

A CASE STUDY OF TRUST AND THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WHITE  
TEACHERS AND THEIR BLACK STUDENTS

by

JOSEPH M. TROBAUGH

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

2022

Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan

Doctoral Advisory Committee:

Julia B. Smith, Ed.D., Chair  
C. Suzanne Klein, Ph.D.  
Robert Martin, Ph.D.

© Copyright by Joseph M. Trobaugh, 2022  
All rights reserved

*This dissertation is dedicated to Janice and Howard Trobaugh, my beloved mother and father. They taught me hard work, perseverance, and commitment. I am forever grateful for their love, support, and guidance. Also, this dissertation is dedicated to my amazing wife, Rachel. She taught me to follow my dreams and fight for the things that matter the most.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, thank you to the teachers and students who participated in my study. Without your thoughts and perspectives none of this would be possible. To my mentor and adviser Dr. Julia Smith, thank you for your dedication, guidance, and inspiration throughout the years. I appreciate you keeping me on track and helping me reach this incredible goal. Thank you Dr. Robert Martin for your expertise in qualitative research. Your thoughtful questions and calm demeanor helped me throughout the dissertation process. To Dr. Suzanne Klein, thank you for the countless comments and advice throughout the writing process. Your clear and concise methods of explaining complex ideas into simple terms is truly a gift.

Thank you to family members, friends, and colleagues for all the support throughout this process. To Kate, Katie, and Tracy, thank you for keeping me on track and for the endless support. Many thanks to my beautiful wife Rachel for her support and unwavering confidence in me. Her words and encouragement meant the world to me as I completed my dissertation journey.

JOSEPH M. TROBAUGH

## ABSTRACT

### “A CASE STUDY OF TRUST AND THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WHITE TEACHERS AND THEIR BLACK STUDENTS”

by

Joseph M. Trobaugh

Adviser: Julia B. Smith, Ed.D.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether White teachers' trust in their Black students would stimulate positive teacher-student relationships. One question guided my research: How do White teachers build trust with their Black students? This study used interviews of 5 White middle school teachers and 3 Black middle school students for the data set. Semi-structured interviews and a focus group were conducted to fully understand the lived experience of teachers and students within a middle school setting. All of the teacher participants worked in middle schools where they taught core content classes. Each teacher and student interviewed had at least 1 year experience teaching or attending middle school. Each interview and focus group was recorded via ZOOM and transcribed as soon as possible for accuracy and review.

Important statements were extracted from the interview and focus group transcripts resulting in three major themes. Theme one, students and teachers' definition of trust, presented how students and teachers viewed trust in developing positive relationships within the classroom. Theme two, teacher-student relationships, presented how trust impacts the interactions of students and teachers to effectively build strong

relationships. Theme three, racial tension, presented how race and White norms impacted teaching practices and the development of teacher-student relationships. The researcher concluded that the participants had a perceived trust as an enabling factor for building positive relationships. However, students explained that building relationships could be improved by the teachers' ability to adapt to their students.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                             |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS                                             | iv   |
| ABSTRACT                                                    | v    |
| LIST OF FIGURES                                             | xii  |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS                                       | xiii |
| CHAPTER ONE                                                 |      |
| INTRODUCTION                                                | 1    |
| Background and Context                                      | 3    |
| Early Views of Trust                                        | 3    |
| Relational Trust                                            | 5    |
| Theoretical Framework                                       | 10   |
| Social Capital Theory                                       | 10   |
| Social Capital Theory and Benefits to School Environment    | 12   |
| Social Capital Theory and Promotion of Mutual Relationships | 14   |
| Trust as a Key Concept of Social Capital Theory             | 17   |
| Examine White Identity                                      | 18   |
| Critical Race Theory                                        | 19   |
| Critical Whiteness Studies                                  | 21   |
| Adolescent Development Theory                               | 25   |
| Research Question                                           | 33   |
| Significance                                                | 33   |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER TWO                                           |    |
| LITERATURE REVIEW                                     | 38 |
| Trust in Schools                                      | 41 |
| Teacher Trust Perceptions                             | 42 |
| Student Trust Perceptions                             | 44 |
| Teacher-Student Relationships and Trust               | 45 |
| Trust Building through Positive Relationships         | 46 |
| Authentic Relationships                               | 47 |
| Barriers to Forming Relationships                     | 48 |
| Racial Impact of Trust                                | 49 |
| Trust and Racial Discrimination                       | 51 |
| Teachers' Implicit Bias                               | 54 |
| White Privilege and White Racial Identity Development | 55 |
| Culturally Responsive Teaching                        | 58 |
| Summary                                               | 60 |
| CHAPTER THREE                                         |    |
| METHODS                                               | 63 |
| Overview                                              | 63 |
| Research Design                                       | 63 |
| Researcher Role                                       | 68 |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

|                                                           |        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Setting                                                   | 69     |
| Participants                                              | 71     |
| Data Sources                                              | 71     |
| Data Collection Procedures                                | 76     |
| Data Analysis Strategies                                  | 77     |
| <br>CHAPTER FOUR<br>FINDINGS                              | <br>79 |
| Teacher Narratives                                        | 79     |
| Ms. Lacey                                                 | 79     |
| Mr. Briggs                                                | 81     |
| Mr. Stanley                                               | 82     |
| Mrs. Schar                                                | 84     |
| Mrs. Ponte                                                | 86     |
| Trust                                                     | 88     |
| Students' Definition of Trust                             | 88     |
| Teachers' Definition of Trust                             | 89     |
| Mistrust                                                  | 91     |
| Comparing Student and Teacher Definitions of Trust        | 93     |
| Teacher-Student Relationship/Student-Teacher Relationship | 94     |
| Respect                                                   | 94     |
| Motivation                                                | 96     |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

|                                               |         |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------|
| Relevant Lessons for Students                 | 97      |
| Value of Education                            | 98      |
| Racial Tension                                | 99      |
| Racial Tension in Society                     | 102     |
| Disproportionate Discipline                   | 104     |
| <br>CHAPTER FIVE<br>DISCUSSION                | <br>107 |
| Interpretation of the Findings                | 107     |
| Teacher-Student Definitions of Trust          | 107     |
| Student and Teacher Perceptions of Mistrust   | 110     |
| Teacher-Student/Student-Teacher Relationships | 112     |
| Racial Tension                                | 115     |
| Implications for Theory                       | 120     |
| Social Capital Theory                         | 120     |
| Critical Race Theory                          | 122     |
| Critical Whiteness Studies                    | 123     |
| Adolescent Development Theory                 | 125     |
| Limitations                                   | 127     |
| Recommendations for Future Research           | 128     |
| Final Observations                            | 130     |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| REFERENCES                       | 132 |
| APPENDICES                       |     |
| A. IRB Approval Letter           | 142 |
| B. Teacher Interview Protocol    | 145 |
| C. Student Focus Group Questions | 147 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|            |                                         |    |
|------------|-----------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1.1 | Construct Map of Theoretical Foundation | 11 |
|------------|-----------------------------------------|----|

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|      |                              |
|------|------------------------------|
| CRDC | Civil Rights Data Collection |
| CRT  | Critical Race Theory         |
| CWS  | Critical Whiteness Studies   |
| PTO  | Parent Teacher Organization  |

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMING

### **Introduction**

Schools are where students learn. Parents send their children to schools expecting that they will be safe and learn. Moreover, parents expect that their children are receiving the most appropriate and highest quality education. In addition to the delivery of information, student learning is also heavily influenced by the classroom culture. The classroom culture has several different factors that make it a unique environment. Some of the aspects of the classroom culture include the implementation of lessons, classroom management, and teacher-student relationships. One of the most important aspects of the classroom culture is trust.

Trust is a human element that makes for great relationships. In their seminal study on the reform efforts of urban Chicago public schools, authors Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) found that, “enabling positive social relationships between the adults was the key to successful school improvement and that trust was at the heart of those relationships”( p. 3). Trust in schools boils down to one thing, being vulnerable in a safe environment. Trust enables individuals to speak their minds freely, be part of the decision-making process, rely on one another, take risks, be innovators, make compromises and accept failure. Through trusting relationships teachers can gain insight into how students learn ultimately boosting student achievement.

However, trust in schools does not often come easy and at times comes with a price. According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), “the adults in a school community rely

on each other to do their jobs correctly and with integrity. The challenge is our expectations for one another are very diverse, based on our unique backgrounds, including our previous school and work experiences” (p.5). In other words, as members of a school community; teachers, principals, students, and parents all must trust one another to create an environment that benefits the collective group, but also, benefits the individual. Additionally, at some level we as people make assumptions. We also know that making assumptions is not healthy and in most cases these assumptions are wrong. If trust is not part of the classroom environment it leads to resentment and judgement among teachers and students. Teachers and students will not feel emotionally safe and become guarded, which is not a great attribute to foster when trying to build relationships that hinge on trust.

One aspect impacting the background of working from assumptions concerns the history of racism in this country. Throughout the United States, many public schools are seeing an increase in numbers of their students of color. Many of the teachers of those same public schools are predominantly white. In the education profession it is commonly known that students of color have lower standardized test scores, receive greater punishment for discipline infractions, are less likely to be recommended for advanced placement classes or gifted and talented programs, and more likely to be recommended for special education when compared to their White counterparts. There seems to be an obvious gap that is occurring in many schools. One of the factors that contributes to this gap is something called implicit bias. Implicit bias, “suggests that people can act on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes without intending to do so” (Brownstein, 2019).

Furthermore, implicit bias impacts our particular feelings and perceptions we have based on our life experiences and societal norms.

In addition to implicit bias, White teachers carry something with them called White privilege. Peggy McIntosh (1988) wrote about this issue in her article "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies." She defined White privilege as, "unearned advantage based on race, which can be observed both systemically and individually, like all unearned privileges in society (such as those related to class, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age or ability)." For example, ... Most White teachers who make up the school system are completely unaware of their implicit biases or do not acknowledge as fact.

Throughout my experiences and study, I have found that trust in schools definitely matters. Although there is a considerable amount of empirical research on the levels of trust among teachers, principals, students, and parents I still see a need to investigate how White teachers earn relational trust with their Black students.

## **Background and Context**

### **Early Views of Trust**

Trust is an idea that has many different meanings depending on who you are. Trust has been studied across many different social science disciplines throughout the years. Early studies of trust focused mainly on the behavioral terms to describe the concept. For example, Deutsch (1958) wrote, "Trust was inferred from people's behaviors, such as displaying cooperative behaviors in the risk that another party could exploit these behaviors" (p.12). Trusting behaviors impact the way in which an individual

interacts with others. As time goes on, each individual can get a sense of how trusting the other person is based on their actions and follow through. Social scientist Julian Rotter (1967) stated, “as time when on, trust was defined as an attitude or judgment. It was conceived as a generalized personal trait indicating an expectancy that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon” (p. 651). In other words, trust is seen as a measure of an individual or group’s commitment to sticking to their word and agreeing to uphold what was discussed.

Trust is a complex notion that hinges on the interactions of the individuals involved in the relationship. Author Mishra’s (1996) work stated trust is defined “as one party’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is (a) competent, (b) open, (c) concerned, and (d) reliable. As you can see the idea of trust can be very complex and multidimensional” (p. 265). Trust is not necessarily a mutual agreement it is quite the opposite. Trust is an individual agreement where one party’s ability to trust another party is determined by more than one factor of trust. In the article, “Trust in Education” Fisher and Tallant (2020) viewed trust in two ways, three placed trust and trustworthiness. According to the authors, they described trust is such, “that ‘x trusts y to perform some action F’. An example here is a case whereby a teacher trusts a particular pupil to tell the truth” (p. 780). The other view of trust comes in the form of trustworthiness, where ‘x is trustworthy.’ For example, “a teacher or pupil may, for instance, be trustworthy. Note, here, that we should be careful to distinguish being trustworthy—a trait of a particular individual—from the perception that they are trustworthy, had by another” (p. 780).

Trusting individuals in social situations requires a variety of different factors. Johnson-George and Swap (1982) contended that, “interpersonal trust is a basic feature of all social situations that demand cooperation and interdependence” (p. 1306). For example, in order to create relationships with others each individual must exhibit trust to give the other party good faith that they are willing to show cooperation within the relationship. In addition, they suggested that, “while willingness to take risks may be one of the few characteristics common to all trust situations, willingness to exhibit trust in any given situation will be determined by a variety of more specific factors” (p. 1306). In social situations taking risks are crucial to earning trust, but that is only the first step to gaining positive relationships. Larson and Johnson (2018) stated, “research with adults indicates that assessments of a person’s trustworthiness are likely to hinge on experiences that test whether the person is truly vested and committed to acting with goodwill” (p. 342). Individuals get a good sense of how others will treat them based on experiences, which help gauge the willingness the parties will exchange trust to one another. On the other hand, the authors pointed to some adolescents having some apprehension as to what adults are reliable, therefore questioning the consistency of what an adult says and does (p. 342). In this instance adolescents decipher the actions of adults leading them to trust or mistrust them. Trust is a multi-faceted phenomenon that largely depends on the individuals, context, and situations involved.

### **Relational Trust**

Relational trust is a key factor in dismantling the achievement and opportunity gaps that plague schools today. Relational trust as a concept was a term developed by researchers Bryk and Schneider (2002) and refers to the interpersonal social exchanges

that take place in a group setting, especially schools. They set out to link trust and student achievement by conducting a longitudinal study of over 400 Chicago elementary schools. At the conclusion of their research, Bryk and Schneider found that schools with higher levels of trust were more likely to make educational policy changes that would help raise student achievement. When looking at my research question I want to look at the components of relational trust to examine how White teachers use those components of relational trust to build positive outcomes with their students of color.

The first component of relational trust is respect. Respect refers to the confidence that one's well-being will be protected by the other party. The next component is personal regard. Personal regard, according to Bryk and Schneider (2004), refers to, "the willingness of members of a school community to extend themselves beyond what their role might formally require in any given situation. Actions are made in an effort to reduce others' sense of vulnerability." Another component of relational trust is competence, which means having good intentions alone is not enough to fulfill an expectation. The last component is integrity. Integrity demands that a moral-ethical perspective guides one's work. Through understanding these relational trust facets it becomes evident that White teachers need to reflect upon their Whiteness in order to meet the needs of their Black students.

The first component of relational trust is respect. Respect refers to the confidence that one's well-being will be protected by the other party. The next component is personal regard. Personal regard, according to Bryk and Schneider (2004), refers to, "the willingness of members of a school community to extend themselves beyond what their role might formally require in any given situation. Additionally, "actions are made in an

effort to reduce others' sense of vulnerability" (p.25). Another component of relational trust is competence, which means having good intentions alone is not enough to fulfill an expectation. The last component is integrity. Integrity demands that a moral-ethical perspective guides one's work. Through understanding these relational trust facets, it becomes evident that White teachers need to reflect upon their Whiteness in order to meet the needs of their Black and Latinx students.

Relational trust in schools helps all stakeholders; teachers, principals, parents, and students form distinct role obligations that evoke accountability from each party. Furthermore, each stakeholder is working in concert with the other to create a unique network where each party relies on one another to feel empowered and achieve desired outcomes. Since relational trust hinges on the day to day interactions between individuals based on social exchanges it is important to understand how it functions in schools. Relational trust is viewed on a continuum where different social exchanges affect the amount of trust that is valued in a particular setting and time frame. In other words, the more positive interactions that you have will lead to more positive outcomes. Similarly, the more negative interactions that you have will lead to more negative outcomes. For example, principals need teachers to create a supportive environment for students and parents to feel connected within the school community. Meanwhile, teachers need the appropriate resources to effectively instruct their students, which is based on the principal's decisions. In turn, parents need the support of principals and teachers to foster safe learning environments for their children.

However, relational trust can be built through positive exchanges if teachers, principals, parents, and students are focusing on the components that make up relational

trust. According to Bryk and Schneider (2004) relational trust is made up of four components; respect, personal regard, competence, and integrity. Respect is viewed as the basis of trust through meaningful social interactions that are categorized by active listening and ability to value other peoples' opinions. Next, is the component of personal regard. Personal regard is referred to as how individuals perceive trust. For example, Bryk and Schneider stated that, "personal regard may come from the willingness of participants to extend themselves beyond the formal requirements of a job definition or a union contract" (p. 5). By going the extra mile based on personal regard it shows an individual's willingness to go beyond what is expected and do what is right for all parties involved to benefit from the social exchanges people are having.

In addition, competence is a key component in relational trust. Competence is valued in school settings because of the overall desired outcomes for all parties involved. To illustrate competence in this context, parents rely heavily on teachers and principals' expertise to create safe and productive learning environments for their children. Integrity is the last component in relational trust. Integrity is rooted in all individuals keeping their word and guiding one's professional obligations with a moral framework. Teachers, principals, and parents must use integrity to further their primary concern, which is to benefit all students within the school setting.

There are many benefits to building relational trust in the school setting. Creating a high level of trust among all stakeholders has proven to impact students in the area of student achievement. For example, when teachers feel supported in a trusting environment they take risks and use new innovative ways to teach their students, which in some cases leads to starting initiatives to address the needs of students. School districts

value how trust affects student achievement and those gains can lead to positive educational reform at the administration level. In Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky's 2005 article, "Trust as a Mediator of the Relationships between Poverty, Racial Composition, and Academic Achievement: Evidence from Michigan's Public Elementary Schools," the researchers agreed that trust is strongly related to academic achievement. Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky found that using a pathway analysis helped control measures within a school context ultimately resulting in showing that greater trust improves academic achievement associated with state mathematics and reading scores. To the authors' surprise the results produced indirect relationships to achievement based on school SES, racial composition, and size. Lastly, the authors suggested that future researchers study whether programs intending to build trust in schools can bolster academic achievement especially for academically disadvantaged students who are mostly associated with poverty or racial composition.

Another benefit to building relational trust is creating a positive school climate where all parties support one another. Teachers especially benefit from this because they interact with each party the most frequently. Likewise, creating a positive school climate can stimulate teacher buy in, increasing collaboration with other teachers. Lastly, building a culture of trust validates expectations among each party and provides a willingness to trust one another to get tasks accomplished ensuring the school vision is being met. All stakeholders work as a team to benefit the students by putting their personal agendas to the side. Each stakeholder understands their role and the decision making process that affects positive student outcomes.

Relational trust suggests that building a school environment that functions under the assumption where each party involved in the process operates with respect, personal regard for one another, integrity and competence in one's abilities. Principals, teachers, parents, and students must welcome the idea of "walking the talk." For example, the teacher takes responsibility of instructing the students and demonstrates the ability to improve student achievement. However, for the purposes of this study, examining teacher and student trust is the chief focus. In addition to examining trust between student and teacher, this study will also examine the context in which relational trust is cultivated. Based on relational trust, it is very important to understand, "how do White teachers earn relational trust with their students of color?"

