, but I think because she’s in the advanced program she is getting high expectations.”
- “...there was a math teacher that didn’t think she could do the advanced math, but I think we got that worked out.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think rigor is extremely important—it goes back to the comment about access to be able to learn certain topics—how can you learn certain things if you are not even given opportunity to learn them?”
- “Rigor goes back to high the teacher’s expectations are.”
- “I think relationships are high there as well.”
- “For the most part, I think all the teachers work well with the kids.”
- “I also think the instruction, mostly, is relevant—it’s part of what makes my son engaged in what he is doing.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I feel that each student is held accountable.”
- “I genuinely feel that they care about each student there.”
- “There are a lot of teachers that make my son feel like his participation is welcomed and necessary to whatever they’re learning.”
- “I think they do a good job.”

Delfina Nelson—statements take from transcripts of interviews

- “I don’t think they push him enough academically.”
- “I think I push them harder at home than they do at school.”
- “I bet he could be in advanced classes but they just keep him there and don’t push him harder or expect more from him.”
- “I don’t think he finds the work relevant either.”
- “He doesn’t think the work is important to his life. I don’t think he sees the importance of a lot of things he does in school.”
- “And if he doesn’t see the point than he just does the bare minimum.”
- “I think the relationships have gotten a little better, because I have had some words with some of the teachers.”
- “...sometimes the teachers will call me and try to sprinkle some sugar on top before they start telling me how badly he behaves in the class.
- “He has one teacher though that he loves to death, so he does whatever she wants.”
- “...another teacher he thinks is out to get him so he shuts down.”

Parent Descriptions of Their Child’s Academic Performance?

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Yes and no,” (in response to question regarding if her child is reaching his full academic potential).

- “I think that she tries very hard and with a disability it is always more difficult—so in that regard, yes.”
- “...I also don’t want to limit her potential.”
- “I think that she doesn’t even know what she’s capable of yet.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think there are certain subject areas where she had weak teachers for several teachers in a row.”
- “When that happens, in the long run, her overall understanding has suffered.”
- “So in a way no, but in a way, it wasn’t entirely her fault, (in response to question regarding if her child is reaching his full academic potential).”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think for the first year of middle school, she is learning the game of the new level.”
- “She’s comfortable right now, but as she gets into the swing of things she is going to really excel.”
- “I see her as really growing in the coming years.”

Justina Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think that he could do more.”
- “Not only is he a class clown, but he kind of picks and chooses what classes and teachers he will perform for and that is so frustrating.”
- “If he doesn’t like a teacher or thinks the teacher doesn’t like him—it’s like pulling teeth to get him to try her best.”
- “He will give the bare minimum to get by.”
- “On the other hand he works very hard for teachers he likes.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “She’s struggled to get good grades at Red Oak, coming from the private school.”
- “...she’s a hard worker, and I think she’ll get it eventually.
- Not that she’s slow but sometimes she’ll take longer to study than her friends are.”
- “I think the school really pushes her.”
- “...as parents at home we are always on her.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I always think he can do better.”
- “I wonder if our shared custody situation causes him to struggle but, I know he is very smart and can do whatever.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “No, I do not,” (regarding whether parent feels child is reaching their full academic potential).
- “I think he’s a smart kid.”
- “I think he won’t meet his full potential until he’s older, but he’s a bright kid.”
- “I think his achievement dips when he’s not home with us.”

Delfina Nelson—statements take from transcripts of interviews

- “Not at all,” (in response to question regarding if her child is reaching his full academic potential).
- “Because I see how smart he is and how the work doesn’t seem to be that hard for high grades.”
- “...he has a little mouth on him and when he’s asked to work harder or do something beyond the bare minimum he talks back.”

Parent Reflections on Their Academic Experiences and How Those Shape the Child’s

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was a good student.”
- “I had some peer issues, but overall, I did my work and got good grades.”
- “I think about my interactions socially and all of the peer issues I had.”
- “...because my daughter is bi-racial, I don’t want her singled out for any reason.”
- “I want her to be better, and I want her to feel confident and understand what it feels like to be successful.”
- “My experience has a huge impact on my daughter.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was very good student.”
- “I worked very hard and I earned very good grades because of it.
- “I think because I was such a strong performing student, I project those expectations on my kids.”

- “But then that places a strain on our relationship. Maybe what I have to learn to do is let go of my baggage.”
- “I had to realize that if she doesn’t get to go to the college she wants to go to then she’ll have to deal with that and see where that leads her.”
- “There are a lot of paths that lead to the same destination and maybe she won’t take the direct route like I want her to take but she’ll figure out a way to get there.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I struggled.”
- “I had a learning disability so after years of struggling in school, I learned to cope, or sometimes I would shut down.”
- “I think my grades in later years were closely related to the connection I had with the teacher.”
- “I am much more understanding, I think, because I had such a hard time in school.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was an ok student.”
- “I think I was a lot like him.”
- “I worked hard for teachers I liked and didn’t for teachers I didn’t like.
- ...I don’t think my education was the best and because we moved to this district for the kids, I am very sensitive to how they are treated and their grades and stuff.”
- “...I am even a little, some teachers might think, aggressive.”
- “I email them all of the time if I feel like he is being treated unfairly.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was a mess up.”
- “I did ok academically, but I was always clowning around, you know?”
- “I think we kind of went through a similar experience, I know she’s in middle school, but with the kids around her, they’re all not minority kids just like at my high school
- “I think she’s finding her identity, figuring out who she is as a Latina.”
- “And I think it was a little hard for me when I was in school so it’s trying to get her to get that it’s ok to be proud of who you are racially.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was a very good student.”
- “I worked hard and earned high grades.”

- “I think I was more driven than my peers because I knew education would set me apart.”
- “I didn’t know exactly how to navigate the hoops, but I knew I wanted to be educated.”
- “I [my educational experience] makes me more proactive about ensuring that my son is in the best possible school.”
- “I don’t want him to go through the same things that I went through. I don’t want him to be behind.”
- “Teachers, I think make the biggest difference.”
- “It makes me more sensitive that he’s being held to high expectations, that what he’s being taught is relevant to him and he’s interested in it and that he has every opportunity to excel.”
- “I think that if I had all those opportunities I could have gone to an Ivy League school.”
- “If I had someone to mentor me and walk me through the hoops I could have went a different path.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I feel that because we are of color, that we have to try that much harder to make sure that my son is that much more prepared for school.”
- “...we have to go that extra mile just to make sure that it’s done, in my opinion.”

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I was fairly good in middle school.”
- “I just wanted to get through and teachers were just there to get you through.”
- “There wasn’t a real priority to connect to us or connect us to what we were learning.”
- “It was pretty much just compliance.”
- “I don’t want that for my kids.”
- “I want them to feel like they are really wanted here and that the teachers are going to teach them everything and more that they need to know—and I didn’t get that for sure.”