### **Theoretical Framework**

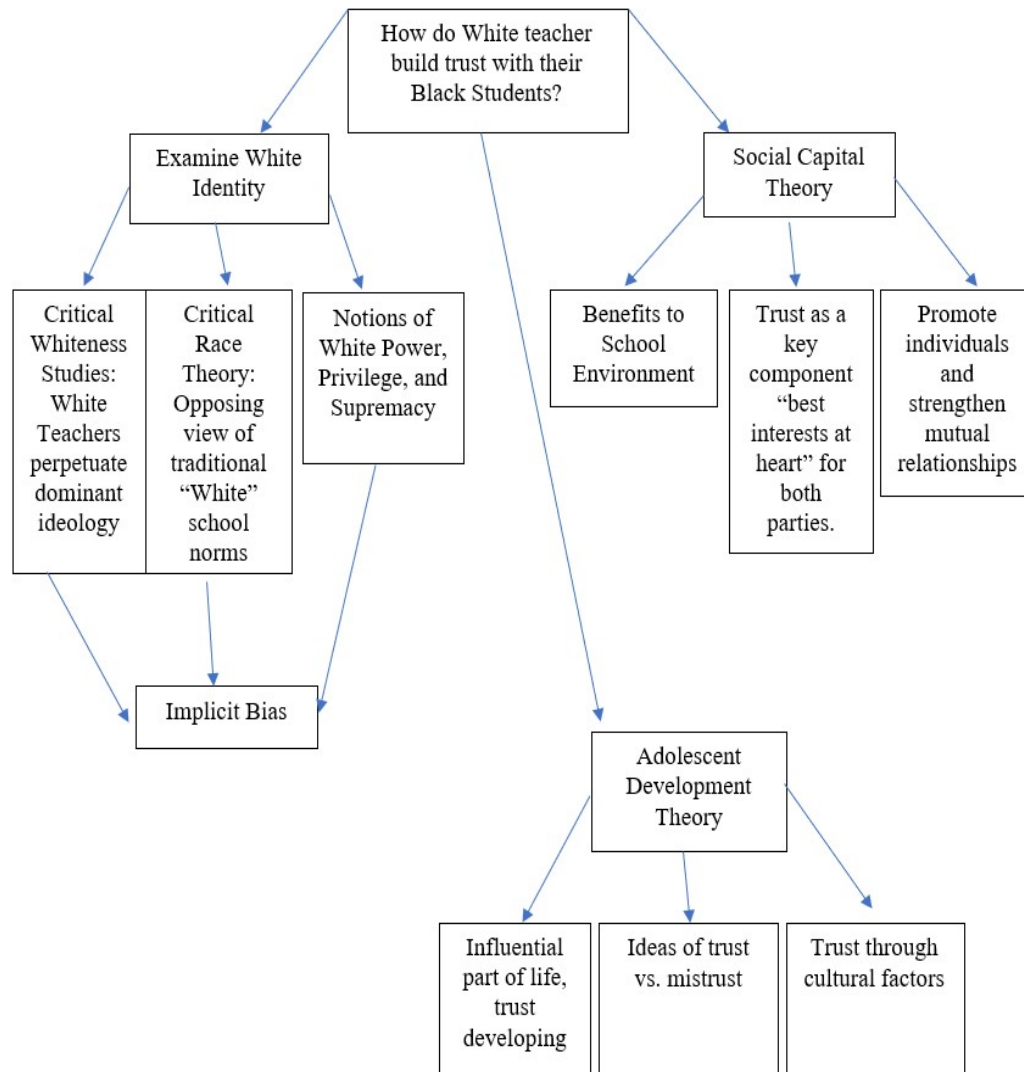
Based on the research question two theories will frame the study: Social Capital Theory and Critical Race Theory. Social Capital Theory will drive my research as it relates to relational trust and Critical Race Theory will be used to analyze the outcomes of the research.

#### **Social Capital Theory**

Coleman's approach to Social Capital Theory focuses upon the idea that social capital is likely to create or lead to productive tangible capital based really in the trustworthiness of the organizational structure. In the article, "Social capital in the creation of human capital," Coleman defined social capital as, "the product of social connections in a network generated from trust, reciprocity, and information channels" (p. 96). Moreover, social capital is not a single entity, Coleman suggested that social capital is a, "variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some

**Figure 1.1**

*Construct Map of Theoretical Foundation*



aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure” (p. 98). In the context of education schools hold several forms of social capital that can be accessed through the interactions of people that make up the school structure. Those interactions build a social network that is rooted in mutual relationships where in this case teachers and students benefit from the quality of those interactions.

### ***Social Capital Theory and Benefits to School Environment***

Social capital has become a valuable way to frame certain issues in our schools today because of what we know now about how students learn as opposed to many years ago. For example, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) stated that, “our education system(s) benefitted too few because they are based on outdated science which holds that brain development and learning is determined primarily by genes; leading to a notion that school performance capacities are predetermined; that some can learn well and some can’t” (p.226). While some may still believe that learning is predetermined, others would argue that learning heavily relies on the environment itself. In this sense social capital acts as a bridge to positively impact the teacher and student relationship. Aslandogan and Cetin (2007) illustrated the benefit of social capital in students’ behavioral development and success (p.35). They maintained that teachers who are fully committed to education, dedicated to academic success, self-sacrificing and altruistic in their manners towards students help attract parents and sponsors (community) towards proper schooling and education. Social capital in this regard can assist parents and students into making decisions about what schools provide them the best opportunities academically and how the role of school personnel support the upward mobility of students.

Social capital in education yields a variety of positive effects. Based on the work of Dika and Singh (2002) social capital has proven to positively affect graduation rates, college enrollment, parent involvement in schools, test scores, grade point average, and school related effort. One of the most important positive effects of social capital in schools is academic achievement for students. As White teachers begin building relationships based on trust with their Black students, teachers start to understand the best methods to teach their students. For example, traditional approaches to teaching and learning may not be the correct way for students to demonstrate their understanding. According to a study conducted by Singh, Granville, and Dika (2002) found that, “attitudes and interest affect achievement, we believe that developing policies and strategies to improve attendance and participation in classroom activities is worthy of consideration” (p. 330). It is important for teachers to strengthen students’ positive attitudes and create an educational path to successful learning. Social capital can be used as a lubricant to foster meaningful relationships that help students view learning and education in a new light. Students who have professional relationships with teachers want to work hard for them and get an understanding of the “why” behind what they are learning.

However, social capital may produce some negative effects in terms of education access and upward mobility. While forms of educational social capital are rooted in Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman’s (1988) theories, researchers have created frameworks in order to explain educational achievement and attainment. Most notably authors Lareau and Horvat (1999) developed a framework of social capital describing the times that families were included or excluded by the school resulting in the denial or acceptance of

social capital. According to Lareau and Horvat in the article “Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family School Relationships,” they stated that, “social class seems to influence how black and white parents negotiate their relationships with schools, for blacks race plays an important role, independent of social class, in framing the terms of their relationship” (p.38). The reality is that Black students have a more difficult time than their White counterparts when developing and using social capital with their White teachers.

Additionally, scholar Stanton-Salazar (1997) provided a framework of social capital that examines the socialization of racial minorities explaining how mainstream institutions create barriers for low-status and minority youth to accumulate social capital. In the article “A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths” Stanton-Salazar stated that, “the central problem at the core of the analysis of relationships between minority children and adolescents and institutional agents is the construction of interpersonal trust, solidarity, and shared meaning in the context of institutional relations, which are defined, on the one hand, by hierarchical relations of power and institutional barriers, and, on the other, by institutionalized dependency” (p. 17). In the case of Black adolescents in schools gaining meaningful social capital is extremely difficult to gain because of the disconnect between races and culture.

### ***Social Capital Theory and Promotion of Mutual Relationships***

There is a strong connection between how stakeholders within a school community earn trust and how social capital plays a role in creating that environment. Many traditional suburban schools are seeing a shift in student minority enrollment

numbers, making the Black population the majority within the school. This shift in the student population reflects a larger trend of many cities in the United States, where the populations are made up of more diverse individuals. When social capital is used as a group resource it can be very beneficial only as long as you are part of the group or “norm.” The researchers Kerbow and Bernhardt (1993) showed, however, “that after controlling for socioeconomic status, African American and Hispanic parents are actually more likely to contact their children’s school and attend PTO meetings” (p.128). Similarly, Stanton-Salazar (1995) has suggested that, “minority and working-class children depend upon social capital to succeed in school.” Therefore, social capital is a valuable resource to Black students because when good relationships form between teachers and students the opportunity to build trust is more accessible.

In the field of education, researchers have found that when it comes to Black students and social capital the likelihood of gaining valuable capital is difficult. According to Wimberly (2013) in *Understanding Social Capital and the African American School Experience* the scholar stated that, “African Americans are behind their White peers in student achievement, high school graduation, college entrance, and labor market participation” (p. 46). In contrast to other ethnic groups Black people in general have a harder time acquiring social capital thus resulting in lesser opportunities and benefits. Since it is harder for Black students to gain social capital in schools that are dominated by a White teaching staff, it becomes crucial to understand how Black students maintain who they are culturally while extending themselves to create meaningful personal networks outside of their immediate community. Basically it comes down to the norms that are established by the teacher which in many cases do not directly

benefit the students. For example, the social capital that can be found in a community can be very detrimental in school and actually work against the student. There is the idea of “playing the game” or assimilating to school cultural norms in order to increase the students’ educational outcomes and attainment. Without social capital, African American students often experience cultural discontinuity, and these disconnections along with inconsistencies between the values of some students are usually those from non-dominant cultures (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011; Self & Milner, 2012).

Although it is increasingly challenging for Black students to acquire social capital there are still some benefits especially when navigating through school. It is a common misconception that Black students do not care about what school personnel think about them; it is quite the opposite. Often, it is based upon the strength of the relationship, frequency of interactions, and overall quality of those interactions. Also, the social capital effectiveness really depends on the student’s social status. For low-social status Black students it is exponentially harder for them to accrue social capital in contrast to middle class Black students and their White counterparts. The first step to gaining social capital for Black students is establishing relationships with teachers and other school staff based on trust, mutual respect, and reciprocity. When Black students perceive school personnel as having high expectations for them then students will most likely have high expectations for themselves. On the other hand, it is imperative for White teachers to provide access to their Black students. Within that access White teachers need to understand ways to help their students gain valuable social capital in school to assist in future educational and career attainment.

### ***Trust as a Key Concept of Social Capital Theory***

Many social capital theorists agree that trust is a key concept because of the reciprocity that exists between two parties that stand to gain benefits from the relationships in which they are engaging. For individuals to truly benefit from the interactions with other individuals they must use trust as a lever to eventually lead to a valuable resource that can be tangible or abstract. For example, White teachers want their students to learn and be successful while Black students ultimately want a fair and equitable education. Both parties when building relationships with each other should trust that each individual has their best interest at heart. Throughout these interactions between White teachers and Black students trust will allow each individual the ability to create a genuine relationship that provides benefits for both sides.

Putnam (1995b) is credited with the idea of describing trust as “thin” and “thick.” Thin trust is commonly associated with individuals who are acquaintances where the relationship is starting to build while thick trust is being built with individuals that are good friends, family members, or colleagues. In other words, thin trust is used with individuals that know you on a surface level, but thick trust is used when people know you more on a personal level. As a result, the trust level changes depending on the stage of each party's relationship. Although each type of trust is different, both types of trust are important to accruing social capital.

In addition to thin and thick trust, Putnam (1995b) described the notions of bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the resources in one's network, mainly their community. Bonding social capital can be troublesome based on the exclusionary nature of how communities typically unite in similar thoughts,

behaviors, and actions, ultimately shunning differences instead of accepting them.

Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic group identity and religious affiliation.

On the other hand, bridging social capital describes how one group can connect with outward looking groups to come to some sort of “common” ground. Bridging social capital can create a pathway that unites demographic and social differences to improve ties between individuals. In most cases people typically have more bonding social capital than bridging social capital, however, it is imperative that people continue to expand their network in order to build up a variety of resources.

### **Examine White Identity**

In order to answer the question, “how do White teachers build trust with their Black students?” it is crucial to examine the White identity of the teachers. A majority of White teachers do not notice that their White identity plays a factor when teaching Black students. Notions of White power, privilege, and supremacy underlie their teaching strategies and approach to the interactions with their Black students. For White teachers to truly build trust with their Black students they must confront their White identity by learning how Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies effect their profession. White teachers can use Critical Race Theory as a lens to look into how their current teaching practices affect their students of color. For example, White teachers can compare how they interact with their Black students by reflecting upon how Black students historically have experienced schooling in a White dominated United States educational system. Furthermore, White teachers should examine their White identity by digging deep into Critical Whiteness Studies. Critical Whiteness Studies can assist White teachers in understanding how their Whiteness is perpetuated in schools. By White

teachers using Critical Whiteness Studies to frame their educational practices they can start to accept how their Whiteness affect their Black students and what changes need to be put into place. By confronting these notions of White identity, White teachers can begin to change the narrative of a racist system that has impacted Black students for way too long.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is another theory that impacts the current landscape of United States schools. Many schools today continue to operate with middle class White norms that do not reflect their student populations. White teachers would greatly benefit from using CRT as a framework to guide their education practices and challenge educational policy. Early theorists of CRT were deeply rooted in the field of legal studies. According to Delgado (1995, p. xiii), "[CRT] sprang up in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, both of whom were deeply concerned over the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S." Schools are no stranger to outdated ideologies when it comes to educational reform. In most cases educational policy only benefits the norm and sustains a level of inequity between schools. Educational reform is a difficult task to take on and can be opposed by the groups that have the power to make reform possible. In Daniel Solorzano's (1997) work, "Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education he lists elements to frame CRT" Solorzano stated that, "the basic CRT model consists of five elements focusing on: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective" (p. 63).

Moreover, Gloria Ladson-Billings is another advocate of using the CRT model in the field of education. In the article written with William F. Tate entitled, “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” (1995), Ladson-Billings discusses the disparities in education today and suggests that these “inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Ladson-Billings and Tate proposed that race “continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States” (p. 48). Using the CRT model White teachers can start to explore their racial identities and roles they play in furthering the existing narrative of racism. Additionally, White teachers can no longer hide behind the “color blind” notion where race does not play a factor in educating Black students. Through the pathways of culturally responsive teaching and challenging the current education policies, White teachers can begin to build lasting student relationships through relational trust to foster growth with their Black students.

Within U.S. schools, CRT seeks to dismantle the oppressive nature of schooling for students that are non-White. Most White teachers are oblivious or choose to avoid how their racist behaviors influence non-White students and contribute to reinforcing structural racism. In my estimation White teachers must be awakened to the notion that oppression is taking place and use a CRT framework to view the educational disparities between White and non-White students. Furthermore, the idea of meritocracy, regardless of social class and race comes into question here as well. A majority of White teachers would subscribe to the idea that, “if” students regardless of social class and race just work extremely hard then they can achieve whatever they put their minds to. The problem with that line of thinking is the White educator assumes that the playing field is equal for

everyone involved. On the other hand, that type of thought keeps White teachers from evaluating their own practices, identity, and assistance in preserving an unequal education system. Hard work and the development of skills is very essential to being able to succeed, however, CRT looks at groups, in this case Black students and points to where structural and institutional racism has taken place, and in turn searching for ways to eradicate these inconsistencies amongst groups. In this way CRT interrupts the current system by challenging the acceptance of colorblind agendas and ideologies. If CRT is used as a framework to dismantle the existing thought, it could impede how White teachers develop their sense of their White identities and welcome how their place in education affects that of non-White people. Building trust within an educational setting could pay huge dividends to both the student and teacher. The teacher must look at the students within their classroom and ask themselves, does the classroom environment represent the students who make up my class and how do I make this a reality if the answer is no. For the purpose of this study, CRT provides an important framework for White educators to evaluate their teaching practices and how they develop relationships with non-White students, especially Black students. By building a relationship of trust between White teachers and Black students, CRT is used as a tool to consistently challenge the inequalities in K-12 education.

### ***Critical Whiteness Studies***

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is an approach to challenge how Whiteness plays a significant role in United States society. In the article, Racial arrested development: A Critical Whiteness Analysis of the Campus Ecology, researchers Cabrea, Watson, and Franklin (2016) stated that, “CWS attempts to unmask the seemingly

invisible privileges of Whites and demonstrate that the privileges are real. In the context of this paper, privileges are living and learning in a welcoming and safe environment that is not always afforded to Students of Color” (120). In many cases White teachers are unaware of how their Whiteness impacts their Black students. It is difficult for White teachers to shed light upon themselves and ask hard questions about race, especially when it is the White race that is in question.

When it comes to the field of education, Whiteness is the dominant ideology because the teaching force remains mostly White and female. On the other hand, the student population is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of race, language, and socio-economic status. To further complicate things many White educators maybe unaware of the power and privilege they possess which only exacerbates the problem. For example, when White teachers do not change their style of teaching to fit the needs of their Black students it causes teachers to wonder what is wrong with the students instead of self-reflecting on their teaching practices. As a result, many White teachers reinforce institutional power and privilege while simultaneously strengthening systematic racism. Moreover, through this colorblind ideology White teachers adopt deficit thinking and White saviour mentalities when teaching Students of Color.

Therefore, CWS provides a framework that pushes back against the idea of normative ways that Whiteness has shaped a teacher’s experience. CWS is used as a means for White educators to examine how the White race contributes to institutional and systemic racism. In *Critical white studies: Looking behind the mirror* (1997) Delgado and Stefancic emphasized that, “Whiteness acknowledged or not, has been a norm against which other races are judged and works to equalize the power” (p.1). Furthermore,

Delgado and Stefancic stated that, “ultimately CWS offers an educational imperative, namely that whites may and should study race, including their own” (p. 605). In education, there is a need to critique Whiteness and challenge how Whiteness affects teachers’ beliefs when educating Black students. In order to critique how Whiteness affects teachers’ beliefs when educating Black students it is imperative to examine the two positions within CWS. One position in CWS falls under the guise that Whiteness inevitably means racism. While the other position has a more positive theorization of Whiteness, which includes the idea of White allies.

Not only are there two positions in CWS, according to Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire (2016) there are two waves of scholars who have slightly different opinions about CWS as a framework. Most first wave CWS scholars suggested that teachers’ Whiteness and privilege added to institutional problems (Jupp & Slattery, 2010, p. 44). Also, these same scholars tend to focus on race evasion where individuals do not want to talk about race.

However, the second wave of CWS scholars view Whiteness in a different regard. First of all, according to Haviland (2008) second wave CWS scholars view Whiteness as powerful and power evasive. Next, Haviland believes that Whiteness uses techniques to maintain power and views Whiteness as not monolithic or in other words open to new ideas (p.39). In the article, Second wave white teacher identity studies: A review of white teacher identity literatures from 2004 through 2014 Jupp, Berry, and Lensmire (2016) found that two thematic categories emerged based on their research: race evasive studies and race visible studies.

Most of the research on race evasiveness has studied the behaviors of preservice and in-services teachers. In those studies, there was an emphasis on how White and

diverse classroom contexts affect a teacher's White racial identity, teacher practice, and colorblindness. For example in the article "You could argue it either way": Ambivalent white teacher racial identity and teaching about racism in literature study Borsheim-Black (2018) examined how a White teacher's, "White racial identity may have shaped and ultimately undermined her attempts to teach about racism, with the ultimate goal of contributing to the development of more productive antiracist pedagogies" (p. 229). In order to build trust with their Black students White teachers must use the CWS framework to gauge how their White identity plays a factor in teaching and interacting with Black students.

Most of the research on race visible teacher education aims to use critical pedagogy to challenge students perceptions of race. According to Hambacher and Ginn (2020) teacher educators incorporated literature, art, and various multimedia in their attempts to disrupt students' tacit understandings about race. According to Glenn (2015) teacher educators led, "pre-service teachers to reconsider their prior understanding of American literature and recognize the relative absence of texts by Black and Latinx authors in English classrooms" (p 26). For example, many White educators view Black and Latinx authors as being something separate from American literature because it does not align with their thoughts of what American literature is. In other words, American literature is White authors, not Black or Latinx authors. Based on a study by Matias and Mackey (2016) they found that using multimedia was a main instructional practice in anti-racist teaching. In that same study Matias and Mackey analyzed pre-service teachers' use of digital tools to narrate their lives in ways that, "engaged them emotionally as they problematized the normativity of whiteness and deconstructed their own white racial

identities” (p. 39). Race visible educators approach teaching by not contributing to the White normative ideology, but rather confronting their own White identity and how it plays a role in educating students.