Research Question # 3—How were rituals and routines different and/or the same for families of color versus White families?

Parent Descriptions of Family Roles:

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I am a single mom with 2 daughters and as a parent I have the children 70 percent of the time.”
- “My role as a parent is to provide everything—food, clothes, and schooling.”
- “My oldest is a 6th grader and my youngest a 2nd grader so we are all students in our household.”
- “But the three of us at home, the girls and I, are very, very close.”
- “The kids have a lot of extended family involvement they are with their dad, especially when they lived with him at their grandmother’s house.”
- “...on my side, my parents are extremely involved with the upbringing of the children. We see them about every other weekend. Talk to them on the phone. They are a huge influence as far as their upbringing.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “But our role is to establish values, morals, teach them responsible behavior, follow through, pride in what you do, provide consequences, consistency.”
- “I think bringing home the paycheck and teaching them to be productive members of society.”
- “The kids in our house have varying chores and we expect them to contribute to the family and the running of the family and at times that works better than others because being the age they are they are so ego centric.”
- “There’s not a lot of extended family involvement.”
- “My parents don’t live close so we only see them occasionally.”
- “We’re not real close, relationship-wise either, but there are a lot of dynamics that make that difficult.”
- “So no, we really are very individualist...”
- “It’s very much that mindset of take care of your own needs and don’t rely too heavily on extended family to help you out.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Just to be good role models for them and teach the children to do that also.”
- “We want them to become productive, healthy people to society, we would like them to excel and have ambitions of going to college and to get degrees because they will be better off to go to college than not to go to college.”
- “There isn’t too much extended family involvement.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "...the roles in the family are somewhat blended."
- "Our extended family is really involved in the upbringing of our kids because I work outside of the home."
- "My husband and I are very strict. The kids usually know where we stand and how we will answer regarding some of the questions they ask."
- "Our middle child is in middle school now and he is trying to spread his wings and try different after school activities, as well as hang out with friends after school."

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "Parent involvement with the kids, you know, we take the kids to school, we pick the kids up."
- "...basically direct them with household chores and home work."
- "We have small children that my mom watches at her home."
- "...my wife's parents take the kids on weekends; they have them over for the weekend."
- "It's kind of like a very normal family."

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I think my role is to guide my son the best way that I can and make sure that he has all the tools he needs to be successful."
- "...making sure that he is successful in school and that includes ensuring a consistent environment including rituals and routines expected schedules making sure we provide opportunities for extracurricular activities."
- "Our extended family is always around."
- "Their role is to provide love and support."
- "I think the role of my son is to be a child."
- "Kids grow up in our society sooner and sooner they don't really enjoy their childhood."

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- "I always help him study, I help him with his vocabulary words or he'll ask me questions and we'll talk about upcoming projects."
- "His mom helps him with homework when I'm not available and vice versa."
- "He's under our supervision at all times, he's at his father's during the weekend and sometimes during the week."

- “[At his father’s] he’s exposed to movies we’d normally not let him watch and other activities we wouldn’t normally let him watch and other activities we wouldn’t let him engage in—so in that sense he doesn’t fulfill the role a child should.”
- “His grandparents care for him on the weekends and on occasions his aunt.”

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “As a parent my role is basically to take care of my kids. To take care of them to love them, to take them to school.”
- “Basically, because I’m a single parent, I do everything.”
- “My kids’ role is to do well in school.”
- “They need to go to school, and do their homework everyday.”
- “My dad is really involved with their upbringing.”
- “He helps them with their homework and reminding them to do their reading.”
- “My sister, brother, and mom are also involved in helping me raise them.”

Parents Descriptions of Home Rituals and Routines:

Misty Lincoln—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Going back to college 25 years later really opened my eyes to how important it is that the kids get every basic structure for a strong foundation.”
- “We are all doing homework every night.”
- “The kids are in bed by 8:30. We have homework from 7-8:30 every night.”
- “One of the things I don’t do is rewards, because I don’t want them to do it for something.”
- “I want them to learn to do it for themselves for them to get that satisfaction of their own accomplishments.”
- “Is just the reward of knowing you did by yourself, that no one helped you. I am really trying to embed that into the girls instead of, “If you get two “A’s” I give you five bucks,” or whatever the rewards system is.”
- “As far as consequences, no not really big in our house either, yet.”
- “Of course if the homework is forgotten they have a consequence at school that you need to talk to the teacher about it.”

Sally Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “When the kids were younger, both in elementary school, we actually had a, “No TV on School Night,” policy.”
- “...as they’ve gotten older they’ve learned to self-manage a little more so that has gone by the waste side, but for a couple of years it was no TV during the school nights and that helped.”
- “We’ve typically always had the girls do homework at the kitchen table while one of us was cooking dinner.”
- “Fortunately, they’ve been able to integrate those habits so it’s really never been a struggle to get them to do their homework.”
- “I think it all goes back to kindergarten which lays the foundation of this is the expectation we’re going to set aside the reading time and not just sign the reading log and say we did it and you know hold them accountable.”
- “Now it’s more like they start on their homework on their own and we trust them to get it done.”
- “We have done some contingency reward type things...”
- “I was a straight “A” student and so I have very high expectations.”

Harry Crystal—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “As far as rewards both of us don’t subscribe to the whole—an “A” is worth so much money, a “B” is worth so much money.”
- “...we want them to work on their own merit and not expect something.”
- “We don’t really go out of the way to reward good grades.”
- “We really want it to be an intrinsic reward to have pride in good work.”
- “I think I am more lax about consequences than Sally.”

Justina Simmons—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “...they usually settle in by getting a snack and starting homework at the dining room table.”
- “Once they are done with homework they each do their chores and get ready for dinner.”
- “We try to eat dinner as a family at least three times a week, but there are times when the kids eat at the island in the kitchen.”
- “... [they] hit the sack by 8:30.”
- “We don’t really reward the kids for good grades, we expect them to do their best, but I think the follow through with consequences is probably more noticeable.”

- “We consequence by taking away electronics—cell phones, game boys, TV.”

Diego Martinez—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “When the kids get home they know they have a place for backpacks, Backpack Central.”
- “As far as rituals, we have consistent bedtimes, religious bedtimes—the older kids go to bed at 8:30 and the younger ones go to bed at seven.”
- “With our daughter at Red Oak we’ve been following up with the teachers, even with the two other ones in school we follow up and email the teachers constantly.”
- “We are in constant communication with the school.”
- “When the kids are home they do their homework and we are there to help them.”

Marilyn Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “I think that he knowing what to expect everyday reinforces a safe environment because he knows what’s going to happen every day.”
- “Plus going to bed at the same time every day ensures he will get enough rest and can better concentrate and pay attention at school.”
- “Reading every night also reinforces the expectation from the school.”
- “We try to make sure that we have a lot of reading materials around and we like to have him involved in extracurricular activities.”
- “I don’t think we make rewards very explicit.”
- “We really haven’t had a need to reward because it’s just expected.”
- “His consequences are mostly around video games.”
- “Anything else isn’t much of a consequence because that is what he cares about.”

Pedro Cordova—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “Upon coming home from school, my stepson knows the routine.”
- “He has several chores he has to do first.”
- “...he starts his homework, which I am available to help him with if he needs it.”
- “We eat dinner as a family.”
- “It’s like clockwork.”
- “Rewards aren’t real explicit...I mean there’s really no point to rewarding.”

Delfina Nelson—statements taken from transcripts of interviews

- “The kids do homework on nightly basis, and we set an hour or two aside every night for that.”
- “They have to do their homework before they do anything else—before they can do their homework.”
- “...as well as chores like doing the dishes, and making their beds. They have the same bed time every night—they have to be in bed by nine on weeknights.”
- “Consequences are definitely embedded.”
- “As far as rewards, he is motivated by money.”

Major Themes

As the interview series came to completion, with the eight parent partners, there were several emerging themes to consider. While all eight parent partners were different and came with their own set of experiences and divergent personalities; there were certainly some commonalities related to their experiences at Red Oak Middle School. The themes have been categorized in accordance with their relationship to the research questions. Furthermore, these “theme summaries” help to serve as a baseline for answers to the research questions as it was the essence of the parent partners’ stories which provided the foundation in which to construct answers.

Research Question # 1—What perceptions were held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school?

Expectations and the Existence of the Achievement Gap

The eight parent partners had divergent explanations as to why the achievement gap exists in schools today. Generally, the theme of expectations was an evident thread. Whether it is the expectation of the parents to succeed, or the expectations of the teachers of the students—having and setting high expectations is clear.

Stereotype Threat

Although, expectations were a clear thread in the significant statements, a reoccurring theme, limited to parents of color, is the perception of judgment they feel from the school. Parents suggested that they felt judged as “not caring” about the education of their children; they feel like they and/or their child is judged according to “how they look,” or, “dress”; and an overall judgment of students academic prowess resulting in low expectations by and of the teachers. Delfina went so far as to state, “I think Black and Brown kids are getting a different education, where White kids are seen for who they are and for what the teachers think they are—like better or something.”

Navigating Systems

A less evident, however valuable insight into the achievement gap, is the parents ability to navigate the system. According to a couple of parents (of color), a need exists to educate parents of color in the hidden rules of navigating the system at large.

Race Matters

Unequivocally, according to all eight parent partners, race matters in one form or another. Being, probably, the most emotionally laden question presented to the parent partners, there were a lot of opinions as to whether or not race really makes a difference in academic achievement.

Harry and Sally, intellectualized the question and cited risk factors, such as poverty, young mothers, single parent homes, and low parental expectations and/or involvement in education as contributors to the achievement gap (all of which have been

cited in literature). The biggest difference, certainly, is the difference in how they personalized or didn't personalize the question.

As expected parents of color, overwhelmingly, personalized the question and had personal anecdotes chronicling their experiences. Common themes among all parents of students of color included a hyper-awareness of how people of color are treated, specifically, an awareness and sensitivity to fairness and equity. Furthermore, these parents indisputably cited low teacher expectations for students of color as a contributor to the achievement gap.

The concept of stereotype threat, (Steele, 1992), is clear throughout all of the interviews. However, Sally and Harry intellectualized the concept as a possibility for low achievement, somewhat as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Whereas, the parents of color anecdotally describe emotional incidents in which they felt judged and targeted by the staff. Of an interesting note, Misty (a mother of two bi-racial daughters), does not cite specific incidents of feeling like her daughter has been targeted or judged because of her race, however, she does suggest (during her answer to this question and frequently throughout the process) a sense of worry that her daughter will be targeted for "standing out."

Finally, it must be noted, that the idea of racism was a common thread among all of the parents with students of color. Whether implied, through tales, of individual racist actions, or a general understanding of a racist system. Unmistakably, racism is thought to still exist in education today. Pedro profoundly states, "We like to think we live in a society where race or color's blind and it's not." Diego says of students of color, "They

have to push harder and work harder just to form an equal ground.” Both of these statements are a testament to the system at large.

Emotional Reaction to “Transformation”

Parents’ reactions to the poem, Transformation (Ferguson, 2000), were fascinating. Every parent partner related to the poem in one form or another. All of the parents reported feeling a sense of hope after listening to the entirety of the poem.

However, there was one glaring difference between how the poem was received by the White parent partners as opposed to the parents of color. The White parent partners said they felt “sad” at the beginning of the poem, whereas, parents of color cited feeling “angry”.

Influence of Socioeconomic Status

Overall, the eight parent partners had high expectations of the school. They all indicated the expectation for better resources, curriculum, and programming in general. However, one interesting unique expectation of Harry and Sally (parents of White children) was the high expectations for student behavior, whereas parents of students of color did not mention that (including Misty—although White herself, she is the mother of biracial children).

All of the parents suggested that pressure to “keep up with the Joneses” did exist at Red Oak in one form or another. However, the breakdown of this pressure looked different across racial differences: White parent partners of White children (Harry and Sally) suggested pressure was to fit in by their daughter; Misty (mother of bi-racial children) said the pressure was in her in order to avoid her daughter being singled out;

parents of color, overwhelmingly, mentioned their children as using “stuff” as a means to compensate.

Research Question # 2—How do parents, specifically parents of color, experience an affluent middle school, where a racial achievement gap exists and what meaning did the experience have for the parent partners? Essentially, do parents of color experience the school differently than White families?

Expectations for the School and of the Teachers

When discussing the disappointment with Red Oak, parents’ language indicated the emotion of the event(s): disappointed; hurt; suspicious; outcast; frustration; infuriated; targeted; intimidation; racism; not respected. Furthermore, “stereotype threat,” (Steele, 1994), was prevalent in some of the parent’s descriptions.

Misty’s description of the school was unique. She mentioned her surprise at how diverse Red Oak actually was, as well as the school’s emphasis on “courageous conversations,” (Singleton, 2005).

Influence of Parents’ Experiences

The influence of the parent partners’ educational experiences on how they rear their children was evident across the board. All of the parents suggested wanting their children to experience success and confidence in school. However, that is where the commonalities end.

Sally and Harry expressed the importance of work ethic—essentially, if you work hard you will earn good grades. Misty, however, had concerns about how peers influence

student achievement. She mentioned a few times her concern with her daughter being singled out. Overwhelmingly, the parents of color suggested the importance of student/teacher relationship as being a large influence in their education, and thereby are hypersensitive to that interaction with their children.

Furthermore, the parents of color were demonstrated a hyper-awareness to the treatment of their children by teachers, the risk of low expectations, educational/system hoops, and racial identity. Additionally, they all mentioned relating to their children's educational experience in one way or another.

Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships

In consideration of fundamental teaching variables at Red Oak, the parent partners' responses yielded some of the most divergent answers. Themes regarding rigor and relevance were inconsequential and sporadic. However, major departures in thought manifested when relationships (as a teaching variable) were discussed.

While Misty and Harry both suggested the importance of relationships, Sally implied they were not. Sally believed that, while positive relationships were nice to have, they are not essential to academic success.

Furthermore, she states that poor teacher/student relations are part of the real world and essentially implies that those experiences help to build resiliency and character.

On the other hand, the importance of relationships was stressed dozens of times between the parents of color. Furthermore, this importance was more than intellectualized—each parent partner had personal accounts testifying to the importance of relationships between students and teachers. The theme of working hard for “likable”

teachers versus not working for the contrary was not only evidenced during the question about these teaching variables, but the theme was a shadow throughout the interviews.

Contentment with Red Oak

When asked to discuss their experiences at Red Oak, there were several common themes among all of the parent partners. With the exception of Delfina (who has a history of disappointment with the educational system) overall, the parents feel valued and welcomed in the school. Generally, they are pleased with the community involvement and encouraged to participate in various ways in the school culture. However, all of the parents did experience at least one disappointment with the school.

Perceptions of Child's Academic Performance

When asked about how they perceived their child's academic performance versus their potential, this question revealed the most commonalities among the parent partners. Simply stated, all of parents felt their child wasn't fully reaching their academic potential. Additionally, they each mentioned how hard their children worked and that they had academic potential.

The difference lied in the "whys". Misty shared her belief that her daughter's learning disability limited her performance; Sally, discussed the influence of mediocre teachers on her daughter's performance; Harry, suggested his daughter's achievement has been related to the new level and her navigation of entering 6th grade; four of the five parents of color mentioned their child's resistance to work hard for teachers they "don't like," and their willingness to work hard for the teachers they had a positive relationship with; and four out of the five parents of color made a point to mention how "smart" their

child was. Additionally, Justina and Delfina mentioned their sons' behavior as inhibiting their academic success.

Research Question # 3—How were rituals and routines different and/or the same for families of color versus White families?

Embedded Routines

Across the board, the parent participants expressed the value of having a consistent routine. All of the parents cited consistent bedtimes, homework times, and chores as part of the daily routine.

Interestingly, all three White parents discussed the value of natural consequences and natural rewards (e.g. intrinsic motivation) rather than embedding systems to reward and consequence their children.

Contrary to that school of thought, the five parents of color reported having embedded consequences as motivation for their children. Parents of color varied in their responses to rewards.

Furthermore, all three White parents referenced the importance to lay an educational foundation for their children. This was not mentioned by the parents of color.

Extended Family

Glaring differences were evident regarding the involvement of extended family. Whereas, extended family was utilized as an important factor in the upbringing of the children with the families of color, the White parent partners suggested limited extended family involvement and/or no extended family involvement.

Clear Roles

A common thread among all eight families was the responsibility to provide a moral education to their children as part of the role of the parent. All families also indicated the importance to provide basic and fundamental needs as well as a foundational reverence for education.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

“If tolerance, respect and equity permeate family life, they will translate into values that shape societies, nations and the world,” (Kofi Annan, 1998).

Overview

The purpose of this study was divided into two primary areas: practical and theoretical. The practical focus of this study was to illuminate the phenomenon of the racial achievement gap in an affluent educational setting in order to uncover processes, patterns, policies and systems which contribute to depressing the academic identity of students of color in order and to provide direction to promote the achievement of non-Asian minority students.

The theoretical focus of the study was to examine the detrimental effects of stereotype threat and social mirroring in the development of a positive academic identity among students of color—even under the supposed positive atmosphere of a resource laden educational facility. Gleaning the essence of the parent partners’ experience was central to the framework of the study.

Although the pool of resources, indicating recommendations and protocols for developing culturally proficient schools and eliminating the achievement gap, is wide and deep, it was the researcher’s intent to explore the achievement gap phenomenon through the unique perspective of parents.

The primary objective of the researcher in this study was to construct a rich description of the *essence* residing in each parent partner's unique perceptions of the educational experience at an affluent suburban middle school whereas a racial achievement gap exists.

The rich portrayal of the parent partners is intended to take the reader on a journey of reflection resulting in a deeper understanding of the unique complexities of parents and students of color in an affluent educational setting.

Methodology

In order to thoroughly represent the perspectives of the parents, a phenomenological tradition was the methodology employed to investigate this phenomenon. The overarching question to the study was : Why does an achievement gap exist between minority and non-minority students in affluent socioeconomic educational settings? The three research questions were: (1) What perceptions are held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school? (2) How do parents, specifically parents of color, experience an affluent middle school, where a racial achievement gap exists and what meaning does the experience have for the parent partners? Essentially, do parents of color experience the school differently than White families? (3) How are rituals and routines different and/or the same for families of color versus White families?

Individual interviews were chosen as the means of gathering data. Furthermore, because the nature of the topic is emotionally laden, the researcher chose to divide the interview into two sessions: Session One was essential in building rapport (the questions

were designed to be easy to answer and not loaded with questions about race); Session Two was designed to address race specifically.

Three main questions were selected for Session One: (1) What are the roles in your family? (2) What supports are embedded at home to promote academic achievement? (3) Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak. Ten additional questions were selected for Session Two: (1) Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs. (2) Share your thoughts regarding the poem, *Transformation* (Ferguson, 2000). (3) Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school? (4) Does social status matter in your neighborhood? (5) Is there pressure to “Keep up with the Joneses”? (6) What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak (Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and High Expectations)? How important are they? (7) How would you describe your student’s academic performance? (8) Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential? (9) What type of student were you in middle school? (10) How has your middle school experience shaped your child’s?

Following IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted with a parent with a child in a school with similar demographic information. Following the pilot study, eight parent partners, all with at least one child in attendance at Red Oak Middle School, were interviewed in person. All of the interviews were recorded.

All of the interviews were transcribed word-for-word. The data was analyzed according to a phenomenological process, specifically the analysis methodology process described in *The Handbook for Phenomenological Research in Education* (Barritt,

Beekman, Bleeker, and Mulderij, 1983). Significant statements were extracted from the transcriptions for each parent partner, for all of the research questions, and organized according to the research questions. Furthermore, in accordance with the significant statements, themes were extracted, summarized and aligned as they pertained to each of the three research questions.

Discussion and Implications

There are numerous implications to the racial achievement gap. The discussion section of this study will include answers specific to the research questions. Answers will be summarized to the three research questions followed by a summary of the answer to the overarching research question.