In education CWS has been used to shine a light upon how White educators use their Whiteness to perpetuate inequities within the public school system. Many White teachers throughout U.S. public schools do not understand how their Whiteness impacts their Students of Color. According to Rogers and Mosley (2006) “Whiteness studies are related to the intellectual movement of CRT and seek to theorize and problematize the construction of whiteness as an absent racial category and dominant social norm” (p. 466). Therefore Whiteness is not necessarily the problem, but White teachers not accepting the fact that being White affords more opportunities and privileges that other races do not have. CWS provides a framework that helps White teachers reflect on how their teaching practices impact the achievement of their Students of Color. Lastly, CWS is an accountability tool for many White educators who are looking to disrupt the dominant White social norms and values that are ingrained into U.S. schools.

### **Adolescent Development Theory**

Adolescence is a stage of development between childhood and adulthood. Typically adolescence takes place between 12 and 19 years of age. Fundamentally, adolescence is broken down into two phases, early and late adolescence. Each phase has its own unique characteristics. For example, early adolescence is characterized as the time when adolescents begin to increase their interaction with peer groups and slowly start to decrease the time they spend with parents. As youth begin to move out of early adolescence they reach late adolescence. In this development stage of adolescence youth

become separate individuals and create an awareness of their own perspectives and identities. According to Gemelli in the book, *Normal Child and Adolescent Development*, (1996) the researcher stated that, “adolescents take refuge in believing they are joined by other adolescents in their struggle to achieve emancipation from their childhood dependencies” (p. 447).

Throughout the years there have been many researchers who have studied the characteristics of human development at this stage. Hall is widely known as one of the first researchers to identify adolescence as an influential period of life and has some important writings using psychology as the framework for describing the stages of adolescence. In *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education* (1904) Hall used Darwin’s concepts of evolution along with the development stages of adolescence in concert with the beginning of civilization. Fast forward to the mid-20th century, where scholars began to take on more positive features of adolescent development and place them into stage theories.

One of the most influential scholars in adolescent development is Piaget. Piaget’s work was mainly focused on cognitive development, which suggested the forming of abstract concepts during adolescence. Although there are four stages of Piaget’s cognitive development, which include sensorimotor (birth to two years), preoperational stage (ages two to seven), concrete operational stage (ages seven and eleven), and formal operational stage (ages 12 and up), I would like to focus on the last stage, formal operational for the purposes of my study. In the formal operational stage of Piaget’s development theory the scholar discussed how adolescents start to acquire reasoning skills and understand

abstract ideas. For the purpose of my study, teachers should incorporate critical thinking during the delivery of instruction within the classroom. According to the book, Stage Theory of Cognitive Development--Jean Piaget (2020) Oogarah-Pratap, Bhola, and Ramma stated that, “exposing students to problem-based scenarios from different contexts can foster the formal operational reasoning patterns through the equilibration process, involving both assimilation and accommodation” (p. 137).

White teachers must understand the stages of adolescent development in order to build trust and strong relationships with their students. Another scholar that has greatly contributed to the field of adolescent development is Erikson. Erikson in his many writings described how the concept of developing an identity was an integral part of adolescence. According to Erikson (1968) identity formation is necessary, “for a young person to experience wholeness and youth must feel a progressive continuity between that which he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future; between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see him and expect of him” (p.87). From this basic premise Erikson was able to establish eight developmental stages of a man. Each stage of development focused upon a conflict where people had to experience both outcomes. For example, one of the stages of development is trust vs. mistrust. In this conflict scenario, youth are navigating the world by figuring out their environment and one’s own self through decision making. On the other hand, mistrust is viewed by Erikson as, “time and time confusion, which is more or less typical for adolescents at one stage or another” (Erikson, 1968, p. 182). As it pertains to this study, Black students are not only navigating through adolescence, but also experiencing conflicts that arise when

interacting with their teachers. One of the most prevalent conflicts between White teachers and Black students is behavioral expectations. Many White teachers do not understand different cultural norms or are not willing to learn about them in terms of classroom expectations and therefore resort to punitive punishment.

More recent research has shifted from a stage based approach to a more process driven approach to adolescent development. With a process driven approach to adolescent development, researchers have made the case that due to the nature of continual change in humans the stage based approach to adolescent development does not quite fit an individuals progress over time. In addition, process driven researchers acknowledge that within this approach the development process must include interactions between individuals and other people and contexts. For example, according to the article *Life Span Psychology: Theory and Application to Intellectual Functioning* (1999) researchers Baltes, Staudinger, and Lindenberger suggested that, “development is not completed at adulthood but that it extends across the entire life course and that from conception onward lifelong adaptive processes of acquisition, maintenance, transformation, and attrition in psychological structures and functions are involved” (p. 472). In other words, people do not necessarily travel through each stage of development with ease and in the correct time frame.

People, especially adolescents, do not fit perfectly within the development stages because each person is uniquely different. For this study, White teachers must be cognizant of development stages and that each student is on a different trajectory in terms of adolescent development. Another scholar that promotes a process driven approach to adolescent development is Bronfenbrenner. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) in the

book, *The Bioecological Model of Human Development* the biological model is an, “evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time” (p.793). Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of development is defined as, “the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups” (p.793). In both instances, Baltes and Bronfenbrenner point out individuals are never a finished product, however, are continuously evolving and learning. Overall, White teachers could benefit from viewing students holistically, taking into account their unique personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and factors that have shaped their lives to this point.

For the purposes of this study, process driven approaches to development seem to fit nicely with both groups, White teachers and Black students. First, White teachers fit into the process driven approach to development. Obviously adults, and in this case White teachers, are considered “grown up” or past the adolescent stage of development, however, they go through a continuum when it comes to forming a perception of their White identity. White teachers tend to go through a transformation of sorts floating in and out of how in touch they are with being White in a world that benefits them. Just like adolescents, White teachers will find themselves never really arriving at a finish line with development because the process is not linear, but cyclical.

On the other hand, Black students, and in this case adolescents are developing at different rates. Adolescents go through two types of development, physical and cognitive. Depending on the adolescent, the physical attributes can be misleading for adults when they consider the cognitive functioning levels of their students. For example, a student might have physical features that make them look more like an adult, however,

cognitively the student might not live up to the expectations of the teacher because the student should act more like the mature individual they appear to be from the outside. To further illustrate this point, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model suggests external factors that affect development, which include the environment, connections, changes over time, and social/cultural factors.

The external factors listed above have a lot to do with why there is a mistrust between White teachers and Black students. Although, White teachers have a vision of how the educational process of learning should look, however, in most cases it is not representative of the student population they teach. For example, the learning environment of school is not conducive to the ways in which Black students learn. Not only should learning be presented in culturally responsive ways, but also should meet the needs of the student at the particular stage of adolescence they are in. According to Eccles and Midgley, they stated that, "learning individual needs of students should be at the stage of development of child and educational context that fits the learning processes" (p.) Furthermore, researchers Ryan and Deci (2017) found that, "caregiving environments affect intrinsically, helping students to learn" (p. 352). Learning environments play a major factor in how adolescents learn and ultimately teachers should take into account the stage of adolescence development their students are in.

Another aspect that influences adolescent development is cultural factors. For this study, the difference in cultures of White teachers and Black students, affects the developing ethnic identities of Black adolescents. Throughout centuries in United States history there has been a deliberate notion of assimilation for minorities and immigrants into American culture. In this case American culture reflects the dominant group, which

is White Americans and mainstream society. However, the idea of assimilation does not stop when Black students enter schools, especially those schools staffed by mainly White teachers. Depending on how Black adolescents are socialized by parents, it can have a huge impact on their perceptions of discrimination. According to Ng and Hall (2011) in their book chapter, *Cultural Influences on Adolescent Development* suggested that, “a person of color whose parents practiced cultural socialization is more likely to perceive negative behavior as discriminatory than someone who has not received such socialization” (p. 46). As mentioned earlier, there is a long standing tradition of racism within the United States and public schools across America, therefore schools become a microcosm of the overall culture of White America. It is not a surprise that many Black students have negative perceptions of their White teachers. Trust is not given, it is earned.

In addition, there is an overall mistrust that is a cultural factor based on the upbringing of Black adolescents. White teachers need to understand this cultural factor and equip themselves with learning about the students they are teaching. Ng and Hall discovered that cultural factors influence the overall psychological health of Black adolescents; they stated that, “racism and discrimination, have been found to impact depression” (p.47). Moreover, Ng and Hall go on to say that, “due to historical abuses (e.g., slavery, Tuskegee experiment), African Americans tend to distrust the mental health system and prefer to seek help from their religious leaders” (p.47). This same kind of distrust can be seen in schools, based on years of actual and perceived discrimination. On the other hand, ethnic identity plays a big role in how adolescents cope with their feelings surrounding psychological health. For example, “adolescents

with strong ethnic identity tend to report higher self-esteem, self-confidence, more positive emotions, and fewer anxiety and depression symptoms" (Ng & Hall, 2011, p. 47). This evidence is further proof that White teachers need to take into account the ethnic identities of their students, placing an emphasis on how the differences in culture affect behavioral outcomes, especially in terms of trusting relationships.

Without the foundation of trust between teachers and students it is highly unlikely for Black students to have academic success in a White dominated educational framework. Positive ethnic identities play a significant part in the academic success of Blacks adolescents. Once again, Ng and Hall have reported that, "African American and Latino/a American students who report a higher ethnic identity as assessed by connectedness, awareness of racism, and a strong belief that achievement is valued by their cultural group, achieve higher grade point averages in eighth and ninth grades" (Ng & Hall, 2011, p. 48). Furthermore, when parents of Black adolescents discuss discrimination and push academic success to their children as a way of building cultural identity, in most cases their children will perform well in school.

On the other hand, Black adolescents who do not feel connected to their ethnic group or isolated from that same group will most likely not achieve the academic success that they are capable of reaching. In addition, Black students who experience or perceive discrimination can acquire negative attitudes about school and ultimately academic achievement. White teachers, whether conditioned or otherwise oblivious to their own identity and how they benefit from the world, need to be reflective in the ways they interact with Black students. For example, a longitudinal study of Black adolescents found that, "experiencing perceived daily discrimination in school by teachers and peers

negatively affected African American youth satisfaction with their school work” (Ng & Hall, 2011, p. 48). So even before learning has taken place White teachers must create a warm, caring, and inclusive environment for Black students. The basis of this environment should focus on removing the barriers of distrust and initiating a mutual relationship of trust then the real learning can take place.

### **Research Question**

In my proposed research I will be explaining how successful White teachers earn trust with their Black students. This topic has been developed based on the changing student racial demographics that are occurring in many United States schools today. Also, throughout the United States, the majority of teachers are staying homogeneously White, causing disproportionate numbers between the race of students and their teachers. To further illustrate the point, White teachers are the group within the school that has power based on a socially constructed idea of race where White people benefit because of their skin color. Additionally, not only are Black students underrepresented based on race, but also, they are children, which creates an obvious power dynamic that does not benefit them within the school context. Therefore it is important to examine relational trust and how social capital provides teachers and students with resources that positively impact both parties. The idea of building trust between teachers and their students has led to the research question, “How do White teachers earn trust with their Black students?”

### **Significance**

In the United States today there are several schools that are experiencing an increased population of diverse learners, while the teaching staff that makes up these schools are staying the same. What is obvious is the difference in race between teacher

and student, however what is not obvious on the surface, is the disconnect between teacher and student relationships based on traditional schools that reflect White norms and values. White teachers make up the majority of the teaching workforce and what comes along with that is White privilege. White teachers unbeknownst to themselves perpetuate White middle class values to their Black students who do not identify with these values. Since White teachers are at the top of the power structure within a school they maintain institutional racism because it benefits them. White teachers need to confront their Whiteness and White privilege in order to meet the needs of their Black students.

On the other hand, Black students are consistently underrepresented in suburban schools. For example, achievement and opportunity gaps continue to exist and widen in the areas of test scores, discipline referrals, lack of representation in Advanced Placement courses and programs like gifted and talented education. What is more astonishing is the lack of culturally responsive teaching in many of the teacher preparation courses that will produce educators unequipped with the skills to help Black students be academically successful in the classroom. To be successful teachers must build strong relational trust with their Black students before actual classroom teaching can take place. Lastly, there is a lack of Black teaching candidates who are getting education degrees and entering the classroom. Moreover, many Black teachers are leaving the teaching profession because of teacher burnout and the weight of being the torch bearer of the entire race who in most cases is the only Black teacher in the school. Similarly, Black teachers cannot identify with their White teaching colleagues making it hard to break through the White supremacy that the school has established.

For this dissertation research, will investigate how White teachers build trust with their Black students. I plan on examining and discussing the intersection of theories concerning social capital, adolescent development, and critical race theory/critical Whiteness theory. Specifically, I intend to connect the aforementioned theories to how they apply to trust between White teachers and non-White students. Lastly, I will identify the critical components from the theories that will pertain to my dissertation.

There have been many research studies using the theories of social capital, critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and adolescent development. However, there have not been any empirical studies that I have encountered that used all of these theories to examine how White teachers build trust with their Blacks students. Nonetheless, using all of the theories makes perfect sense when examining the relationship between teachers and students. Each theory has components within their frameworks that deal with relationships. Also, each theory sheds light on racial and cultural differences. By using all of the theories listed above for my dissertation research question I can attain a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers or gateways to building trust amongst White teachers and Black students.

For the purposes of this study, there are several rationales for using four different theories to examine the building of trust between White teachers and Black students. First, social capital theory provides a framework for the basis of mutually benefiting relationships. In the case of White teachers and Black students, it is imperative that both parties feel that they are gaining some sort of benefit from one another, especially Black students because as the student they are in a vulnerable role compared to the power that teachers possess in the relationship.

Second, Critical Race Theory can shine a light onto the ways institutions continue to systematically create laws, rules, and policies that benefit the dominant group, which in this case is White people. Not only does Critical Race Theory confront the inequalities of education between White and non-White students, it shows the disparities of access that Black students have at institutions that are predominantly White. Moreover, CRT and social capital intersect when it comes to the opportunities that Black adolescents have in schools. For example, social capital is much harder for Black students to accrue and without the correct institutional agents assisting in the navigation of social capital accumulation then Black students are left with missing out on opportunities that White students take advantage of in schools.

Third, Critical Whiteness studies provide a lens through which White teachers should view themselves. With CWS, White teachers can evaluate their identity and start to understand how being White affects their teaching practices and relationships with Black students. As White teachers take a look at their own identity it becomes increasingly more important to also delve into the developmental process of the adolescents they teach. Adolescent development theory and CWS have some similarities, the most obvious being the ideas of identity and how people perceive those identities. When White teachers begin to come to terms with how being White in society benefits them and they can make the choice of changing their behaviors; ultimately taking an interest into the needs of their Black students. In that same line of thinking, White teachers must go above and beyond the original scope of their work and realize how adolescent development plays a part in successfully helping their Black students achieve academically, socially, and emotionally.

Lastly, this study will focus on how trust is built between White teachers and Black students. Using the theories of social capital, CRT, CWS, and adolescent development this study will provide a framework on how teachers and students interact while simultaneously using an analytic lens to reflect upon the relationships that are built based on trust. In other words, social capital is the main theory that will guide my research, however, CRT, CWS, and adolescent development theories will provide a backdrop for challenging how dominant and non-dominant groups interact with one another. In conclusion, with the intersectionality of each theory this study will dig into racial identities and confront how different races view the building of trusting relationships in schools.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this research and identifying how trust building between White teachers and Black students takes shape, there are multiple pieces of research that relate to the study. Examining student teacher relationships is an important foundation for understanding how trust is established and is a key aspect of the study. Uncovering the dynamics of race, Whiteness, trust and other factors that emerge in education is crucial in illuminating the relationship components that form between teachers and students. Also, identifying the factors that promote trust between teachers and students is a major goal of this research. There are many researchers that indicate the positives of teacher-student relationships based on trust (Brake, 2019; Gregory and Ripski, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Russell, Wentzel, and Donlan, 2016). On the other hand there are several researchers that speak upon the barriers of trusting relationships based on racial dynamics of White teachers and Black students (Bennett, 2012; Freeman, Brookhart, and Loadman, 1999; Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 2015; McKown and Weinstein, 2003).

The idea of building trust between teachers and their students has led to the research question, “How do White teachers earn trust with their Black students?” In the United States today there are schools that are experiencing an increased population of diverse learners, while the teaching staff that makes up these schools are staying the same. What is obvious is the difference in race between teacher and student; however what is not obvious on the surface, is the disconnect between teacher and student relationships based on traditional schools that reflect White norms and values. White

teachers make up the majority of the teaching workforce and what comes along with that is White privilege. White teachers unbeknownst to themselves perpetuate White middle class values to their Black students who do not identify with these values. Since White teachers are at the top of the power structure within a school they maintain institutional racism because it benefits them. White teachers need to confront their Whiteness and White privilege in order to meet the needs of their Black students. On the other hand, Black students are consistently underrepresented in suburban schools. For example, achievement and opportunity gaps continue to exist and widen in the areas of test scores, discipline referrals, lack of representation in Advanced Placement courses and programs like gifted and talented education.

What is more astonishing is the lack of culturally responsive teaching in many of the teacher preparation courses that produce educators not equipped with the skills to help Black students be academically successful in the classroom. To be successful in the classroom it is my assumption that teachers must build strong relational trust with their Black students before actual classroom teaching can take place. Lastly, there is a lack of Black teaching candidates who are getting education degrees and entering the classroom. Moreover, many Black teachers are leaving the teaching profession because of teacher burnout and the weight of being the torch bearer of the entire race who in most cases is the only Black teacher in the school. Similarly, Black teachers cannot identify with their White teaching colleagues making it hard to break through the White supremacy that the school has established. Throughout my experiences and study, I have found that trust in schools definitely matters. Although there is a considerable amount of empirical research on the levels of trust among teachers, principals, students, and parents there a

need to investigate how White teachers earn trust with their Black students Furthermore, how does this affect student achievement and influence the trust among teachers and administrators to effectively implement educational reform that best suits the needs of students moving forward.

This chapter will examine the relationships between White teachers and Black students through a review of literature. Searching the database ERIC using the keywords “student-teacher and “trust,” identified literature that focused on both teacher and student perspectives of trust when it came to interactions within the classroom and school. The “student-teacher and “trust” keyword search in ERIC yielded 161 results. Using those search results and looking over peer reviewed documents and those that contained student, teacher, and trust in the titles. Next, there were 15 articles that examined the trust-building relationships of White teachers and Black students.

In the literature authors identified the context in which teachers and students were able to foster positive and trusting relationships. As well settings where positive and trusting relationships were built based upon the racial dynamics of White teachers and Black students. Teacher-student relationship literature was readily available, however it was more difficult to locate literature that dealt with teacher student relationships based on racial demographics and with the aspect of trust. Although there is a great deal of research about how teachers and students perceive trust and how that can shape a relationship, there is little research that delves into trust building strategies between teachers and students, especially White teachers and students of non-dominant racial groups.

This review of the research will continue by addressing teacher-student relationships as it applies to their trust perceptions. Also, the review of research will investigate classroom strategies that promote trusting relationships between teachers and students. Lastly, the review of research will focus upon how racial discrimination plays a factor in the trust building process of White teachers and Black students. Using the three categories mentioned above, the review addressed examples of how teacher-student relationships are perceived, how trust is incorporated into teacher-student relationships, and the impact of trust on those relationships, and implications based on existing research and record any gaps.

### **Trust in Schools**

Trust is a human element that makes for great relationships. In their seminal study on the reform efforts of urban Chicago public schools, authors Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) found that, “enabling positive social relationships between the adults was the key to successful school improvement and that trust was at the heart of those relationships” ( p. 3). Trust in schools boils down to one thing, being vulnerable in a safe environment. Trust enables individuals to speak their minds freely, be part of the decision-making process, rely on one another, take risks, be innovators, make compromises and accept failure. This section explains barriers to trust, teacher trust perceptions, and student trust perceptions.

Trust in schools does not often come easily and at times it comes with a price. According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), “the adults in a school community rely on each other to do their jobs correctly and with integrity. The challenge is our expectations for one another are very diverse, based on our unique backgrounds,

including our previous school and work experiences” (2002, p.5) In other words, as members of a school community; teachers, principals, students, and parents all must trust one another to create an environment that benefits the collective group, but also, benefits the individual. Additionally, at some level we as people make assumptions. We also know that making assumptions may not be healthy and in most cases are wrong. If trust is not part of the classroom environment it leads to resentment and judgment among teachers and students.

### **Teacher Trust Perceptions**

Teacher perceptions have a major impact on the quality of school experiences for students. Teacher trust in students therefore denotes the quality of school life of both students and teachers. Educational research increasingly acknowledges the significance of trust as an indicator of positive teacher-student relationships producing favorable outcomes for student learning and teacher functioning (e.g., Bryk and Schneider 2002; Forsyth 2008; Goddard et al 2002). However, not all teacher perceptions are positive and benefit their students. A study by Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011), sought to identify the barriers in developing supportive student- teacher relationships. They found that, “teachers instructing in low SES schools perceive the students as less teachable, as less able to meet the educational expectations imposed on them, which in turn reduces the level of trust teachers expose in the students” (p. 96). Furthermore, there are other factors that assist in teachers having lower levels of trust in their students. According to Van Maele and Van Houtte, “teachers often express discontent with students’ commitment to learning: “lack of student interest” represents the single most important reason for poor achievement” (Bishop et al. 2004, p. 240). Similarly, the more hours teachers instruct, the

more the pool of trust-based evidence on which teachers rely points out that students are not to be trusted (Tschannen-Moran 2004). Teacher perceptions of their students impact teacher job performance and how classroom environments function. Negative perceptions held by teachers can have a negative impact on students.

On the other hand, when teachers are committed to meaningful and deliberate trust building strategies with their students, positive outcomes arise. A study conducted by Russell, Wentzel, and Donlan (2016) discovered that teachers, “believed that teacher–adolescent trust is related to changes in general classroom climate and classroom functioning, student and teacher behaviours, and opportunities to vary instructional methods” (p.254). Additionally, Russell, Wentzel, and Donlan found that teachers reported, “once trust is established, they are able to enjoy their jobs more and have fun at work. In essence, the classroom simply becomes more comfortable; it becomes a place where the teacher can joke with students and there is an absence of stress” (p.255). As a result, when teachers perceive trust as a positive effect of teacher-student relationships, there is a willingness by the teacher to try different things within the classroom. For example, teachers have the ability to modify their instructional practices and take greater risks because they trust that students will do the right thing in terms of following the correct set of classroom expectations. For teachers there is a burgeoning trust forming through the willingness to accept how trust can benefit themselves and students. When a trusting relationship is established between teachers and students there is a commitment to doing what is right, which benefits both parties.

## **Student Trust Perceptions**

Student perceptions of their teachers greatly influences students' affinity with school and the quality of school related interactions in the classroom. Student trust in their teachers is based on the teacher's behavior and overall teaching style. Kate Phillip (2012) in her article, "'You're Trying to Know Me': Students from non-dominant groups respond to teacher personalism", stated that, "how students initially observed teachers in their interactions with students in the classroom, how they designed their classroom activities, and how they used classroom discipline approaches over time determined how teachers were perceived as being trustworthy and culturally responsive" (p.280). From the students perspective teachers who make an effort to understand their students have a better opportunity to gain trust over time making the learning process enjoyable and meaningful. When teachers take a genuine interest in students and make efforts to help them academically through understanding them as a learner, students know that there is a caring relationship taking place.

Students also rely on how they perceive their teachers' instructional and classroom management styles as an avenue to garner trust. Through a study using both semi-structured interviews and surveys with teachers and students, Gregory and Ripski (2008) clarified that, "student trust seems supported by a relational, rather than authoritarian teacher discipline style, and that trust is associated with lower levels of defiant behavior" (p.338). In this day and age students respond better to a relational discipline style between them and their teachers. Trust becomes the basis of the student-teacher relationship because there is some understanding as to why students are behaving in certain ways. When teachers understand and know their students there is more

empathy associated with their students misbehaving. In turn students understand the empathy teachers are displaying and when teachers have to discipline students they trust that the teachers still care for them. Once trust is built up over time students will start to exhibit less defiant behavior, understanding that teachers are looking out for the students' best interests at heart.

In addition, when students trust their teachers they are able to become more active in their overall school experiences, especially in the classroom. In the study, "TRUST US Documenting the Relationship of Students' Trust in Teachers to Cognition, Character, and Climate" researchers Corrigan, Klein, and Isaacs (2010) used a post hoc correlation analysis to show numerous positive significant relationships between students' levels of trust in teachers and students' own character, educational attitudes, and school climate. When students trust their teachers there is a confidence associated with how they perceive school. Motivation and buy-in are important impacts of trusting relationships with teachers that instill a determination to do well in school. Students trust that their teachers have their back and know that teachers will be supportive by helping them navigate their academic journey.

### **Teacher-Student Relationships and Trust**

The notion of trust and building positive teacher-student relationships is a fairly new concept in education. In the past and in some cases today, the teacher-student relationship is a one sided endeavor placing all of the power and authority in the teacher while the students hold little if any power. Teachers are supposed to be the ones who hold all the knowledge and disseminate it to the students who are expected to absorb it and regurgitate the information for later use. Furthermore, many students do not have a say in

what they are taught and do not have the ability to influence a teacher's decision about the best ways to reach individual students in the classroom. In turn, many students lack the desire to learn in a classroom that does not reflect their personalities and learning styles.

Trust can be the common denominator that links the teacher to the student in terms of understanding how each individual functions and works together to reach goals. Recently, student trust perceptions have given some insight into how effective their teachers are and how hard students will work for them. As a result, teachers should be concerned about how students perceive their levels of trust in a classroom setting. In other words, using classroom strategies that promote trust in students is a powerful tool to provide teachers not only for their students' benefit, but for the teacher's sake as well.

### **Trust Building through Positive Relationships**

In a study Andrew Brake (2019), examined teacher–student trust is associated with the social and emotional development of students, their school connectedness and engagement, and their academic achievement. Brake found that, “students highlighted the importance of teachers leading classroom activities that were designed to strengthen classroom teacher and peer relationships as well those that explicitly sought to develop classroom norms and expectations for strengthening these relationships” (p. 287). In addition, Gregory and Ripski (2008) found that “high school teachers who avoided incompetence, offensiveness, and indolence were more likely to develop trust with their students and, in turn, reduced student discipline referrals, teacher stress, and lost instructional time” (p. 339). Moreover, Lee and Schellert (2008) used a qualitative study

that modeled the role played by the relationship between a writing teacher and her students in the feedback and revision cycle they experienced.

The work above demonstrates the building of trust through academic teacher-student interactions where levels of trust are reciprocated. Lee and Schellert also found that, “our data and the model we developed from them led us to portray trust as an important force in how a writing teacher and her students could build caring relationships with each other” (p. 531). Writing provides valuable insight into how students communicate and express their feelings creating an avenue to building distinctively personal relationships between teachers and students. Many students use writing as a tool to express themselves and through that dialogue with their teachers meaningful relationships can be built using written expression.

### **Authentic Relationships**

Along with being culturally relevant and responsive in classrooms, it is imperative for White teachers to build authentic relationships with their Black students. By White teachers building authentic relationships with their Black students they are creating a bond that is cemented by trust and care. In most schools a high priority is placed on learning objectives, classroom behavior, and grading; however, schools seldom put an emphasis on building relationships of trust. Although it is important to focus on these things above it is difficult to accomplish those things if the student does not feel supported and cared for. In the book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools* by Nel Noddings (2006) the author explained that, “a caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings” (p. 15). However, for that caring relationship to

blossom into a trusting relationship both the teacher and student must find a common ground where the caring is mutual.

According to Noddings (2006), schools need to be environments where human development is of primary importance even above academic development. Noddings describes the ideal classroom as a space of cohabitation between teachers and learners, a place where students feel safe to express "wonder and curiosity" (p. 12). While the classroom setting provides a safe environment for student inquiry, White teachers are able to express how caring is modeled and maintained. Once students, especially Black students, know how much you authentically care then the avenues to trust develop and students have an open mind to what you are teaching. According to Parsons (2005) when faced with moral issues, "individuals with a caring orientation consider responsiveness to others and the nurturance of interpersonal relationships as paramount in determining action" (p. 26). As a teacher, caring for students should be one of the top priorities when establishing a positive and trusting relationship. In 'Teachers as Moral Models? The Role of Empathy in Teacher/Pupil Relationships Cooper (2002) stated that, "an attitude of care in teaching and learning emerges through profound empathy in one-to-one relationships" (p. 13). It is during those individual relationships where teachers get a more in depth understanding of their students making it easier for them to care for their overall well being.

### **Barriers to Forming Trusting Relationships**

There have been several researchers who question the idea of care when White teachers teach non-White students. Valenzuela's (1999) explanation of education provides one nuanced look at how Mexican youth and their families understand the role

that care plays in education. From this perspective, White dominated schools look to be the leader of moral and social values, but fail to realize that non-White students may not have the same moral and social values. Furthermore, not only do White dominated schools fail to align their moral and social values with non-White students, but they devalue cultures altogether.

According to Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Jackson (2014), “Building trust becomes a critical step in establishing an atmosphere conducive to a co-constructed learning experience” (p. 984). With the institution of trust White teachers can create a community where a sense of caring is taking place. As a result, Siddle, Walker, and Thompson (2004) found that, “teachers who enact such care often play the role of counselor, encourager, benefactor, and racial cheerleader in order to meet the needs of the whole student” (p 81). For teachers it is not all about instructing students, but being someone that wears many hats in order to comprehend what students are experiencing and how best to reach them socially, emotionally, and academically. White teachers must implement a culture of care into their classroom environment to set the stage for learning and meeting the individual needs of their Black students.

### **Racial Impact of Trust**

There has been a growing amount of literature that suggests that Black students are more likely to distrust White teachers because of the mistreatment spurred on by the effects of racism. In the article, The Development and Consequences of Stereotype Consciousness in Middle Childhood, researchers McKown and Weinstein (2003) suggested that, “when children come to understand that others endorse stereotypic beliefs, they gain insight into others’ social motives that profoundly affects their

relationship to other individuals, social settings, and society” (p. 498). It is not shocking that Black students distrust individuals that hold stereotypical beliefs about them.

Similarly, Black students who attend schools with a majority of White teachers have a difficult time gauging the intentions of their teachers because in mainstream society the relationships with White people in power has not favored Black people. White teachers must take a hard look at how their perceptions are hindering the trust of their Black students.

Moreover, Black students have had prior experiences with White teachers who have treated them unfairly. Researchers Gregory and Thompson (2010) reaffirmed the mistreatment of Black students by teachers in their article about African American high school students and variability in behaviors across classrooms. Gregory and Thompson suggested that, “African American youth are at-risk of being perceived as defiant by their teachers and, consequently, issued discipline referrals, and sent out of class, thereby missing important instructional time” (p. 387). To make matters worse, most White teachers tend to have more positive interactions with White students rather than their Black students. According to Harber et al, (2012), White teachers inherently provide more positive feedback to White students while Black students receive less positive praise (p. 1149). These types of classroom interactions definitely weaken the trust that Black students have for their White teachers.

To further complicate trust building, Black students receive less authentic feedback from their White teacher impeding their academic progress. In other words, Black students are not held to high academic expectations and therefore, in the eyes of White teachers, they are not motivated or highly interested in succeeding. Cohen, Steele,

and Ross (1999), for example, found that, “Black students are more likely than White students to distrust negative academic feedback from a White evaluator” (p. 341). Black students feel that White teachers’ negative feedback is not genuine or even worthwhile. If White teachers are not making an effort to provide meaningful feedback then they cannot blame Black students for not being motivated to learn. White teachers must understand that valuable feedback is meant to assist students in the learning process not impede the development of their students.

Yet, according to Liou and colleagues (2019), White teachers do uphold high academic expectations for their White students further complicating the level of trust with them and their Black students (p.126). Black students see these inconsistencies and naturally know that there is a mismatch in the treatment of students based on race. Over time, Black students start to fulfill these White teacher expectations and inadvertently perpetuate racial stereotypes held by White people claiming that Black students are not serious about their education and are not motivated academically. Unfortunately, when White teachers continue to hold low expectations for their Black students they are not providing an adequate education and it is harder to gain trust, motivate, and care for their students.

### **Trust and Racial Discrimination**

Another area that affects teacher-student trusting relationships is a perceived discrimination or bias from either the teacher, students, or both. Saft and Pianta (2001) studied teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with students with teachers of a large, demographically diverse sample. They concluded that, “when teachers match with their students in terms of racial-ethnic background, teachers may perceive the relationships

with their students as more positive” (p. 128). Freeman, Brookhart, and Loadman (1999) performed a study that compared similarities and differences among two groups of entry-level teachers from 10 different teacher-preparation institutions. Within the study, Freeman, Brookhart, and Loadman were particularly interested in comparing teachers who taught a high level of racial/ethnically diverse students and teachers who taught at schools with lower levels of racial/ethnically diverse students. The researchers cited, “beginning teachers in ethnically diverse schools report greater difficulties in establishing meaningful relations with students” (p. 100). White teachers who teach non-White students may have a feeling of exclusion, which they do not normally have because in most settings they are comfortable and around other White people.

It is ironic that White teachers feel this way because in most cases Black students and people feel uncomfortable throughout society as a whole because they are living in a White dominated world. Furthermore, many White teachers do not attempt to authentically build relationships with their Black students because White teachers are used to doing things their way, the correct way, which really means how White people do things. Greene, Way, and Pahl (2006) defined racial/ethnic discrimination as, “unfair, differential treatment on the basis of race or ethnicity” (p. 218). There is no way to sugar coat it, Black students in schools with a predominately White teaching staff may be mistreated based on race. When White teachers bring differential treatment in building relationships with their Black students, students may not trust their teachers.

Race should not play a factor in schools but sadly it does especially in a White dominated educational system. It is almost impossible to build a relationship based on trust when teachers are already not making an effort to create a positive experience with

their Black students either through an unspoken or blatant form of discrimination. Payne (2008), reviewing literature relevant to African American trust of others in general and of educators specifically (e.g., Ferguson 2006; Taylor et al. 2007; Ruck et al. 2008), argues that “student trust in schools can be constrained in two ways: via limited access to educational resources and via disproportionate experiences of negative treatment” (p.113). This type of limited access grows larger based on the racial differences of teachers and students, especially White teachers and Black students.

There is a long history in the U.S. of racial discrimination and stereotyping that continues to this day, which has caused a disconnect between White teachers and Black students. A study conducted by Hope, Skoog, and Jagers (2015) used semi-structured individual interviews of eight Black high school students to explain their experiences of racial stereotyping, discrimination from teachers and staff, lack of institutional support for a positive racial climate, and lack of racial diversity in curricular offerings. The researchers found that, “Black students were targeted as the instigator of a classroom management issue provided the most obvious point of contrast between the ways that teachers treated Black and White students” (p.94). Throughout the literature there are studies explaining barriers of trust between White teachers and Black students. Clearly, White teachers need to utilize trust in their relationships with Black students in order to help them succeed academically and emotionally. Trust is the foundational piece that White teachers must build with their Black students and there needs to be a commitment to understanding how racial stereotyping affects a student’s behavior from the teacher’s perspective.

## **Teachers' Implicit Bias**

Another factor to building positive teacher-student trusting relationships is implicit bias. Staats (2015), of the Kirwan Institute, defined implicit bias as, “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (p. 29). In the same fashion van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, and Holland (2010) investigated whether the prejudiced attitudes of teachers related to differences in their expectations between students of color found that, “teachers generally hold differential expectations of students of different ethnic origins, and achievement differences between ethnic minority students and students of European origin” (p. 518). In Pit-Cate and Glock’s study (2019) that investigated teachers' attitudes towards students from different social groups they found that, “teachers greatly influence their students’ academic achievement because they interact with the students in the classroom, assign grades, and refer the students to different school tracks” (p.2).

It is ironic that White teachers feel this way because in most cases Black students and people feel uncomfortable throughout society as a whole because they are living in a White dominated world. Furthermore, I believe that many White teachers do not attempt to authentically build relationships with their Black students because White teachers are used to doing things their way, the correct way, which really meets how White people do things. Greene, Way, and Pahl (2006) defined racial/ethnic discrimination as, “unfair, differential treatment on the basis of race or ethnicity” (p. 218). There is no way to sugar coat it, Black students in schools with a predominately White teaching staff are mistreated based on race. When White teachers bring differential treatment in building

relationships with their Black students it makes complete sense on why students would not trust their teachers.

Race should not play a factor in schools but sadly it does especially in a White dominated educational system. It is almost impossible to build a relationship based on trust when teachers are already not making an effort to create a positive experience with their Black students whether it is through an unspoken or blatant form of discrimination. Payne (2008), reviewing literature relevant to African American trust of others in general and of educators specifically (e.g., Ferguson 2006; Taylor et al. 2007; Ruck et al. 2008), argues that “student trust in schools can be constrained in two ways: via limited access to educational resources and via disproportionate experiences of negative treatment” (p.113). This type of limited access grows larger based on the racial differences of teachers and students, especially White teachers and Black students.

### **White Privilege and White Racial Identity Development**

One of the most significant barriers to trust between White teachers and Black students is the notion of White privilege. It is well documented that most teachers are White and make up the majority of teaching faculty across the country bringing with them their own set of norms and values. Not only are White teachers bringing their own set of norms and values they are bringing something that is not as apparent; White privilege. White privilege is the invisible benefit that each and every White person brings with them and in this case schools. Many scholars define White privilege as, “historic structural benefits resulting in psychological advantages that create different lived experiences for Whites and minoritized populations” (Bennett, 2012). The biggest

problem with White privilege is that many White people either do not know it exists or they refused to accept that it is an actual thing.

Moreover, White privilege is especially problematic for Black students who have White teachers. It is widely known that White teachers receive less preparation when it comes to being ready to teach racially diverse classrooms. Similarly, those White teachers who receive adequate teacher preparation training still need to confront their White privilege in order to employ culturally relevant teaching strategies with fidelity. According to Lawrence and Tatum (1999), while “White teachers have more positive feelings about people of color after participating in multicultural courses. It seems that few of these programs have had the ability to influence either prospective or current teachers’ views about themselves as racial beings or to alter existing teaching practices” (p. 45). In addition, White privilege clouds White teacher’s judgment about the efforts Black students are pulling into school based on their own set of White norms. In other words, White teachers blame Black students for the lack of success when White privilege has systematically created large inequalities within the school system.

One of the major impediments to building trust between White teachers and Black students is the notion of White Racial Identity Development (WRID). White teachers make up the majority of U.S. public school teachers and not only are they bringing their Whiteness to schools, but also their White privilege. Furthermore, most White teachers are not aware of the privileges they possess as White individuals and continue to perpetuate White superiority and power within the structure of the school system. Many of the racist acts are not explicit or overt forms of what many White people would

characterize as racism, however, these acts still reinforce the dominant White norms and values of mainstream society.