Moreover, the findings of this study add credence to the utilization of phenomenological research in obtaining insight to the achievement gap through the essence of parent partners. It is through the keen insight and unique perspective of the parent partners that add so much value and depth of this study. These findings have implications to understanding the achievement gap, specifically in the areas of teacher expectations, navigating systems, the new three R's (rigor, relevance, and relationships), and cultural differences (Reiman (1986), cited in Creswell (1988), p.289).

Research Questions

Overarching Research Question: Why does an achievement gap exist between minority and non-minority students in affluent socioeconomic educational settings?

Undeniably, the results of this study suggest that where the rubber hits the road is in the classroom. The role of the teacher is pivotal to the success of students of color.

High expectations for learning coupled with the development of positive and meaningful relationships are fundamental factors to the academic success of Black and Hispanic students.

Second to the role of the teacher, having what the researcher calls “system savvy” is essential for parents of color. Holding a clear understanding of systems, structures, data, protocols, and educational language will ultimately support parents of color to navigate a seemingly daunting and somewhat cumbersome educational system. This question was addressed further in the following answers to the Research and sub-questions.

Research Question # 1—What perceptions were held by parents regarding race and academic success in an affluent middle school? Sub-questions for consideration were: Did parents hold beliefs regarding the achievement of non-minority versus minority students? Did perceptions of socioeconomic status matter to families of color in affluent neighborhoods?

Although the beliefs held by the parent partners regarding the racial achievement gap were divergent, strong opinions regarding its existence and origins were clearly evident. Moreover, the parent partners held judgments concerning the influence of socioeconomic status. Parent perceptions were separated into six themes: Expectations and the existence of the achievement gap; stereotype threat; navigating systems; cultural differences; and the influence of socioeconomic status.

Expectations and the Existence of the Achievement Gap

This study clearly corroborated the importance of high expectations cited in previous research. Specific to the affluent community of Shaker Heights community in Ohio, Ogbu suggested, in his ethnographic study, that low-teacher expectations held for minority students were a leading contributor to the racial achievement gap (2003). Similarly, the parents with students of color in this study continuously attributed low-teacher expectations as hurting their child's academic image. For example, Misty Lincoln states, "there are teachers that just assume that kids of color don't know the answers and that makes me mad."

Delfina was probably the most pained parent partner of the bunch. Her experiences had led her to distrust educators in general and thus her suspicions were encouraged each time her child was held to a lower standard or not provided with the reward of praise when he did do well. "I think he gets frustrated because he doesn't get recognized when he does well." This sentiment is supported in Kuykendall's book titled, *From Rage to Hope* (2004), whereas she states, "Some teachers continue to hold lower expectations of Black and Hispanic youth and reveal these expectations by giving less praise, encouragement, attention, and interest to these youths, (p. 26).

Consequently, the contrary also reigns true. The importance of consistently holding high expectations for all students is equally important to the parents in this study. Marilyn's tribute to the magnitude of high expectations best, "...it goes back to...access...how can you learn certain things if you are not even given the opportunity to learn them?" Gail Thompson reinforces this concept when she suggested that teacher

expectations significantly influence the quality of learning opportunities provided to the students, (2004).

Stereotype Threat

The threat of rejection based on race was a common theme found in the statements of the parent partners with students of color. From Misty's invariable worry that her daughters would be singled out to Delfina's innate fear that her son is a constant target, the regularity of stereotype threat in the results of this study indicate a need for further exploration in this area. Researcher Claude Steele suggests the impact of stereotype threat is a cancer to the academic success of students of color, (1994).

Navigating Systems

Although the importance of system savvy was not prevalent in the results of this study, the weight of understanding how to navigate the structures embedded in the educational system was evident. Marilyn reflected on her own experiences stating, "If I had someone to monitor me and walk me through the hoops, I could have went a different path." This is also suggested in previous research, specifically relevant in Ruby Payne's poverty framework, the importance of understanding the "hidden rules" of the social construct of which we are in is vital (1996).

Cultural Differences

The essence of the parent partners' experiences revealed that colorblindness still exists (Schofield, 2002). Specifically evidence of this was both Harry and Sally's ability to intellectualize the impact and influence of race on academic achievement. Overwhelmingly, Harry and Sally cited the influence of external risk factors, thereby minimizing the impact of race alone.

On the contrary, the parents of color had heartfelt accounts of how race alone has impacted their academic achievement and the achievement of their children. Beverly Tatum goes so far as to cite colorblindness as a farce which perpetuates the denial of ethnic and/or racial identity and pride, (1997). The results of this study interestingly points to further exploration of the idea that White persons do not consider the impact of race readily, whereas, people of color are consistently conscious of race.

Influence of Socioeconomic Status

Throughout this study, the researcher aimed to investigate why an achievement gap persists, even in a seemingly supportive educational environment. The results of this study suggest that while all parents expect more of schools in higher socioeconomic areas, students of color still struggle with an internal need to compensate for not being White. Ogbu indicates the pervasive internalization of White beliefs and perceptions towards African Americans is deathly related to the negative cultural and racial identity of Black children that ultimately results in poor academic performance, (2003).

Research Question # 2— How did parents, specifically parents of color, experience an affluent middle school, where a racial achievement gap exists and what meaning did the experience have for the parent partners? Essentially, did parents of color experience the school differently than White families? Sub-questions for consideration were: Were the family's attitudes toward and involvement in the school a factor in student success? What did it mean to be a parent of a student of color in an affluent school setting and how is the nature of the experience articulated and felt by the parent partners? (Van Manen, 1990, p. 42).

The short answer to the question of whether parents of color experience school differently than White parents was, yes. Whereas the White parent partners were highly focused on the importance of academic structures such as relevant and rigorous curriculum, the parents of color consistently indicated the need for and importance of meaningful, positive, student/teacher relationships.

Referred to at length in the literature review section of this study, Black and Hispanic students develop their academic and behavioral self-image through the internalization of such relationships, (Tatum, 1997).

In discussing the importance of positive teacher/student relationships, Kuykendall testifies, “All too often, the maintenance of a positive ego and requisite self-respect for black and Hispanic teens requires the support and solidarity of peer associations in the absence of other supportive adult relations,” (2004).

The assumption that parents of color would assert divergent treatment from school officials was not entirely founded. Tales of disappointment rang true for all of the parents, but by-and-large all but one of the parent partners were satisfied with the school and how they were perceived by school officials. However, parents of color did hold a more keen awareness and sensitivity regarding explicit and implicit messages within the school and by the faculty and staff.

Research Question # 3—How were rituals and routines different and/or the same for families of color versus White families?

While seemingly benign in nature, this research question yielded very interesting results. The interview questions regarding home routines and the role of family were

meant solely to develop a rapport between the parent partners and the researcher. However, after the pilot study was conducted, it was determined that this is an interesting potential facet to the research. The idea that perhaps how parents of color raise their children is so divergent than White families was not substantiated at all. In fact, the parents of color held similar routines for their children as did the White parents. The results of this study, point to a greater need to investigate this assumption—held by many educators.