The biggest problem with White teachers is the inability to recognize their White identity or acknowledge how their Whiteness benefits them throughout life. So, the question is how do White teachers build trust with their Black students if they continue to claim that they do not see color including the one that they were born with? Luckily there have been many scholars who have written about this phenomenon. White teachers and White people in general do not identify with a particular race in the most fundamental of ways. In other words, White people do not view themselves as racialized or being part of a racialized society, which is something more reserved for the “other.” The “other” in this particular situation is any race or person that is non-White and does not reflect the so called mainstream society. For example, White people often do not realize that they are excluding themselves from the racial discussion because it does not affect them negatively and that they benefit from the systematic racism that has permeated U.S. society. Schools across America function as a microcosm of mainstream U.S. society where White people create the rules and laws that allow an uneven distribution of power that is seldom recognized by White educators.

One of the leading researchers in the field of WRID, Dr. Helms theorized this phenomenon of WRID through six different statuses that White people experience. Helm’s model consists of two distinct phases for each set of statuses. The first phase includes contact, disintegration, and reintegration while the second phase contains pseudo-independence, immersion-emersion, and autonomy. White people can be in individual statuses or multiple statuses at the same time. In addition to Helm’s model for

WRID, Siegel and Carter (2014) studied the six statuses and assigned emotions to the varying degrees of statuses White people were entering or exiting. Siegel and Carter's article *Emotions and White Racial Identity Status Issues* stated that, "racial situations can make White counselors and clients emotionally sensitive and that sophisticated White racial identity functioning can make one less prone to feeling fearful within race-related scenarios" (p.230). When White teachers are not able or willing to become aware of White identity statuses it is really difficult to cultivate trust with their Black students.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching practices are an excellent way for teachers to connect with students and provide them with the learning they need. It is not widely known, however, that most well intentioned White teachers cannot deliver culturally relevant teaching strategies and information that would illicit trust amongst their Black students. According to Ladson-Billings (2009) culturally relevant teaching is, "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 46). Additionally, Ladson-Billings (1995a) explained that culturally relevant teaching rests on three criteria or propositions: "(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). White teachers need to understand that culturally relevant teaching is based on student centered learning where the context of that learning is rooted in the culture of the student. White teachers must reshape the curriculum and act as facilitators for culturally relevant teaching to have a positive impact. White teachers need to continue to hold

positive perspectives of their students and families by not allowing racial stereotypes and discrimination to enter their minds. Lastly, for culturally relevant teaching to be truly effective White teachers must uphold high expectations for their Black students and communicate them clearly.

However, in recent years culturally relevant teaching has been a buzzword in education, but White teachers who teach a majority of Black students have seldom utilized culturally relevant teaching strategies for their students. When White teachers use culturally responsive teaching practices with their Black students, it helps to build positive and sustaining relationships. Also, teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching strategies showed a desire to help every student succeed. In the article, But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that teachers, "saw themselves as a part of the community and teaching as a way to give back to the community" (p. 163). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings found that creating a bond with all students led to teachers encouraging the "students to learn collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for each other's learning" (p. 163). Similarly, in Bryd's (2016) article Does Culturally Relevant Teaching Work? An Examination From Student Perspectives found that, "when teachers use real-life examples and try to connect to the interests of the students in the classroom, students are more engaged and feel more connected to their schools" (p.6). With culturally relevant teaching educators are adapting to the learning styles and communication methods of their students. In this case White teachers are making an effort to understand and provide their Black students with the appropriate education that they deserve.

Culturally relevant teachers are at the forefront of developing caring and trusting relationships where students can learn in classrooms authentically as themselves. Howard (2001) conducted a qualitative study that sought to assess elementary African American students' perceptions of culturally relevant teachers. Howard found that, “students made several references to being more comfortable with their teachers through their methods of communication, modes of interaction, and overall cultural knowledge” (p. 145). Based on the data of Howard’s study three suggestions became evident for teachers of African American students should focus upon: developing caring relationships, establishing community, and engaging classroom environments. There was significant evidence that the students’ opinions of their teachers’ culturally relevant pedagogy practices suggested that, “the primary keys to helping African American students have an equitable opportunity for school success is teachers’ understanding of various cultural and learning characteristics they bring to the classroom” (p.147). The ability of White teachers to come to terms with how their Whiteness affects their general teaching practices definitely plays a vital role in determining the education Black students receive. It is up to White teachers to understand how to learn about other cultures especially the students that they teach and make a point to adapt to their learning styles in order to help them become successful.

### **Summary**

Trust plays a huge role in the development of positive relationships between White teachers and their Black students. Relational trust can be a valuable factor in establishing a classroom culture that respects the individuals involved and breaks down barriers of discrimination. As a result, by establishing trusting relationships White

teachers can truly impact their Black students positively. Research has shown that when trust levels are high between teachers and students, both parties benefit, increasing the likelihood for Black students to have a more fruitful school experience.

In order for schools to adopt a more culturally responsive environment for their Black students it is imperative for White teachers to confront what it means to be “White.” White teachers must understand how implicit bias, racial discrimination, White privilege, stereotype threat, and identity development contribute to strengthening the foundation of systemic racism within schools. If White teachers are unwilling to reflect upon these inevitable truths that continue to suffocate the growth of their Black students, they will never form authentic trusting relationships that help Black students learn the best.

The review of literature shows that trust and reflecting upon what it means to be White affects how White teachers start to approach their teaching strategies to positively support Black students. Pre-service teaching programs should start to institute a rigorous curriculum that infuses culturally responsive and multicultural education courses. This research study will focus on authentic trust building relationships between White teachers and Black students to understand how White teachers can re-shape their teaching practices and philosophies.

The study fits in with the existing literature by examining how race plays a factor in developing trust through meaningful relationships. On some level White teachers must confront their own White identities in order to admit to advantages of power and influence over non-dominant racial groups. Without this admission of advantage it will be difficult for White teachers to adapt and truly commit to a teaching style that promotes

trust with their Black students. For example, are White teachers actively seeking out strategies to impact Black student learning like culturally relevant teaching and understanding the ways in which they might be perpetuating stereotypes and implicit bias. The study will also gather the perspectives of the Black middle school adolescents by understanding how trust manifests itself through the particular teaching style and relationships with their White teachers. Furthermore, the study will gain insight by investigating the adolescent stage of development along with the overall Black student experience, especially in schools where the majority of teachers are White. Lastly, identifying the perspectives of White teachers and Black students will be explored to see if their perspectives match up with the work and interactions being displayed in the classroom.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### **Overview**

The premise of this study is to examine the relationship between teacher and student as it specifically relates to trust. Not only is this study about trust and the teacher-student relationship, but how race plays a factor in earning trust from students. The study investigated how White teachers build trust with their Black students ranging from 11-14 years old, taught in a public middle school setting. A holistic case study was used to conduct student focus groups and teacher interviews. Interview and focus group protocols were employed to gain insight from White teachers and Black students in order to receive both perspectives of trust within the classroom.

The main research question is “How do White teachers build trust with their Black students?” The research questions in this study are:

- What are the behaviors and actions that White teachers exhibit to earn trust with their Black students?
- How does trust impact the teacher-student relationship between White teachers and Black students?

#### **Research Design**

The holistic case study approach is a research framework that collects information from a variety of individuals. The elements of the holistic case study approach are a combination of the study’s design, implementation, and analysis contained within the study itself. Holistic case study has several components involved which can make it

difficult for the researcher to develop a trustworthy summary of the case. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of a holistic case study approach is the idea of communicating a general context and for that context to be meaningful. According to the Encyclopedia of Case Study Research, “context can include the physical, social, cultural, symbolic, and psychological environments of the case study” (p. 441). Therefore, depending on the context that is being examined, context could have different definitions and parameters set into place. William James is largely credited with the idea of the holistic case study approach. In *Principles of Psychology*, James’ (1890) suggested that, “the notion that an object of consciousness gains its meaning from its embeddedness in the context from which it emerges” (p.442). In other words, holistic case study is gaining meaning from the surroundings of the case. The philosopher Husserl (2001) in *The Shorter Logical Investigations* explained the idea that a, “phenomenon is meaningful only by understanding the web of interconnections from which it arises” (p. 442). For a holistic case study to be truly meaningful, the context of the case should portray how the aspects of case are related. Holistic case study is all about viewing the larger whole of the case.

To truly understand the holistic case study approach, the idea of holism must be discussed. Holism, as a principle seeks to understand the entire context of the situation. Holism as a philosophy is concerned with the whole rather than the individual parts. To fully understand the phenomenon in question the broader approach is imperative under the guise of holism. As Heidegger points out in *Being and Time* (1962), to make things meaningful by trying to understand their contexts, “in the realm of case study approaches, holism is an interpretive standpoint of the researcher” (p. 442). Thus, the researcher is in

charge of not only the purpose of the study but terms of reference. It is essential for the researcher to establish the big picture of the case and what elements are involved in that case.

One of the most important ideas of the holistic case study is the single case study. If the case study's purpose is to develop theory then the selection of the case must be holistic in nature. Also, in a single case holistic case study approach the researcher must make a decision as to which case can represent a broader set of cases. A holistic single case study design incorporates all of the phenomenon that emerges from the study itself. The design of the single case study must function with all aspects to see how the interactions either support or impede the context as a whole. One of the major challenges in the holistic single case study design is to comprehend the single unit of the case that comes to the forefront based on the interconnectedness of the diverse aspects contained within the case. In addition, communicating a holistic case study design can be challenging.

A major roadblock in communication is the understanding of the researcher, in most cases the understanding might be partial, limited, or still developing. Throughout the holistic single case study approach, results may not reveal a truth but mere interpretations of the case. Those interpretations are not always considered equal in value because researcher may not be able to fully articulate the findings. On the other hand, for holistic case study researchers can display how their own interpretation developed and express why it is important to take note to this interpretation.

For most holistic case study researchers there is an emphasis on conducting quality field work. Field work consists of being out in the "field" or the environment in

which the researcher is studying. Within the field not only is the research concerned with the environment the study is taking place, but also the individuals, structures, and organizational policies that make up the setting as a whole or in other words the interconnected pieces of the group. In holistic case study approaches, field work along with field notes are crucial parts of making clear as to what the researchers believe they know. According to the Encyclopedia of Case Study Research field notes are the, “act of recording one’s research data as well as the beginning of communicating one’s research findings with others” (p. 396). In the holistic case study approach field notes are an important source of data and case study researchers rely heavily upon them. Field notes are unique in a sense because they provide a vivid description of the event and record that event at a particular time and place. Furthermore, that piece of recorded information can be reviewed by the case study researcher at a later date in order to make connections between other pieces of data and information. It is important to note that taking quality field notes does not happen without a direct plan and focus.

Before creating field notes researchers must understand the different forms and ideas associated with the task of taking field notes. As stated in the Encyclopedia of Case Study Research, “the case study providing a template for thought, learning, and action, studying various methods of taking field notes can provide a menu of options for the researcher standing in a field site with an empty notebook” (p. 398). However, in some cases case study researchers may develop a system of taking field notes through a type of trial and error of being in the field recording events. As a system of conducting field notes emerges it is important for researchers to create a data base for their collection of data. Using this collection of data becomes a valuable resource for the holistic case study

researcher because they are able to communicate meaningful and rich description of the context in which the case is taking place. All in all, well conducted field notes are an integral part of holistic case study researchers looking to highlight the event and the interconnected pieces of the case itself.

There are some distinct advantages and disadvantages of conducting a qualitative holistic case study approach. One of the most important advantages of conducting a case study is the thick and rich description of the case itself. By collecting data through interview and focus groups it allows the researcher to gain valuable insight into the participants' perspective. Using semi-structured interviews gives the researcher the ability to ask follow up questions that evoke elaboration of the participants' experiences. Qualitative studies also use smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies thus making it useful in understanding the phenomenon that is being investigated. In this study to understand how White teachers build trust with their Black students, using a case study permits the research to take place at one location with relatively low numbers of participants.

Although there are many advantages to conducting a qualitative case study, there are some inherent disadvantages. A major disadvantage of qualitative case studies is the subjectivity based on the feelings of the researcher. The researcher's feelings can influence bias by interpreting the data to fit their own opinions of the phenomenon they are studying and not describing the participant's point of view. Another limitation to case study research is the sheer volume of data that a researcher collects. In order to complete an in-depth analysis of the data researchers must involve themselves in a time intensive process with coding and identifying themes. To conduct a successful case study

researchers need a variety of skills. One of those skills is the ability of the researcher to ask the correct questions and draw out the attitudes, emotions, and perspectives of the participants. Similarly, if a researcher is lacking in this skill they will be hard pressed to gain any valuable data to analyze making it difficult to provide rich descriptions of the participants and the setting. Lastly, an important disadvantage to conducting a case study is the lack of generalizability where the results cannot translate to a broader population.

### **Researcher Role**

I am a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, teaching English Language Arts and Social Studies. As a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, teaching in a school district that is majority White, the notion of culturally relevant teaching for me as a White teacher seems vastly important. However, this notion has greatly increased over the past few years especially after the racial unrest of events like the Black Lives Matter movement, George Floyd's death, and countless other racial injustices. In addition, as a PhD. student, I have read numerous articles on systemic racism mainly in schools, but also in other aspects of our society.

A recent experience, I have participated in my district's school improvement team where the team read and studied the book *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo (2018). Throughout the year at each monthly school improvement team meeting we discussed different chapters of *White Fragility*. In those meetings the overall consensus from many of the White teachers present who became defensive and felt attacked by DiAngelo's take on what happens when White people are confronted by their White Privilege and power. As a researcher and advocate of culturally relevant teaching, my experience looked much different than most of the teachers that made up the school improvement team. It was difficult to understand how my experiences have shifted over the years from a colorblind

educator to viewing my colleagues in that stage of understanding when it comes to race within schools. In this research it might be challenging to separate my own experiences from the teachers that are participating in my study. There is potential for me to want the teacher participants to understand that racism is in fact systemic and try to lead them to my beliefs based on the interview questions I ask.

Furthermore, based on the informal conversations I have had with colleagues who are overwhelmingly White, most believe they are doing a great job teaching all students including their Black students. In those conversations most White teachers cannot identify how and what they do to justify why they believe they do a great job teaching their Black students. In my estimation, as a researcher I feel I might get some “scripted” answers that will avoid race and try to focus on treating “all” learners the same way. As I go through the various stages of understanding my Whiteness I will most likely want teachers interviewed in my study to go through a similar transformation. However, a transformation is highly unlikely based on my experiences of talking about race in the classroom with the White teachers in the district I work in. Overall, the lack of authentic answers during the interviews could prove to reinforce my experiences of White teachers who continue to avoid racial discussions in education.

### **Setting**

In all forms of my proposed case study method, the case itself centers on a public school in a Midwestern state. The school district has nearly 4,500 students spread across three elementary schools (Pre-K to 5th grade), one middle school (6-8 grades), one high school (9-12 grades). The school district also has an Alternative Education Center (ages 16-19 years old), a Virtual Academy (grades 5-12) and a unique school for students who

need an alternative to the traditional academic setting, (grades 3 to 12). The district consists of over 450 staff members, including 250 teachers and 11 building administrators. The school, located in a suburban community near a major Midwestern city, has approximately 30,000 residents. Of those 30,000 residents the number of public students living in the district totals about 3,500. The total number of enrollment for students in the fall 2019 was approximately 4,400 resulting from a gain of more than 2,600 non-resident students. The biggest group of non-resident students 2,220 live in a major urban city that borders the suburban school district.

For the purpose of this case study, I will be focusing on the middle school in this district made up of roughly 800 students in grades 6-8. At each of those grade levels the student population is greater than 96% African American. Moreover, the percentage of economically disadvantaged African American students is very high. In both the student populations of 6th and 7th grade, the total percentage of economically disadvantaged students in both grade levels exceeds 80% with 6th grade at 87% while 7th grade is at 82%. The 8th grade African American student population has a slightly lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students at 74%.

The racial demographics of the full time teaching staff are overwhelmingly White. In this middle school White teachers make up 96% of the total number of full time teaching staff while African American full time teachers make up the remaining 4%. I targeted this particular school district and middle school based on the racial composition of both students and teachers. Since there is a high percentage of White teachers and a high percentage of African American students the research question of how White teachers build trust with their Black students is very fitting. For example, most African

American students would have at least one if not more White teachers throughout the school day and multiple interactions with those White teachers.

### **Participants**

Students who are in grades 6-8 participated in a focus group. Three students participated in a focus group, made up of males and females. The focus group of students allowed me to get a sense of the students' attitudes, opinions, insights, and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon within the social context.

The five White middle school teachers who have completed at least 3 years of teaching in the current school district. Furthermore, the teaching cohort contains three female teachers and two male teachers who teach different grade levels and subject areas.

### **Data Sources**

The next step in my case study design was to determine the data collection method. Yin (2003) states that, "data for case studies can come from many sources of evidence. Six important ones are discussed in this chapter: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts." Out of the six different data collection sources I used interviews as they are great way to collect important information related to this study. Furthermore, the interview process was the primary data collection during my case study. Similarly, my goal for the interview was to maintain two jobs. According to Yin (2003), those two jobs are, "(a) to follow your own line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and (b) to ask your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of

your line of inquiry”. Focusing on these two goals allowed me to get to the root of “how” White teachers build trust with their Black students.

To be more specific, I conducted several interviews with White teachers who teach a majority of Black children. Additionally, I used a semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured interviews helped me create a free flowing type of conversation where I will be using a set of questions. However, there are opportunities to have the interviewee elaborate on some of their answers. In Barriball’s (1994) article Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper stated that semi-structured interviews are, “well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (p. 330). Using semi-structured interviews enhanced the overall points of view of each interviewee making it easier to get a sense of their authentic experiences. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. During the interviews no excessive note was taking place and exact words were studied to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions.

The teacher interview protocol was developed to elicit authentic teacher responses to a set of twelve questions. The interview protocol was carefully constructed by thinking about trust within schools especially between White teachers and Black students. The initial 6 questions asked teachers about how they build relationships with students and their overall perspective about those teacher-student relationships. Questions 7 and 8 explicitly ask teachers about trust and the loss of trust, which is the main component of the study and specific to the research question. The last set of questions focused on how race plays a factor in U.S. schools. The main objective of these questions was to gain an

understanding of how White teachers grapple with racial topics within their classrooms and also on a personal level.

For the pilot of the interview questions, I enlisted the help of my current teaching partner. In order to test the questions, I conducted the interview process as close to the “real” thing as possible. We met in a neutral part of the school building, library or conference room. In addition, I set aside 45 minutes of time for the interview process. During this interview session I recorded the interview so that I could review the questions and answers later. Next, I practiced the questions to figure out the most appropriate follow up questions to ask. Lastly, based on the answers to the interview questions I might revise, modify, or change certain questions.

One of the pieces of information I gathered while conducting interviews was whether or not teachers value the teacher-student relationships and, if teachers valued relationships with students, are they using a variety of different techniques to achieve this. For example, if teachers believe that teacher-student relationships are valuable do they go out of their way to use strategies to build and maintain them or do they simply just see value in those relationships. Also, through the teacher interview process I wanted to know teachers' views on trust and how relevant it is in their teaching. Asking teachers questions about trust was a chance to understand if trust plays a vital role building successful relationships with students especially their Black students. The last pieces of information gathered are the thoughts that teachers have about racial tension within society, in schools, and how they have approached talking about these topics with their students. Overall, the interviews were a opportunity to learn how trust acts as an agent to building positive and strong relationships between teachers and students.