Thompson labels this as the, “Parents are at fault theory,” whereas the lack of parent involvement by Black and Hispanic parents is a major contributor to poor academic performance, (2004).

Recommendations

Parents

Based on the manifested themes embedded in the interview transcripts, these recommendations are best suited for parents with children of color.

The findings of this study indicate that parents of color must develop a “system savvy” in order to best promote the academic achievement of their child. Through capitalizing on the hyper-awareness and sensitivity of parents of color, the primary step to developing a “system savvy” includes looking through a critical lens at various artifacts as means of data.

Parents should be aware and look for representation of students of color in all special programs (i.e. Special Education, Gifted and Talented, elective programs, athletic programs, clubs and activities). Furthermore, parents of color should note where students

of color are represented and where they are not in core content area curriculum—in essence, look for multiple perspectives in literature and assignments; engaging and relevant material/assignments; and relevance to their child’s world.

Moreover, Parents must educate themselves of the intricacies embedded in the educational system at large. It is critical that parents of color make themselves knowledgeable of critical policies and procedures in order to best advocate for their child and to further ensure their child’s academic success. This education of systems include the following: bureaucracies embedded in the system; the state’s system for accountability; the school’s accountability rating; their child’s proficiencies according to state standards; the school’s intervention system; if their child is below proficiency, parents must be informed as to what the teacher’s plan is for academic improvement; district policies and procedures regarding student, teachers and administrators; and the school/district discipline guide.

The development of “system savvy” also includes fostering a strong line of communication with the administrators at the school. Since a vision of equity will ultimately be set by the principal, it is important for parents of color to share their perceptions directly with the administration. Additionally, Parents must be direct with teachers and administrators regarding their expectations for their child’s achievement. Parents should also become involved in parent/school associations—if this is uncomfortable, it is suggested they work with administration to develop their own association, however, it is this researcher’s belief that power exists in organizing into one voice.

Educators

If the researcher were to identify the top three things for educators to focus on, as a result of this study, they would include the following: Make a targeted effort to survey the needs and insights of our parents of color; Provide supports and systems, which aim to educate our parents of color of the systems and structures embedded in the educational system; Provide professional development and learning community opportunities, for our teachers, which attempt to isolate race from other at-risk factors to achievement and support our teachers in understanding the impact of our own biases and predispositions in educating children of color.

A primary focus of this study has always been to provide insight into the perceptions held by parents regarding the achievement gap in order to better inform educational decision making. It is imperative that we listen to the voices of parents, as their “Kitchen Table” conversations and perceptions influence how their children perceive the school, and ultimately, how both parents and students interact with school officials.

These recommendations stem directly from the tenor of the themes gleaned through the parent interviews. First, in order to better understand where we lie on the continuum of cultural proficiency, (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, Terrell, 2005), we must hear and digest the stories of our families of color. This may include: encouraging parents of color and White parents with students of color to share their perceptions regularly; developing and facilitating a forum for parents of color to engage with other parents of color—to drive educational decision making at the school; being accessible and approachable; embedding multiple opportunities for students to develop meaningful

relationships with teachers and staff members; and providing structures for students of color to voice their perceptions.

Additionally, it is suggested that educators leave their biases and preconceived inferences regarding people of color at the “school building door”. Based on the chronicles of the parent partners, the following are some assumptions that should be relinquished when developing positive school/parent relationships are desired: do not assume that parents do not care if they are not represented in the parent/school associations; do not assume parents do not care about their child’s education if they are unable to navigate through the system with ease or if their child is struggling; and, do not assume that all students of color are struggling due to external risk factors. This can be done by conducting professional development, which aims at understanding our own culture and biases as we work to understand the cultural backgrounds of our students.

Finally, and specifically for the benefit of building administrators, the following recommendations are geared towards building and sustaining culturally proficient systems: test all systems, curriculum, programs, policies, and procedures for equity—ask, “Where are students of color represented, where are they not represented?”—then act accordingly; have clear expectations for teachers and staff regarding communicating with students and parents of color (hold faculty and staff accountable to these expectations); demand teachers to hold high expectations for all students; test core content area curricula for rigor and relevance; provide ongoing opportunities, embedded within the structure, for teachers to engage in academic discourse and progress monitoring for students of color; take the ambiguity and mystery out of the systems and structures at the

school—simplify, for parents, the multiple ways to look at data, systems, and structures at the school and in the district.

Suggestions for Further Research

Plainly, and without hesitation, a glaring and noticeable reoccurrence took place. The need for time, and even more time to pursue all of the different aspects of even this minute sect of achievement gap studies was always looming. There was never enough time to realistically tackle all of the ideas that had been suggested and conceived for consideration. This was not something that could be remedied easily, and thus, the need to move forward prevailed. Some of the limitations to the study, mentioned in Chapter Three may also be revisited for further research as well:

1. What results would a larger sampling reveal?
2. What patterns would evidence if the research was geared towards only one ethnic group? What if this study was duplicated to focus on just African American or Hispanic parents?
3. If the parent partners were limited to Hispanic families, what divergence, if any, would evidence between Mexican national/immigrant families and Mexican American families?
4. Is there a large difference between caste and immigrant minorities?
5. Where would Hispanic families fall into that minority design? Are they of an immigrant mentality, a caste mentality, or a little bit of both (Ogbu, 2003)?
6. Given the unique viewpoint of the one White parent with bi-racial children, what themes would manifest among a larger sample of similar parent perspectives?

7. Would this study be relevant if Critical Race Theory was utilized as a conceptual framework rather than just a theoretical tool, (Billings, 2006)? In essence, the usage of “chronicles” of the experience, rather than phenomenology in its more pure form.
8. What information would be gleaned if the school did not have an African American principal? Does that make a difference in how parents of color perceive the school?
9. How do the students of these parents perceive the school? Would they draw the same conclusions?
10. How would teachers imagine parents’ perception of them and the school?
11. How prevalent is “stereotype threat,” (Steele, 1994), by parents of color? Essentially, do their perceptions of how people view them according to stereotypes, color their perceptions of the school?

Although some of these suggestions would be difficult to carry out, a considerable value in exploring these questions exists as we seek to eradicate the racial predictability among all students. Providing further insight through the perceptions of parents can help us in determining strategies and structures, which promote and capitalize on their input.

Reflection

The parent partners in this study provided a plethora of insight into the explanation of the achievement gap through their stories. Despite the oppressive weight of the racial achievement gap, and even more surprising, the manifestation of this gap in

affluent suburban communities, all of the parents shared a sense of hope and reconciliation with the educational system at large.

As a scholar, the researcher is familiar with the themes embedded in the statements of the parent partners. I am aware of the invisible tax people of color bear—stereotype threat (Steele, 2002); social mirroring, (Tatum, 1997); low teacher expectations (Kuykendall, 2004); institutionalized racism (Tatum, 1997); and external risk factors such as poverty (Payne, 1996). I was not surprised that these themes manifested through the course of the interviews.

As a person of color, and a parent of Hispanic children, the researcher was overcome with an emotional sense of oppression and anger; listening to story after story, where people of color had been isolated, or treated differently based on their race—even in the most seemingly benign and supportive educational situations.

The researcher is disappointed in my field and charged with the call to act. However, also filled with a sense of hope. The researcher is hopeful that the stories of these parents, along with their resolve to involve themselves, will inspire other parents of color as well as educators. Additionally, the researcher is hopeful that more and more parents will lie in the bed of bureaucracy and become so intimately involved with the system that an intentioned consequence will be academic savvy and action. Furthermore, the researcher is also optimistic that educators will continue to look within the walls of the school for solutions and will reach out to parents seeking input and perspective, rather than rely on the co-dependency of racial stereotypes and external risk factors as the only reasons for the achievement gap.

The value of this study is plain and imperative. Through the elegance and candor of the parent participants it can be said that the core truth of the achievement gap lies in their stories, in their statements. At the end of the day, the internal, basic, yet complex condition of human nature prevails over the simplicity of external factors.

The Last Word

There is a bittersweet taste in my mouth as this process comes to a close. There is so much more to explore. I feel as if I have merely placed my feet in the shallow end of this topic, and sadly the deep end has yet to be dived into. This topic, I have come to understand, cannot be reduced to the “art and science” of teaching—this topic is about race relations and Critical Race Theory, (Delgado, 1995). Thus my optimism is limited, as it has taken over 500 years to arrive at this level of enlightenment. However, through the power of scholarly inquiry and insight, and the urgency for human connection and understanding, I am assured that equity in education will manifest in my lifetime.

References

- Banks, J. A. (Ed.). (2004). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Barritt, L. S., Beekman, A. J., Bleeker, H., & Mulderij, K. J. (1983). *A handbook for phenomenological research in education*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.
- City-Data.com, (2008). Retrieved June 25, 2008, from City-Data.com: Aurora Colorado Web site: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Aurora-Colorado.html>.
- Cohen, G. L., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., & Master, A. (2006). Reducing the racial achievement gap: A social-psychological intervention. *Science Magazine*, 313, Retrieved April 17, 2008, from <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/313/5791/1307>.
- Colorado Department of Education. (2006). [Red Oak] Middle School: School Accountability Report [Brochure]. Colorado Department of Education.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Delgado, R. (1995). *Critical race theory*. New York, NY: New York Press.
- Dickens, Charles (1859). *A tale of two cities*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Dixson, A. & Rousseau, C. (2006). *Critical race theory in education*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC.
- Education Trust, (2004). *The nation--key educational facts and figures: Achievement attainment and opportunity from elementary school through college*. Education Watch, Retrieved May 5, 2005, from <http://edtrust.org>
- Ferguson, R. F. (2001). Cultivating new routines that foster high achievement for all students: How researchers and practitioners can collaborate to reduce the minority achievement gap. *ERS Spectrum*. 19, 4-16.
- Ferguson, R. F. (2001). A diagnostic analysis of Black and White GPA disparities in Shaker Heights, Ohio. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*. 2001, 247-414.
- Ferguson, R. F. (2002). What doesn't meet the eye: Understanding and addressing racial disparities in high-achieving suburban schools. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Retrieved May 3, 2005, from <http://www.ncrel.org/gap/ferg/intro.html>.

- Haycock, K. (1998). Good teaching matters: How well-qualified teachers can close the gap. Thinking K-12. Retrieved October 29, 2007, from http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/0279CB4F-B729-4260-AB6E-359FD3C374A7/0/k16_summer98.pdf.
- Haycock, K. (2004). The real value of teachers: If good teaching matters, why don't we act like it? Thinking K-12, 8, Retrieved May 3, 2005, from <http://www2.edtrust.org>
- Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. (1998). The Black White test score gap. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities. New York, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc.
- Kuykendall, C. (2004). From rage to hope. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- Lee, V. E., & Burkam, D. T. (2002). Inequality at the starting gate: Social background differences in achievement as children begin school. Economic Policy Institute, Retrieved April 23, 2008, from http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/books_starting_gate.
- Lindsey, Robert B, Et. Al. (2005). *The culturally proficient school*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.
- McIntosh, P. (1990). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. Retrieved November 22, 2008, from White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack Web site: <http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/~mcisaac/emc598ge/Unpacking.html>
- Oakes, J., Muir, K., & Joseph, R. (2000). Course taking and achievement in mathematics and science: Inequalities that endure and change. Madison, WI: National Institute for Science.
- Payne, R. K. (1996). A framework for understanding poverty. Highlands, TX: aha!
- Peske, H.G., & Haycock, Haycock. (2006). How poor and minority students are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality. Teaching Inequality, Retrieved May 15, 2008, from <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/010DBD9F-CED8-4D2B-9E0D-91B446746ED3/0/TQReportJune2006.pdf>.
- Proctor, B. D., and Dalaker, J. (2001). Poverty in the United States. Washington, DC: Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p60-219.pdf>

- Public Schools Report, (2007). Retrieved June 25, 2008, from Public Schools Report: Public School Information and Data Web site:
http://schools.publicschoolsreport.com/Colorado/Aurora/_____.html.
- Rist, R. C. (1981). The invisible children: School integration in American society. *The American Journal of Sociology*. 87, 478-480.
- Singleton, Glenn (2005). *Courageous conversation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schofield, J. W. (2006). The colorblind perspective in school: Causes and consequences. *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. 6, 271-295.
- Scott, A. (2003). Husserl's ideas on pure phenomenology and on a phenomenological philosophy. Retrieved June 27, 2008, Web site:
<http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html>.
- Steele, Claude M. (1992). Race and schooling. *Race and schooling*, from www.theatlantic.com/politics/race/steele.htm
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York, NY: Basic Books.
- The Teaching Commission. (2004). *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action* [Corporate Publication]. New York, NY.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2000). Digest of education statistics. Retrieved January 23, 2008, from National Center for Education Statistics Web site:
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/>
- van Manen, M (1990). *Researching lived Experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1967). Mirror-role of the mother and family in child development. In P. Lomas (Ed.), *The Predicament of the Family: A Psycho-Analytical Symposium* (pp. 26-33). London: Hogarth.

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN AN AFFLUENT URBAN
MIDDLE SCHOOL:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
Demographic Survey

Thank you for participating in this study. The information gathered on the Demographic Survey will help the researcher in data analysis and will further paint a picture of our participants for the reader.