Next, I conducted a focus group with students. According to Paul Lavrakas (2008) in the Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods a focus group is defined as, “a qualitative research method in which a trained moderator conducts a collective interview of typically six to eight participants from similar backgrounds, similar demographic characteristics, or both” (p.146). In “Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences,” Berg (1995) stated that, “focus groups help to capture those experiences that cannot be meaningfully expressed in numbers” (p. 3). The purpose of the focus group was to gain valuable beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of the student participants. Using a focus group helped add more specific information that otherwise might not be given in a different setting. Moreover, the student participants in the focus group shared a unique cultural context that provided a significant piece of data for the study. According to Glitz (1998), focus groups accomplish two things, “first is that individuals can provide a rich source of information about a topic. The second is that the collective and individual responses encouraged by the focus group setting will generate material that differs from other methods” (p.22). In addition, using a focus group gave students a voice, crucial to the case study. Another reason for using a student focus group was to complement the data collected in interviews to elicit a better overall understanding of the topic.

The focus group protocol was developed to gain the perspectives of students who attend the school and have interactions with teachers. The focus group protocol started with an explanation of the purpose of conducting this focus group. Students that are participating in the focus group they had the opportunity to ask questions and clear up anything they did not understand before questions begin. The overall theme of the focus group protocol was understanding the experiences that students have had throughout their

school years. For the focus group protocol there was a set of 7 questions. Of those 7 questions, 2 questions had specific follow up questions included to help guide the student participants to elaborate on their answers. As the focus group protocol questions progressed to the last question, students identified teachers who they trust and do not trust. This type of structuring of the questions was purposeful and intended to create a list of teachers to either interview, observe in the classroom, or both.

I tested the focus group protocol by conducting a pilot with middle school students. I contacted the middle school principal inquiring if there were any students who would like to participate in the pilot focus group. Once the principal identified students I reached out to their parents via email explaining that I would like their children to answer some questions regarding their experiences in school with teachers. After permission was granted by parents, I conducted the pilot focus group at the middle school. I selected a neutral location preferably the library or conference room to establish an informal environment to make students feel comfortable and willing to give honest answers to the questions. Similar to the interview protocol, I conducted the focus group as close to the real thing as possible to ensure that the questions were the most appropriate to ask. I used the pilot focus group to revise, modify, or change any questions.

I learned from the students' perspective what teachers they trust and do not trust. Also, I learned the types of interactions they have had with White teachers in particular. Based on those interactions, I explored what types of experiences students were having, positive or negative and how students defined trust, and what their initial thoughts or examples that come to mind. Lastly, I learned what teachers in the school did a good job of building trust with students in the hopes of understanding how they achieved this. By

understanding which teachers were good at building trust with their students I could strengthen other data by observing classrooms and interviewing teachers.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study had a multiple step approach for data collection procedures. To begin, an email was sent to prospective teacher participants. In the email, a summary of the study was presented and the specific requirements for the teacher participants outlined. The email gave particular details about the time commitment for each teacher participant.

The ideal mode of interviews was face-to-face, the world experienced a global pandemic affecting many things, one of those things being in-person schooling for children. I conducted on-line interviews via Zoom, Google Meet, or another web based video conferencing application.

Data were collected by interviewing each teacher via virtual Zoom meetings. Since the interviews were conducted on-line through a virtual format, each teacher interview was recorded for accuracy and then transcribed later to capture the conversation in detail. The interview protocol, a set of 10 pre-planned and scripted questions were asked to teacher participants to evoke the strategies they use in their classroom to build trust with their Black students. Before I asked the interview questions I expressed to the teacher participants that the questions did not have a correct answer. Rather, I was interested in hearing their authentic descriptions of what things they do in their classrooms to build trust.

After the conclusion of the interview, I let the teacher participants know that I would be in contact with them via email to ask if they had any reflections after the

interview. The total time for each teacher interview was between 45-90 minutes. After careful transcription of the interviews I sent a final email to clarify any information I previously did not understand.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

This case study is rooted in the social interactions of teachers and students. More specifically the overall goal of the case study was to understand how White teachers build trust with their Black students within a classroom setting. During the data analysis process I looked critically at each individual case. Furthermore, I combed through the transcripts to locate the overall experience of teachers and students. Yin (2003) suggested that, “data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 109). One of the most essential aspects for this study was to link the data back to the research question by using a coding strategy. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the codes and coding technique utilizes the case oriented approach strategy referred to as ‘partial ordered displays’ to analyze the case study data (p. 57). For this case study it was beneficial to use both descriptions and themes based on the thoughts of the participants.

Throughout the case study data collection I provided descriptions of the teachers and students. To make the participants' experience shine through. Also, descriptions will be valuable in order to understand how White teachers built trust with their Black students. For example, it was useful to describe the interactions between teachers and students but also the teachers and students themselves. By providing thick descriptions of the participants developed an understanding as to how teachers created relationships

within the classroom. Another useful strategy used during data collection was the development of themes. Based on the data from interviews and focus groups providing a genuine representation of how and why teachers and students acted in certain ways in the classroom and observing the theme(s) that presented itself the most when transcribing the data. It was of particular important to do so in order to represent each participant's point of view to better understand how they used trust in relationships.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The primary focus for this study was, “How do White teachers build trust with their Black students?” Trust in the school setting for teachers and students requires the process of understanding not only adolescents, but their cultural perspective. The teachers’ collective response to building trust is intended to assist students in achieving success within school. The aim of this study was to explore the motivations and intentions of White teachers that support trust building with their students and identifying specific strategies they used to adapt to their Black students.

#### **Teacher Narratives**

The five White middle school teachers that participated in this study were very unique and offered some distinct perspectives. Their views, personal opinions, experiences, and approach to teaching was extremely interesting because each of the following teacher narratives was an opportunity to capture their views of the teacher-student relationship, the impact of trust in building relationships with students, perceptions of racial tension within the school and an overall sense of their personalities.

#### ***Ms. Lacey***

To start the interview Ms. Lacey (pseudonym) was somewhat apprehensive about the scope and topic of the study although she read and signed the consent form prior to answering questions. As the researcher, I noted there was a sense of discomfort with Ms. Lacey because she mentioned “*I didn’t realize that we were going to be talking about race, I thought this was an interview with middle school teachers, but okay.*” Ms. Lacey

seemed to be caught off guard by the topic of the study, however but agreed to participate in the interview.

Ms. Lacy expressed that one of the best things you could do with students was to build relationships. One of the things Ms. Lacey expressed as a middle school teacher to build relationships was to stand outside her classroom door to connect with students that were walking by during passing time. In doing so, she described both connecting with students she has in her classes, but is also connecting with students who in the school that she might not have direct contact with.

Within the classroom Ms. Lacey believed that it was important to share some things about herself with students and felt it was important to model how to share effectively with her students. Ms. Lacey often referred to her students as family and said that she regularly held “family” circles to give students the opportunity to share anything that may be going on in their lives. In the classroom Ms. Lacey detailed communicating respect through large amounts of teacher modeling. Ms. Lacey explained that she subscribed to the old phrase, “*treat others as you would want to be treated.*”

Additionally, Ms. Lacey described herself as a high energy teacher who liked to bring lots of passion when teaching students. One of the ways Ms. Lacey motivated her students was to keep learning moving forward as long as students could prove that they understood the concepts so the learning material did not get stale. Along those same lines, for students who needed assistance with their assignments Ms. Lacey offered small group help mainly for those who needed it, but really for anyone who wanted to work with their peers or her.

As an English/Language Arts (ELA) teacher Ms. Lacey stated doing a variety of things within her classroom brought relevancy to her students. Regardless of what professions students planned on seeking when they get older, Ms. Lacey described making it abundantly clear to students that they were going to need specific writing skills for the profession of their choice. Furthermore, when books and topics did not seem to grab the interest of students, she reported switching out the material using the ELA program to facilitate those changes.

Ms. Lacey did not see any racial tension throughout the school or classroom. Furthermore, she did not notice certain races being disciplined more than others and felt that the lack of support staff had negatively impacted discipline referrals.

***Mr. Briggs***

By trade Mr. Briggs (pseudonym) taught 7th and 8th grade English/Language Arts (ELA), and he described himself as a cool, calm, and collected teacher. For most of the interview Mr. Briggs answered each question in a cool, calm, and collected manner. Mr. Briggs, a veteran teacher with 24 years of experience, started off in an elementary school, but soon transitioned to middle school where a majority of his teaching experience has been. After answering several questions Mr. Briggs apologized for not answering the questions correctly or having a great answer. As the interview went on Mr. Briggs increasingly became more comfortable with the interview protocol, which led to great insights about building trust with students.

Mr. Briggs believed that the teacher-student relationship was the most important factor to a successful classroom. In addition, Mr. Briggs believed relationships with students were ongoing, there was no cruise control to set, it took work. As an ELA

teacher, Mr. Briggs proclaimed to learn about his students through their writing. Writing, specifically journals, personal narratives, and poetry opened up a line of communication that was not there in other subjects.

Respect was a big part of Mr. Briggs classroom. For the first couple weeks he revealed he was pretty “hardcore” when it came to the procedures and routines being established. Mr. Briggs described motivating students by using high interest books that touched on topics such as the Holocaust and apocalyptic Science Fiction novels. Additionally, Mr. Briggs announced stressing the value of education by explaining the set of skills students needed to have based on the career they would like to pursue.

Mr. Briggs did not observe racial tension in the classroom or school. Mr. Briggs affirmed that he does not want to say that all the students of color were fine, but it seemed that the kids got along. Mr. Briggs did not necessarily bring up any societal issues that were racial charged, but provided an open forum for students to discuss these topics if they wanted to talk about them. When I asked Mr. Briggs how he felt about the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data indicating that Black students are receiving more discipline referrals than any other students he said he was not shocked, but would have to look at the statistics. Mr. Briggs reaffirmed that discipline statistics rarely came back to teachers and the way they built relationships with students. Mr. Briggs concluded the interview with the thought of stepping out of his comfort zone and being more of a leader in order to help teachers with building relationships with students.

### ***Mr. Stanley***

Mr. Stanley (pseudonym) was a veteran middle school teacher who had taught 24 years in the current district. Mr. Stanley mainly has taught Social Studies, but also has

had some experience teaching Science. In addition, Mr. Stanley has spent most of his career teaching 6th graders. Mr. Stanley was a dedicated teacher who also coached track and spent his lunch hour monitoring students in the cafeteria. Mr. Stanley believes that getting to know the students was a very important aspect of the job because the teacher-student relationship was constantly changing. Mr. Stanley was quick to strike up conversations with students in the hallway or lunch room because it was easier to find out what their life was like when they were not sitting in the classroom. In Mr. Stanley's mind, respect in the classroom boiled down to one phrase, "*you can't just say what's on your mind.*" He elaborated on this statement by saying you can't just say hurtful things to other people.

Mr. Stanley mentioned in recent years it had been increasingly difficult to motivate his students. He described motivating his students as his number one job, but also the hardest part of the job. Based on the multitude of distractions Mr. Stanley stated that it was very difficult to make teaching relevant for students. The approach he used is shocking them into getting interested. For example, as a Social Studies teacher there was a lesson about how women couldn't vote. He tried to get students to question why this once was and dig into the topic further.

Racial tension in the classroom is something Mr. Stanley did not see, however, he had heard the phrase, "because I'm Black statement" thrown around at him and other students. Throughout the school Mr. Stanley did not hear much about racial conflict at least not any recently. He believed that most kids wanted to hang out with each other and that, in his opinion, they did not really see color. The contributing factor to less racial conflict in Mr. Stanley's eyes was the increased number of Black teachers and

administrators. Mr. Stanley has heard the statistics that Black students, most notably Special Education Black students, were receiving more discipline referrals than their White counterparts. He knew that administration kept data on certain groups of students, but had never seen that data himself. Mr. Stanley really thought that the problem was the way their school was structured and the lack of support staff they have in the building. Mr. Stanley concluded the interview by reflecting upon ways to tackle the suspension issue and also address the increasing problem of absenteeism.

***Mrs. Schar***

Mrs. Schar (pseudonym) is a veteran middle school teacher who had over 20 years of experience. Of those 20 plus years, Mrs. Schar had taught Science in the same school district. Mrs. Schar was an active member within the school. Not only was Mrs. Schar a dedicated teacher, but also was the president of the teachers' union for the school district. She viewed the teaching profession as an important one and fought to keep the opportunities the teachers have. Mrs. Schar was a passionate teacher who also advocated for her students. She was outspoken when it came to changes that the school district should make, especially ones that support teachers and students. Lastly, Mrs. Schar continued to advocate for the teachers and students making sure they had the best experiences possible.

According to Mrs. Schar the teacher-student relationship was a complex one. She believes that on some level the student needed to like her, but just enough to want to talk to her about things. Mrs. Schar described her approach to respect in the classroom was to not act above the students in any way and approach things level headed.. Mrs. Schar quickly said, *"Let's not get it wrong, kids can't get away with crap and they cannot be*

*disrespectful.*” Mrs. Schar told me motivating students is a key part of the classroom experience. In the classroom students were in charge of their own learning. As a Science teacher Mrs. Schar talked about the curriculum, which was largely based on inquiry. Before starting each unit there was a driving question that the students had to answer after learning material throughout each lesson. She felt that the Science curriculum did a great job of making the learning material relevant for students. She explained that one of the topics focuses on the increased amount of thunderstorms and flooding throughout the midwest region of the United States.

Mrs. Schar made it abundantly clear that she did not necessarily stress the value of education but rather stressed the value of learning. Mrs. Schar made it known that she wanted students to understand and comprehend the material so she proceeded the chance for a re-do, re-write, and re-tests.

Within the classroom Mrs. Schar had experienced racial tension. Her initial reaction was that it was there and it was very disappointing. Also, Mrs. Schar felt that well intended White teachers reacted to racial tension, but not correctly. Furthermore, she was frustrated at the way things are handled by the district and stated it was handled “by the book.”

Lastly, Mrs. Schar was not surprised when presented with the Civil Rights Data Collection report that Black students received more discipline referrals and suspensions than any other group of students. Learning about this report reminded Mrs. Schar of a presentation on cultural competence where many of her fellow teachers believed that discipline data relied heavily on socio-economic data. However, the presenter had enlightened the group by sharing that even in affluent communities Black students

received more discipline referrals, which was eye opening for some. Mrs. Schar noted that she hated suspensions and believed restorative practices should be taking place. With restorative practices she described that the administrators would actually get at the problem, not just treat the behavior.

***Mrs. Ponte***

Mrs. Ponte (pseudonym) was a very dedicated middle school Math teacher who taught 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. She was a veteran teacher who had over 20 years of experience in the same middle school. Mrs. Ponte's experience within this school district was a unique one because not only was a current Math teacher, but she also spent her adolescent years roaming these same hallways as a student. Moreover, Mrs. Ponte was a self proclaimed no-nonsense teacher who believed that being strict and holding your students accountable meant that you cared about your students. Often referred to as the "mean" teacher for the amount of work students are assigned during class, however, Mrs. Ponte shrugged that label off citing the idea of "*I'm here to teach and they are here to learn.*" Mrs. Ponte thought that the teacher-student relationship is a complicated one. She described the relationship as more of a "dance" where there was a constant building of the relationship, really no end point. Similarly Mrs. Ponte mentioned that every child was different and there was no template for building these types of relationships. Also, she felt that as the teacher she cannot only be seen as the master of content, you had to be much more than that to connect with kids.

Mrs. Ponte was a teacher who described communicating respect through modeling that behavior. She disclosed information about how she created a classroom environment where students treat the teacher with manners. Motivating students had

become increasingly difficult these past couple of years and Mrs. Ponte pointed to two things, Covid and having a new principal. She described the new principal as someone who did not know how to run a school and contributed to low morale amongst the staff because of poor leadership. Mrs. Ponte felt that the overall lack of physical and emotional connections students missed when the Covid shutdown was taking place had hindered their excitement about learning.

Mrs. Ponte believed that students should understand the value of education and get rewarded for their achievements. She continued by saying that giving students the standards at the beginning of the school year was crucial because then they would know what it took to be successful.

Mrs. Ponte confirmed that the district was becoming more open to acknowledging racial tension and there had been a push for the kids to see more diversity in their teachers and administration. However, Mrs. Ponte expressed that she was a firm believer that jobs should be based on merit not simply race. Mrs. Ponte explained that she is very open in pointing out racial tension in the classroom and school, but had never been compelled to talk about recent societal events that have left Black people either injured or killed. Mrs. Ponte mentioned that she not only has not been compelled to discuss racial issues with her class, but hoped to never have to.

As the interview came to an end I pointed out that the Civil Rights Data Collection concluded that Black students are receiving more discipline referrals than any other racial demographic and wanted to know her thoughts. Mrs. Ponte agreed that this was happening, but does not know what to do and she is not in a position to do anything about it. She went on to say that discipline referrals have been a huge problem for the

school's special education population. She said administrators need to think outside the box to limit the amount of suspensions because most of the kids who are suspended don't need to be out of school. Mrs. Ponte reflects back to the initial statement about disproportionate referrals and says, "*the real problem is in the elementary schools, where they are focused on the kids' feelings instead of punishing the behavior so by the time they get to middle school they have no clue.*" From my perspective Mrs. Ponte is referring to the lack of discipline procedures the elementary schools have, which does not support the teachers once the students reach middle school. In the end, Mrs. Ponte revealed that the school needs more structure and a set of procedures that support learning.

## **Trust**

### **Students' Definition of Trust**

During the focus group the students' definition of trust varied, but were very similar. Student A (pseudonym) summed up the word trust as simply dependable. Student B (pseudonym) defined trust as somebody that was honest with you. Student B continued and said, "*that somebody is going to take a side whether you are right or wrong.*" Student B was saying that trust was someone who is not always going to take your side because they did not want to upset you, but someone who was brave enough to tell you the truth even though it might not be easy. Moreover, Student B explained that the picture that came to mind when he heard the word trust was a circle. He only trusted a few people, therefore the circle represented the people he trusted and you could enter the circle unless you were trusted. Student C (pseudonym) had a difficult time coming up with a definition of trust. In Student C's mind they referred to trust as more of a feeling that you could sense when you have someone's trust. As a group we decided to form a

common definition of trust to guide us throughout the remainder of the interview. The definition of trust they settled upon was trust was a feeling one gets when someone was dependable and honest with you no matter the circumstances.

### **Teachers' Definition of Trust**

Each teacher had their own unique definition of trust when asked during the interview process. Although each teacher's definition of trust differed, they were very similar in their responses. Ms. Lacey referred to trust as, "*going both ways and putting yourself out there.*" This quote demonstrated the idea of trust not being one sided and there were some vulnerabilities associated with earning trust with someone. She also expressed that, "*trust leads to respect and eventually to students trying in class.*" This quote conveyed the importance of Ms. Lacey getting buy-in from students and before that happened trust from students needs to be earned. Mr. Briggs had a similar definition of trust as Ms. Lacey where he stated, "*trust is someone having your back and trust equals respect.*" This quote suggested that Mr. Briggs' viewed the earning of trust with the outcome of respect inferred that once one was achieved so was the other. Throughout the school year Mr. Briggs described going a step further when building trust by incorporating themes that students could talk about and refer to. Mr. Briggs used the word camaraderie as a synonym for trust and make it a point for students to understand as a class we are all in it together.