Please place a checkmark next to the answer which best describes you:

1. Are you Male or Female? Male Female

2. What is your age?
 25-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46 or over

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 Less than High School High School/GED
 Some college 2-year degree (Associates)
 4-year degree (BA,BS) Master's Degree
 Doctoral Degree Professional Degree (MD,JD)

4. What is your total household income, including all earners in your household?
 Less than 25,000 26,000 to 35,000 36,000 to 45,000
 46,000 to 60,000 61,000 to 75,000 76,000 to 99,000
 More than 100,000

5. What is your current marital status?
 Single, never married Married Separated
 Divorced Widowed

6. What is your race/ethnicity?

White White, non-Hispanic African-American
 Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander Native American Other

7. How do you racially/ethnically identify your child?

White White, non-Hispanic African-American
 Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander Native American Other

8. What is the highest level of education your mother has completed?

Less than High School High School/GED
 Some college 2-year degree (Associates)
 4-year degree (BA, BS) Master's Degree
 Doctoral Degree Professional Degree (MD, JD)

9. What is the highest level of education your father has completed?

Less than High School High School/GED
 Some college 2-year degree (Associates)
 4-year degree (BA, BS) Master's Degree
 Doctoral Degree Professional Degree (MD, JD)

10. Do you own or lease your home? Own Lease

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN AN AFFLUENT SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear _____:

As a Red Oak Middle School parent, you are invited to participate in a study to gain insight into perceptions of race as it relates to academic achievement in an affluent middle school. The immediate outcome of the interviews will be a comprehensive description of your experiences and its meaning to the participants of the study. The more universal purpose of the study is to apply the descriptions and their meaning to the generalizable knowledge of the achievement gap. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Policy Studies. This study will be conducted by Robyn A. Duran, a student at the University of Denver (720-300-3183—mrsduran@hotmail.com), under the supervision of Dr. Ellie Katz, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver (303-906-1472—elbennet@du.edu).

Participation in this study should take about three to four hours of your time. Participation will involve responding to approximately 20 questions about perceptions of race and academic achievement in an affluent suburban middle school in two sessions at a location determined by you (sessions can be on separate days or on the same day). Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-2431, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

Thank you for your consideration, with warmest regards,

Robyn A. Duran

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called Perceptions of Race and Academic Success in an Affluent Suburban Middle School: A Phenomenological Study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____ Date _____

(If appropriate, the following must be added.)

___ I agree to be audiotaped.

___ I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature _____ Date _____

___ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

APPENDIX C: AGENDA AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SESSION-ONE

SESSION-ONE

PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN AN AFFLUENT URBAN
MIDDLE SCHOOL:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Interview Agenda Session-One

- Introductions
- Overview of the study
 - Purpose
 - Design
 - Report of outcomes to participants
 - Synthesis in the form of “Experience Descriptions”
 - Capturing the Essence
 - Validity
- Expectations of the Interviews
 - Review agendas for Session-One and Session-Two
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Time-line
 - Benefits
 - Risks
 - Permission to tape
 - Reminder of parent partners’ opportunity to ask questions and to withdraw at any time
- Questions for Session-One:
 - What are the roles in your family?
 - Parent
 - Student
 - Sibling
 - Extended family involvement
 - What supports are embedded at home to promote academic achievement?
 - Rituals and routines
 - Rewards
 - Consequences
- Relationship with Red Oak
 - Tell me about your experiences at Red Oak
 - Likes
 - Dislikes
 - Your child’s academic history
 - Treatment by faculty and staff (of you/of your student)
 - Needs/challenges
 - Peer relationships
 - Community involvement (PTO/Accountability)
 - School event participation

APPENDIX D: AGENDA AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SESSION-TWO

SESSION-TWO

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN AN
AFFLUENT URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Interview Agenda Session-Two

- Review Session-One
 - Feedback
 - Any additional thoughts
- Preview Session-Two
- Discussion of the Racial Achievement Gap
 - Related research topics and areas of exploration
 - Definitions
 - Q & A
- Questions for Session-Two
 - Given the information shared regarding the racial achievement gap—share your thoughts and or beliefs as to why this phenomenon occurs.
 - Read: *Transformation*, poem by Ronald Ferguson (attached)
 - Thoughts
 - Who is speaking in the poem?
 - What are they talking about?
 - What phrases stuck out at you?
 - What words?
 - What emotions did you feel while listening to the poem?
 - Socioeconomic Status
 - Given Red Oak Middle School is set in an affluent suburban neighborhood, what were/are your educational expectations of the school?
 - Administration
 - Teachers
 - Student peers
 - Courses
 - Resources
 - Does social status matter in your neighborhood?
 - Is there pressure to “Keep up with the Joneses”?
 - Neighborhood
 - School

- Teaching:
 - What are your perceptions of the following teaching variables at Red Oak? How important are they?
 - Rigor
 - Relevance
 - Relationships
 - Expectations to achieve
- Academic beliefs:
 - How would you describe your student's academic performance?
 - Do you believe your student is reaching their academic potential?
- Family's attitude toward education
 - What type of student were you in middle school?
 - How has your middle school experience shaped your child's?
 - Expectations of the school
 - Expectations of your child
 - Advocacy

Thank you and adjourn!

APPENDIX E: TRANSFORMATION

TRANSFORMATION

I started Kindergarten
Two or three steps behind.
Some classmates understood things
That had never crossed my mind.

The kids who looked real different
Seemed so smart (I can recall).
Kids who looked and spoke like I did
Didn't seem so smart at all.

Of Course there were exceptions,
But on mostly any day,
It was clear those kids were doing best
And we were just okay.

Our teachers liked them better
'Cause they always knew the answers,
So kids like me just tried to be
Good athletes and great dancers.

The years went by quite slowly
And most things just stayed the same
Until our principal decided
It was time to change the game.

She hinted that the reason
When those other kids did best
Was that many knew already
More of what was on the tests.

They learned it from their parents
And from things they did at home.
Much that I and my companions
Never had the chance to know.

That had always been the pattern.
Yes for years it was the same.
But the standards movement came along
To finally change the game.

Now that there's a new prescription
For the way our school is run,
Everybody's got new goals to reach.
It's getting to be fun!

We're learning to get smarter
'Cause our teachers show us how.
They're all serious about it.
Everyone's important now!

Time in class is so exciting
That we seldom fool around.
We might make a joke in passing,
But we quickly settle down.

After school we do our homework.
Often in our study groups.
When we need them we have tutors
And they give us all the "scoops."

If there's something that's confusing,
It's a temporary thing
'Cause the teachers love to answer
All the questions that we bring.

All the counselors and teachers
Work with parents as a team
'Cause they share the same commitment
To connect us to our dreams

I love the way things are now.
It all just seems so right!
We still play sports and we're still cool,
But now we're also "bright."

That first day of kindergarten
Some of us were way behind.
But today I'm graduating
In a truly different time.

Ronald F. Ferguson, June 2000.