Mr. Stanley, when asked about his definition of trust, immediately responded that, "*trust is earned.*" This quote points out that trust was something that took hard work and was not simply given. However, Mr. Stanley did mention that, "*in the beginning of the year he asks students to have blind faith in him.*" This quote encouraged students to trust

Mr. Stanley strictly because he was the teacher and not necessarily on his merit or actions. Mrs. Schar defined trust as, “*a feeling of support and you can go to that person for help.*” This quote suggested that trust was not only a term you could define, but a feeling someone got from a person who was willingly to help you no matter what. Also, she believed that, “*you have to be authentic or kids will totally know you’re not genuine.*” This quote expressed the idea that kids were incredibly in-tune to the behavior of adults and could literally sense when their teachers were not going to back up what they said. Mrs. Ponte equated trust with following through with what you say you are going to do. She went on to say, “*it is all about being accountable for me.*” This quote suggested that being trustworthy was backing up your words with actions and not making excuses for not being able to do something.

Each teacher had their own unique definition of trust that was very similar, however, there were some teachers whose definitions aligned with one another. Ms. Lacey and Mr. Briggs’ definitions of trust were closely related. Both teachers indicated the idea of respect being a result of trust. Furthermore, Ms. Lacey and Mr. Briggs expressed that trust involved sticking up for someone through actions and in return the other person would do the same thing if necessary.

Mrs. Schar and Mrs. Ponte’s definitions of trust had some common elements. Both of their definitions illuminated the concept of authenticity. Mrs. Schar uses trust as a tool to create relationships and a classroom environment of support. Mrs. Ponte viewed trust as accountability. Where these two teachers’ definitions of trust intersected was the way in which they communicated trust. Both Mrs. Schar and Mrs. Ponte prided themselves on being “real” with their students and were very genuine.

In contrast, Mr. Stanley's definition of trust did not overlap with the other teachers. He believed that trust was earned while simultaneously asking the students to have blind faith in him. From Mr. Stanley's perspective he was asking students to prove that they were trustworthy, however, he was not proving to the students that he could be trusted. Mr. Stanley's definition of trust seemed to be one sided, basically communicating I am the teacher, therefore I do not have to prove trust while you are the student thus you must prove you are trustworthy.

### **Mistrust**

In addition to building trust with students, each teacher has had incidents which they lost trust with particular students. Ms. Lacey and Mr. Briggs had minor incidents with students that questioned the students' trustworthiness. Ms. Lacey had lost some trust with particular students mainly because of inappropriate computer usage and being in the hallway longer than expected when students left for the restroom. Mr. Briggs recounted a time when a student who was not in his class stole something from his desk. There was a loss of trust that Mr. Briggs had with this student, however, he described it as, "more unnerving than anything else." The biggest issue Mr. Briggs had was the student was not in his class, therefore he could not repair trust with this student. Mr. Stanley did not mention a specific incident with losing trust with students in the classroom, however, stated, "overall, he doesn't trust kids because eventually they will lie although he doesn't want students to lie."

Mrs. Schar and Mrs. Ponte both had more intense loss of trust experiences with students that stemmed from building great relationships, but each had a negative event that had fractured the relationship. Mrs. Schar built a great relationship with a student

roughly 15 years ago, which negative during the Washington, D.C. trip for 8th graders. According to Mrs. Schar this particular student was blatantly disrespectful to her on the bus. This incident was a complete shock to Mrs. Schar because she thought they had a great relationship. Unfortunately, the relationship was never reconciled even when the student reached out multiple times in high school. Mrs. Schar wished she would have heard the student out to understand what was really going on, but never did and chalked it up to her own immaturity.

Mrs. Ponte was in a similar situation when she built up trust with a student who was having a challenging time getting accustomed to a new school. Overtime Mrs. Ponte described the student's behavior being so bad that it was not only detrimental to the student, but also to the other students. There were several times where the student begged Mrs. Ponte to trust that in fact he would do better. However, after multiple incidents Mrs. Ponte had to kick him out of her class. Like Mrs. Schar, Mrs. Ponte wished that she could have been more understanding with the student's situation. Mrs. Ponte described a time when she was driving after work and saw the student talking to an adult who appeared to be homeless at the bus stop. Mrs. Ponte explained, "this is the kid's reality, I couldn't imagine holding a conversation with an adult at a bus stop as a middle school student." Overall, each teacher held a specific definition of trust and related how the loss of trust changed the way they approached building relationships with their students.

The focus group interview of the students did not result in any information that discussed the loss of trust. Overall, the students did not think that it was important for teachers to build trust with their students. Also, the overwhelming sentiment was that the students did not really trust teachers. Student B stated that, "*you can build a relationship*

*with them and be cool, tell jokes, but as far as trusting them, no.*” This quote illustrated that teachers and students can build a relationship with one another, but the idea of building trust was something that involved deeper work.

### **Comparing Student and Teacher Definitions of Trust**

After analyzing the definitions of trust from both teacher and student perspectives, it became evident that there were some similarities and differences between the definitions. Where the students and the teachers came to an agreement about trust was the notion of a feeling of trust one gets when trust is achieved. Furthermore, the feeling of trust in the students’ perspective was one that could be clearly described, but from the teachers’ perspective trust was a feeling of support where that person would help you out. For example, Student C recalls a time where she trusted a teacher enough to go to him to discuss an incident with another student. In her words, *“he was more than a teacher. He knew me and my family because he was my sister’s coach, we were close, I’ve known him since 1st grade.”* This particular teacher had not only built a relationship with Student C, but developed a relationship with the entire family developing trust over the years. Another area where the students’ definition of trust overlapped with the teachers’ definition was the idea of accountability and being dependable. In essence the words accountable and dependable were very alike. Mrs. Ponte summed up the word accountability as doing what you said you were going to do.

Some teachers believed that establishing trust led to respect from the students and in turn the students worked hard for the teacher resulting in “earned” trust. The teachers described at length the strategies they used to build trust with their students, but never explained if or how they knew students trusted them. There was a lack of feedback from

students about trusting their teachers, which illustrated a lack of awareness of what really needed to be done for students to trust their teachers. To emphasize this point, Student B broke down trust as someone being honest with you and telling the truth no matter whether they agree or disagree with you. The teachers might feel as though they had built trust with their students, however, they did not seem to be giving the same amount of trust to their students.

### **Teacher-Student Relationship/Student-Teacher Relationship**

During the interview process all of the teachers' statements valued building strong relationships with their students. In many instances the teachers suggested that building relationships with students was the most important part of the job and you needed to build relationships for students to want to learn from you. Overall, the teachers described the teacher-student relationship as a continuum. In other words, the relationship was always changing and on-going; there was not a destination. Mrs. Ponte referred to building relationships with students as a "dance." Furthermore, Mrs. Ponte explained that, "there's no blueprint for building relationships and every kid is different." After analyzing the responses about building relationships with students four categories emerged from the teacher's answers: respect, motivation, value of education, and relevant lessons for students.

#### **Respect**

Ms. Lacey, Mrs. Schar, and Mrs. Ponte all felt that modeling respect was the best way to teach students. Mrs. Lacey believed that treating others the way you want to be treated was a large part of respect along with holding high expectations for students. Mrs. Schar modeled respect by the way she talked to students. She explicitly said, "I don't talk

down to students, I don't want to come off as if I am above them." Moreover, Mrs. Schar communicated respect by not tolerating disrespectful behavior. She was quick to stand up for students who were being disrespected and hoped that students respected her for doing what was right.

Mrs. Ponte also modeled respect by treating people with manners. Mrs. Ponte was a friendly teacher who built relationships, but, in her words, was still "old school" when it came to keeping the teacher-student dynamic professional. As a Math teacher, Mrs. Ponte showed respect by allowing students to make mistakes and openly asked students to correct her if she made any mistakes.

Mr. Stanley was similar in his thought process to Mrs. Schar. When it came to the notion of respect, Mr. Stanley liked to advocate for his students, especially if one or some of his students were being disrespected. He tried his best to make students aware of not saying what's on their mind and not saying hurtful things to each other. On the other hand, Mr. Briggs took a different approach to communicating respect in the classroom. In the beginning of the year Mr. Briggs was very strict and, as the classroom routines were established and the students settled in, he started to give the students a little bit more independence. Unlike the other teachers, Mr. Briggs used a classroom management system called CHAMPS to define the environment in the classroom. Using CHAMPS allowed students to understand the expectations before an activity in the classroom began and the students also knew the consequences associated with not following the expectations, which created fairness in the way students were treated.

The students viewed respect in the classroom similarly and differently than the teachers. Student C viewed respect with teachers as an experience that was worthwhile.

For example, she showed respect to some teachers by staying after class to help and clean up. She said, *“I like to stay after class in the room and help out.”* In my opinion Student C respected the teachers she helped out by paying it forward in return for the way the teachers treated her in class.

The students reported that they would like teachers to be more understanding of their situations. For example, Student B stated that, *“the teachers need to learn how to listen.”* Student B felt that teachers do not actually listen to their students, which created a one sided dynamic to the teacher-student relationship. He went on to explain that, *“just because you are the adult doesn’t mean you’re right.”* Student B was characterizing an unfair power dynamic between the child and adult where the teacher got the final say.

### **Motivation**

Motivating middle school students in the 21st century classroom has become a challenge. However, each teacher had their own unique approach to getting students excited about learning. Ms. Lacey thought that it was extremely important for the learning not to get stale. Also, she motivated the students by offering them assistance with whatever they were working on in order to keep them progressing throughout the learning material. Mr. Briggs fine tuned the curriculum to fit the students’ interests. Mr. Briggs periodically liked to get students’ input on topics they would like to learn about by sending student surveys for them to complete. Likewise, Mrs. Schar was able to choose high interest lessons that students liked to learn about and made sure her inquiry based lessons did not drag on for a long time. Mr. Stanley believed motivating students was his number one priority and the most difficult part of the job. He felt that motivation was intrinsic for students and rewards were not very effective for motivating students in the

long run. Mr. Stanley stated, “there are some kids no matter what I do they are motivated and then there’s other kids that no matter what I do are not motivated.” Mrs. Ponte held a similar view of motivating students. She expressed that motivating students had become increasingly difficult over the past few years, especially with Covid. She said, “I have always been bad at that, I don’t really have any strategies for motivating students.”

In the students’ eyes motivation was communicated through the teacher’s commitment to helping the students learn. Teachers who made a concerted effort to make learning fun got the attention of the students. For example, teachers who used humor or told jokes were much more likely to keep the students motivated. Student B was adamant that you could build a relationship with teachers through these strategies, however, he did not really think you could build trust with the same tactics. Furthermore, the students expressed that when teachers took the time to walk around the classroom and not just sit on their computers was specifically motivating. In most cases the students would not outright ask for help even if they did not know something, but were open to help when the teacher came to them and explicitly asked them if they needed assistance. Lastly, Student A named one particular teacher that motivated him. He detailed an account of this teacher taking the time to help him, especially when he did not understand the material they were working on.

### **Relevant Lessons for Students**

In each of the teachers’ classrooms they associated relevant teaching strategies with making the lessons interesting to the students. Ms. Lacey and Mr. Briggs as ELA teachers used high interest books and writing prompts to engage their students. They both agreed that they could use the mandated ELA curriculum, but had the ability to pick and

choose the learning material to fit their students' interests and academic level while still teaching standards the state had provided. Mrs. Schar held a similar view to Ms. Lacey and Mr. Briggs when it came to making teaching relevant for students. As a Science teacher, Mrs. Schar followed the curriculum that contained national standards, but was able to adjust the learning material to fit the students' interests. For example, Mrs. Schar made sure that she taught her students about thunderstorms and floods, which used extremely relevant for students who live in the Midwest. Mrs. Ponte as a Math teacher attempted to make learning relevant by using hands-on activities whenever possible. Also, Mrs. Ponte was a firm believer that in Math students needed to be able to explain their answers and prove how they solved the problem. Lastly, Mr. Stanley admitted that he struggled with making teaching relevant for students. He believed that nowadays students are inundated with too many distractions to keep them interested in what they are learning.

### **Value of Education**

As classroom teachers the value of education was stressed in multiple ways. Although each teacher highly valued and promoted a college education they were also open to alternative routes of education that did not follow the so-called traditional path. Ms. Lacey not only stressed the importance of a college education, but allowed students to know that for whatever career the students choose they needed requisite skills to perform that job. Similarly, Mrs. Schar stressed the importance of a college education, however, she stressed the task of learning more so. She often let her students know that they were in the driverseat when it came to learning. Also, Mrs. Schar was very direct with students. For example, the level of education depended on the career you chose. "If

you want to be a lawyer, well you have to go to law school.” Mr. Briggs explained to students that they had options when they completed school. He did not discredit a college education, but understood some kids had different interests. For example, Mr. Briggs stated, “I have a lot of buddies that are in the trades and they are absolutely killing it.” Mr. Briggs was more open to supporting students who wanted to go to vocational schools or even be a gamer. He said, “some of the money you can win from a NBA 2K tournament is unbelievable.”

Mr. Stanley and Mrs. Ponte stressed the value of education a little bit differently than the other teachers. Mr. Stanley approached education as an event that students should not take for granted. He felt that students should be recognized for their achievements, however, they should not always expect an external reward and that the learning should be intrinsic. Mrs. Ponte held a similar view that students should be rewarded for their achievements, but there needs to be a blueprint they can follow. Mrs. Ponte believed that teachers needed to set the standards for students and guide them along the process.

### **Racial Tension**

Throughout the interview process the teachers were very forthcoming with information about how they built relationships with students, motivated them, and communicated respect and trust. However, when asked about race many of the teachers avoided the questions or brought up other topics like gender, LGBTQ, and English Language Learners. Over the past few years racial tension in society has been in the media spotlight, especially after George Floyd’s murder and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Schools are a microcosm of society and racial tension spilled

over into the educational system. Overall, the teachers described little racial tension within the school or in their classroom.

Ms. Lacey expressed that she does not really see racial tension in the classroom. Also, Mrs. Lacey had not brought up any of the racial justice issues happening in society for fear of making students uncomfortable. She went on to say, “I don’t touch on hot topics. What if a student finds out their best friend has a totally different opinion than them.” Similarly, Mr. Briggs does not see racial tension within the classroom and school. He said, “you would think there would be more racial tension based on the media reports, but I just don’t see it.” However, Mr. Briggs did recall a time where a student called him a racist. He explained that this upset him and he made sure to talk with the principal and the student. Ultimately, when questioned about why the student called Mr. Briggs a racist, the student could not come up with any examples.

Mr. Stanley provided a unique answer when asked if he has experienced any racial tension throughout his years of teaching. Mr. Stanley held similar views of racial tension in the school to those Ms. Lacy and Mr. Briggs conveyed, however, heard the statement, “because I’m Black” from students in response to him asking students to correct inappropriate behavior. Also, Mr. Stanley stated that, “there are a few White parents who are not allowed to pick up their children from the school because they are outwardly racist.” Mrs. Ponte did not see racial tension throughout the school, but believed the school district was more open to acknowledging racial tension between administrators, teachers, and students. She felt that some racial tension had taken place based on students not receiving adequate consequences for negative behavior. When Black administrators were doling out punishment to Black students sometimes that

punishment did not fit the behavior based on Mrs. Ponte's opinion. The lack of disciplinary follow through from the principal made Mrs. Pointe resent him.

Mrs. Schar was the only teacher during the interviews that had experienced racial tension in the classroom and school. Her initial reaction was being upset about it and frustrated with how the school handled the situation. Mrs. Schar was not in the classroom when the incident happened, but talked about holding space for the Black students who were victimized by racial slurs from a White student. Mrs. Schar was able to see the perspective of the students and listened to their concerns. The White student was suspended for his behavior, but that did not stop him from continuing to harass the Black student. The school's solution had been to put the White student into a different class. Mrs. Schar became increasingly frustrated and wished the school had done some deeper work around this incident that was racially charged. She went on to say, "we are treating the action and not getting to the root of the problem and fixing it from there." Mrs. Schar clearly wanted the school leadership team to explore different alternatives to discipline for students.

Racial tension within the school was more apparent for the students than the teachers. Most of the teachers could not recount any racial tension or had situations where they were "in their words" falsely accused of being a racist. The students had several negative experiences with White teachers that resulted in racist remarks. Student B had some White teachers in elementary school that were overly racist. One of the examples he gave was the teacher calling him out in front of the whole class. He said, "*she didn't have to do that and it just looked bad.*" What I believe Student B was really saying is that by singling him out in front of the class reinforced White society's belief

that Black people were inherently evil. In addition, Student B remembered a negative interaction with a teacher that has been imprinted in his mind for years. The teacher told him he would be getting a phone call home because he was talking in class. The teacher in a fit of rage said, *“I’m gonna call your dad, do you have a dad?”* In response to that question Student B, was confused and said, *“huh.”* The teacher created unnecessary racial tension by assuming that he did not have a father that was “in the picture” based on the negative stereotypes of Black males. Student C had a similar experience when she wore her hair natural to school one day. The teacher was asking when she was going to get her hair done and asked if she could touch her hair. Student C said, *“she felt pointed out because she didn’t do that to anyone else.”* Once again another teacher had created unnecessary racial tension within the classroom by not understanding Black culture, especially the hair culture of Black females.

### **Racial Tension in Society**

The general consensus from teachers in response to asking them if they ever felt compelled to talk about any of the racial events perpetrated on Black people with their students was to not bring it up in the classroom. Ms. Lacey, Mr. Briggs, and Mrs. Schar all agreed that they do not shy away from racial conversations, but did not invite those conversations. Mr. Briggs and Mrs. Schar held similar beliefs about having difficult conversations with students. Although Mr. Briggs and Mrs. Schar might not bring up racial conversation with students they did let students bring up and are there to listen. Unlike these teachers, Ms. Lacey would rather not bring up racial conversations because they could lead to hurt feelings. Mrs. Ponte was adamant about not bringing up racial conversations and was not compelled to discuss them at all. In Mrs. Ponte’s own words,

“I hope I never have to talk about them (racial topics) with students.” Mr. Stanley was the only teacher of the group to talk with students about racial injustice in society. However, Mr. Stanley was completely shocked that many students had a lack of interest in these events. Overall, Mr. Stanley was frustrated with this lack of interest from students and felt that a lot of racial incidents were being downplayed and not emphasized a great deal in the media.

For the most part the students’ and the teachers’ views about discussing racial tension in society was non-existent. From the students’ perspective only a few teachers talked about race. Student B said, “*one of my teachers talks about race and sees the problem, but really talks about how we should be in life.*” In my opinion the teacher in this example was acknowledging race and saw the disadvantages that Black people have in society, however, was not willing to make the necessary changes to systematically help her Black students. Student C told a story of how one of her teachers brought up race in the classroom because there was an incident that was racially charged. The incident did not happen directly with Student C, but involved her friend. When they entered the classroom and went to their seats there was a monkey drawn on the desk with a caption that read, “monkey like you.” When this incident was brought up to the teacher she made a big speech and got really mad. The teacher said, “*How would you like it if you were in their shoes?*” She got the assistant principal involved and they investigated the situation but never found out who did it and since it was the end of the year there was no resolution in the matter. The saddest part was Student C’s reaction to the unresolved situation was one of indifference. She said, “*oh, I was kinda of used to it because like all*

*the years I went there, there was a lot of racism.*” To me, Student C had a sense of hopelessness when it came to racial issues being resolved.

### **Disproportionate Discipline**

The last question of the teacher interview brought up data from the Civil Rights Data Collection that stated Black students had received more discipline referrals and suspensions than any other students in the school. The follow up question asked teachers to give their thoughts and opinions on this disproportionate discipline data. Overall, the teachers were not shocked by this data, except for Ms. Lacey who questioned if this data were in fact true. She added to that statement by saying, *“she doesn’t see one particular race being punished over another.”* Although Ms. Lacey might not see Black students being disciplined more than another race with her own eyes, that was not to say it was not happening without looking over her school’s discipline data. The other teachers in the study were not shocked by this disproportionate discipline data, however, could not expound upon it because they had never seen the data personally. Even though the teachers could not definitively say for certain that disproportionate discipline for Black students was happening they all agreed that suspensions for students were troublesome. In addition, some teachers believed that recent budget cuts and the lack of support staff was a significant factor contributing to an increase in discipline referrals in general. However, Mrs. Schar made one of the most profound observations when discussing disproportionate discipline data. She said, *“there needs to be training around disproportionate discipline data and the implementation of restorative practices. The school district needs to treat the real issues, not just the action.”* In other words, Mrs. Schar felt that there needed to be deeper work around understanding why students might

be reacting in certain ways that had to deal with how they had been treated within the school setting.

The students' reaction to the disproportionate discipline data was that it was not shocking to them at all. Student B did not have any real feelings towards the data because in his words, *"it's the truth."* To me Student B was numb to the situation because no matter what the data was not going to change and Black students would continue to receive more referrals than other students. For example, he recounted many times as an elementary student where he would receive lots of discipline reports. He said, *"respect goes both ways and tone is everything."* In my opinion when Student B did not feel respected by the teacher he was not going to respect the teacher regardless if he was going to get in trouble or not. Similarly, Student C was not shocked by the reports from the Civil Rights Data Collection about disproportionate discipline data. She recalled an incident in school where she was walking past a fight in the hallway and somehow got called down to the principal's office. She was suspended for trespassing, but the incident had nothing to do with her. She said, *"you don't really have to do anything to get in trouble."* This quote was a great example of how Black students could receive a discipline referral for just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This incident reminded me of the many issues that Black people face when confronted by the police.

These findings were meaningful to the study and more specifically to the research question. Interview data from both teachers and students showed their perceptions of trust and positive teacher-student relationships with regard to racial tension in schools. Teachers felt that trust was a huge part of building relationships with students, however, students did not necessarily agree with that statement. The students believed that it is

possible to have good relationships with a teacher, but trust does not have to be involved. The differences in perceptions of trust between teachers and students was evident from the interview data. Also, the interview data provided insight into understanding how teachers and students described the actions they took to create positive relationships with one another. By examining the data from both perspectives, findings in the research can help improve trust and the quality of relationships with White teachers and Black students.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to understand how teachers build trust with their Black students. Teachers need to know more about how trust positively impacts Black students' overall experiences in schools. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings related to the literature on teacher and student trust perceptions, trust building through positive relationships, and the racial impact of trust. Also included is a discussion of relevant theories that are connected to the findings within the study, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and areas of future research.

The findings concerning how White teachers build trust with their Black students was layered and contained three themes: (a) teacher-student definitions of trust, (b) teacher-student/student-teacher relationships, and (c) racial tension. Some perspectives related primarily to the individual (teacher/student), some were perspectives of the collective groups (teachers/students). All of these perspectives helped contribute to how teachers and students perceived relationships that involved trust building strategies.

#### **Interpretation of the Findings**

##### **Teacher-Student Definitions of Trust**

The notion of trust gathered from each of the teacher interview sessions concluded that trust was an important part of building and sustaining a positive teacher-student relationship. The teachers collectively agreed that trust should be modeled through actions and the willingness to share information with students. In other words, the teachers reported that they felt responsible for the way they communicated trust

within the classroom, but understood that they were only half of the trusting relationship where students reciprocated those trust characteristics.

The study's conclusion that trust played a vital role in building a successful teacher-student relationship agreed with the literature that indicated positive teacher-student relationships produced favorable outcomes for student learning and teacher functioning (e.g., Bryk and Schneider 2002; Forsyth 2008; Goddard et al 2002). Positive teacher-student relationships relied mainly on the individual's interest in the relationship. Although teachers and students shared a classroom together, they did not have to go out of their way to have good relationships with one another. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011), found that, "teachers instructing in low SES schools perceive the students as less teachable, as less able to meet the educational expectations imposed on them, which in turn reduces the level of trust teachers expose in the students." While teacher participants in this study did admit that trust was important to build relationships with students, their level of involvement varied in practice. Some teacher participants described trust as a pathway to earning respect and eventually hard work on behalf of the student. Other teacher participants described trust as a feeling of support, accountability, and something earned. The idea of trust was slightly different for each teacher and the acquisition of trust varied depending on the particular student. It was important to note that teachers did not have any concrete evidence that their students trusted them, making it hard to gauge if the strategies they were engaged in to build trust were actually successful.

On the other hand, the students I met with did not feel that teachers needed to build trust with them in order to have a good teacher-student relationship. Students

described teachers as being fun and helpful especially when they did not quite understand the learning material, but did not indicate specific teachers as being trustworthy. Also, students described multiple incidents where White teachers made racist remarks, whether they were intentional or not. The students expressed a lack of emotion with these racial incidents citing examples of mistreatment that went unsolved or ignored. Furthermore, the students explained that there had been so many acts of racism in the school, they were basically numb and used to discrimination. This finding raises the question of whether students did not feel teachers needed to build trust, or whether it simply did not seem possible to these students that trust could be built. These students did not seem to recognize trust as part of the student-teacher relationship.

Student participants viewed trust with their teachers as a feeling one gets when someone is dependable and honest with you no matter the circumstances. This notion of “realness” was a contributing factor for students to trust their teacher(s). Phillip (2012) concluded that students perceived teachers as being trustworthy and culturally responsive based on teacher’s interactions with students in the classroom, how they designed their classroom activities, and how they used classroom discipline approaches over time. Students did express that trust played a factor in creating positive relationships with teachers. Some students described trust as a teacher not steering you in the wrong direction while others described trust as the ability to go to a teacher when experiencing a problem. However, the students equated trust with deeply personal things that they would not necessarily share with a teacher, but would share with a close friend or family member. It was evident that from the students’ perspective there were levels of trust depending on the individual.

## **Student and Teacher Perceptions of Mistrust**

Perceptions of mistrust by the student participants in the study reflected a unique point of view. The students did not necessarily mistrust teachers because they revealed that in order to mistrust someone you must trust them in the first place. Johnson-George and Swap (1982) found that there needed to be a willingness to exhibit trust in different social situations. Moreover, they determined that a willingness to take risks largely depended on a variety of specific factors. One of the specific factors for students in the study was respect. Students revealed that they wanted to have a sense of respect within the classroom setting. The student interviews matched the researcher Ng's (2011) conclusion that mistrust stems from historical abuses perpetrated on the African American community. Trust was not as important as a fun and engaging learning environment where they were set up for success, academically and socially. Since students never established trust with their teachers it becomes difficult to understand what attitudes and beliefs teachers should have to create trusting relationships with students. This was extremely important when examining the teacher-student relationship because if teachers were not aware of how they should be assisting their students then it further complicated the building of a trusting relationship with students.

In this study, teacher participants emphasized their experiences with losing trust with students. Specifically, the results yielded three categories of mistrust; (a) minor behavior incidents, (b) explicit mistrust of students, and (c) negative incidents that impacted mistrust. Some teachers expressed losing trust with students based on minor incidents, which included inappropriate use of computers, taking longer than usual to use the bathroom, and stolen items. The sentiment from these teachers was more of

frustration than of anger. They explained that they chose to either ignore the situation or address it with the entire class to make sure they were not singling out particular students. In this instance, the teachers appeared to be more understanding of the student's actions. They explained that they were aware that these minor incidents could be resolved by reminding students the rules of the classroom and school. These findings were consistent with Erikson's (1968) research of adolescent development. Erikson found that youth are trying to navigate the world based on experience, however, each adolescent is progressing through that stage of development at their own unique rate. These teachers were cognizant of the long lasting effects of calling out a student in class and how that form of discipline could create a negative impact with relationship building not only with that particular child, but the rest of the students in class.

Another conclusion of the study was the idea of not trusting students at all. One teacher believed that kids, especially middle school students who had any type of power would abuse it. This conclusion is consistent with Ng and Hall's (2011) research that cultural factors led to mistrust by Black adolescents. In this particular case the teacher already had a preconceived notion of Black students and was projecting racial discrimination through his actions and attitudes. Therefore, he communicated that trusting any student would be detrimental because at some point they would try to lie. This particular teacher held a very narrow view of students' behavior. It was important to examine this teacher's perspective because in order to establish a teacher-student relationship there must be some form of trust exhibited.

In contrast, other teachers reported the mistrust of students after they had built a strong bond with a student and then the student was disrespectful, damaging the

relationship completely. Two teacher participants described working extremely hard to develop trusting relationships with individual students only to have it blow up in their face. This issue was a crucial view of relationships from these teachers because they were only presenting their feelings based on the situations that led to a loss of trust. The teacher's view was confirmed by Bennet's (2012) research that White people have psychological advantages over minority populations and often have different lived experiences. Unfortunately, after these incidents the relationship between the teacher and student never was repaired. It showed how one major fracture in the teacher-student relationship could cause teachers to never trust the student again. Also, the teachers expressed being let down by these students and blindsided to why the students behaved in this way. From the teachers' perspectives the amount of work and effort to maintain the relationship after the negative incident was not worth rebuilding at the time. These teacher sentiments were consistent with beginning teachers having great difficulties establishing meaningful relationships with racial diverse students (Hope, Skoog, Jagers; 2015). These findings might be indicative of how teachers handled the loss of trust with students but did not address the ways teachers restored trust with students after incidents had taken place.

### **Teacher-Student/Student-Teacher Relationships**

While all teacher participants expressed extreme importance in building positive relationships with students, the participants indicated that teacher-student relationships were ongoing and did not follow a set of simple guidelines. Students at this stage of adolescent development were becoming more independent and free thinkers, which made developing strong relationships a little more challenging. Specifically, the results of this

study included four themes: (a) respect, (b) motivation, (c) relevant lessons for students, (d) value of education. Teachers interviewed in the study indicated that these components were contributing factors to gaining positive relationships with students. With all of these themes there was a factor of trust in the teacher-student and student-teacher relationship. All of the teachers spoke directly to these themes as supportive evidence for how they approached developing positive teacher-student relationships.

1. Respect: Teachers thought the best way to show respect with their students was to model that behavior when interacting with people. Also, advocating for students who are being teased or mistreated by fellow classmates communicated to other students that disrespect within the classroom would not be tolerated.
2. Motivation: High interest lessons and student driven learning were the best strategies to keep students engaged in learning. Teachers believed that students who took charge of their education were highly successful with academic tasks. Also, the teachers felt that their role in the classroom was to keep students engaged and to offer assistance when they got stuck, frustrated, or loss interest in the subject matter.
3. Relevant Lessons for Students: Fine tuning the curriculum to fit the students' need was the overall opinion of the teachers. They used reading and writing lessons to peak the interest of students and as a tool to express themselves through writing tasks. Science lessons were incorporated to tap the students' prior knowledge and relate to the environment they live in. Math lessons were hands-on when applicable and proof of how students got their answer was a must.

4. Value of Education: All teachers agreed that promoting different avenues of learning for particular career paths was important. They conveyed to students that depending on the career they desired there would be certain skills to focus upon. Teachers felt it was imperative to create a blueprint for students to follow in order to achieve academic success.

The emphasis on the teacher-student relationship in this study was consistent with the literature regarding trust building through positive relationships. Brake (2019) makes reference to the teacher-student relationship as a lubricant to improving student social and emotional development, school engagement, and academic achievement. This study's conclusion emphasized the importance of the teacher's role in understanding the individual needs of their students and for the students to trust that their teachers had their best interests at heart. This was extremely important for teachers because if they were not connecting with students' needs it became difficult to build the relationship and teach the material without knowing how the students learn.

Understanding the student's individual needs was an area where the literature supported the idea of authentic relationships. Noddings (2006) describes the ideal classroom as a space of cohabitation between teachers and learners, a place where students feel safe to express "wonder and curiosity." Trusting teachers have the ability to make the classroom setting comfortable for their students to express themselves and show up authentically. It was important for teachers to adapt to their students to make them feel a sense of belonging and to trust that teachers were not going to try and make them someone they are not.

## **Racial Tension**

One of the most notable differences in the results of the study were the perspectives of racial tension between the teachers and students. Teachers viewed racial tension within the school as being very little to none at all. In general teachers avoided discussing race when the topic was brought up and mentioned other marginalized groups in society, which included the LGBTQ community, English Language Learners, and various forms of religion. By teachers avoiding the topic of race and racial tension they were continuing to reinforce White norms that were embedded in the educational system. Avoiding the topic of race altogether would not make teachers aware of the racial tension that surrounded them within the school and prevented them from making their classroom culturally relevant.

A prime example of the avoidance of race was Ms. Lacey's reaction to the disproportionate school discipline data collected by the CRDC. When asked about the disproportionate school discipline data Ms. Lacey responded with, "*is this true?*" That response was a telling reaction and exposed her real feelings about race and disproportionate discipline that involves Black students. This type of admittance of the truth reflected as a betrayal to the students that she teaches and directly effected the relationships she has with students. Furthermore, throughout the interview with Ms. Lacey she was very careful not to express any feelings that offended teachers, students, parents, and the overall school. This study was consistent with the literature that discussed the avoidance of race, especially the implicit biases that White teachers hold and their reactions when confronted by racial issues involving Black students. Implicit bias is a main factor in the avoidance of racial issues because attitudes or stereotypes that

affect White teachers' understanding and actions of other races is not easily recognized (Staats, 2015).

The teacher participants in this research cited a multitude of reasons for not discussing racial tension within society with their students. Some of the reasons teacher participants provided for not discussing racial tension were they did not want to make anyone feel uncomfortable, needed all of the class period to teach curriculum, and students were becoming less interested in these events. It is a prime example of teachers dismissing how race plays an important factor within school. Teachers have a tremendous amount of power within the classroom and could easily choose to implement culturally relevant lessons and could fine tune the curriculum to fit students' needs.

The teachers interviewed in the study discussed ways to make the curriculum more engaging and interesting to students but struggled to find ways to make the curriculum more culturally appropriate for students. The results of this study clearly showed a need for teacher participants to acquire skills to be culturally responsive in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995a) explained that culturally responsive teaching contains three aspects; academic success for students, students developing cultural competence, and consciousness that challenges the existing social order. Teachers must make this investment into their teaching practice in order to build trust and create positive relationships with students. If teachers are not willing to make these adjustments in their teaching practices for students they will continue to leave a group of students behind. This issue is increasingly problematic for Black students because they are not receiving the education they should and further complicating the issues associated with Black people in society and Black students within the school.

Student participants had a completely different view of racial tension than the teachers. The literature indicates the importance of identifying racial discrimination and understanding when it has taken place. Racial discrimination is defined as unfair, differential treatment based on race or ethnicity (Greene, Pahl, Way; 2006) Students recounted negative experiences with White teachers that were associated with race. One student explained how the teacher would call him out in front of the class, which reinforced the stereotype that Black students are the troublemakers in class. This finding explained how racial discrimination manifested itself in a classroom that led by a White teacher. When White teachers made statements about their Black students they had no consequences to their actions because they held all the power not only racially, but by being older and the adult.

Moreover, the same student explained a situation in class where the teacher told him she was going to call his dad because she perceived him as misbehaving and she followed up that statement with do you have a dad? It was a prime example of a White teacher strengthening a racial stereotype associated with Black people, but more specifically Black fathers. Another student explained that she wore her hair natural and the teacher wanted to know when she was getting it done and if she could touch it. African American trust of others, especially teachers, becomes inhibited through disproportionate experiences of negative treatment (Ferguson 2006; Taylor et al. 2007; Ruck et al. 2008). The study's results showed that racial tension was being inflicted upon Black students by White teachers, however, White teachers were not understanding how their words and actions were being received by their students. These incidents were key examples of how aloof White teachers can be when interacting with students. Within the

study it became clear that teachers were trying to build relationships with students, however, they did not really take into account the perspective of the students. The teachers were not making genuine connections with their students, which in turn made it difficult for students to respect their teachers and have a feeling of acceptance.

Also, historically disproportionate discipline data has shown that Black students were receiving more referrals and suspensions than any other racial demographic. The study's results showed that teachers agreed that disproportionate discipline was taking place with their Black student population, but have never viewed or sought out the data to confirm their suspicions. In addition, most teacher participants avoided the idea of race completely and focused on suspensions as being bad for all students. The CRT framework has been developed to challenge the existing ideology in schools, however, instead of teachers challenging these referral numbers they were actually ignoring the data and making it harder to understand the plight of their Black students.

One teacher participant believed that the school needs to approach discipline in a new way. This idea of approaching discipline in a new way was an example of using the CRT framework to challenge the status quo. Although this particular teacher felt the need to change the way behavior was handled she also felt handcuffed because the administration largely controlled behavior policies. Instead of punishing the action of the student, the administration needs to do deeper work to address the root of the problem in order to understand the cause of the action. The results of this study align with the existing literature regarding the importance of disproportionate discipline data. Gregory and Thompson (2010) suggested Black students are at-risk of being perceived as defiant and therefore issued discipline referrals and sent out of class frequently missing

instructional time. There needs to be a concentrated commitment to train teachers surrounding the idea of Whiteness and the way it plays out in schools. Overall, schools are led by White administrators and teachers, therefore, there is no real need to change the system. White administrators were fearful of making changes to the curriculum, discipline practices, and being culturally relevant because of negative responses from teachers and the community.

Student participants were not shocked at the disproportionate discipline data statistics stating that Black students received more referrals and suspensions than other students. Furthermore, the students reacted indifferently to the data commenting that it was not going to change. Students are so conditioned to feel defeated and treated unfairly there was no need to challenge the current discipline practices. Disproportionate discipline referrals came down to the teacher's interpretation of rules which was commonly skewed against Black students.

The students in the study cited many examples of being falsely accused of something or being written up for something they did not do. The results of the study pointed out inconsistent standards to which Black students were held to by White teachers. White teachers hold differential expectations of students of different ethnic origins (van den Bergh et al., 2010). As a result of this mistreatment, Black students in this study expressed a sense of hopelessness and a feeling of normalcy associated with constant racial discrimination. Understanding the cultures of Black students remained a top priority for White teachers. If White teachers ever wanted to eradicate this sense of hopelessness Black students have then they would have to look past the oblivious nature of not acknowledging other cultures.

## **Implications for Theory**

### **Social Capital Theory**

Putnam's (1995) view of Social Capital Theory hinges on the idea of individuals using networks, norms, and trust to enable people to act together in order to pursue shared goals. In this study, teachers and students acted in ways to promote a good teacher-student relationship within the classroom setting, closely related to Putman's view of individuals working together to achieve common objectives such as academic success and an overall positive school experience. The results of this study aligned with Putnam's view of Social Capital Theory by suggesting that there were clear incentives in a social network, but individuals had the ability to independently act within those relationships.

Although social capital has direct benefits for developing positive teacher-student relationships, there are some drawbacks of the theory with regards to the school environment. Putnam is responsible for defining trust within the Social Capital Theory framework as "thin" and "thick." Thin trust refers to the more surface level relationships you would have with acquaintances while thick trust refers to the bond you would have with a good friend or family member. The results of this study affirmed that most teacher participants believed that positive teacher-student relationships relied upon thick trust while the student participants viewed those same relationships as having thin trust at best.

The teacher participants throughout the study avoided the discussion of racial topics within the classroom and some teachers avoided the topic altogether. However, these same teachers believed that they built strong relationships with their students based on thick trust. In the study there is no evidence that the teachers were able to gain any

trust with their students and the comments reported by teachers were purely perceived. During the interviews a student expressed that she would stay after class to help teachers. Based on this student's comments it seemed to be a "sizing up" or a way to get to know the teacher without the rest of her classmates being in the room. In this example the teacher believed the student showed thick trust because the student is helping, but in reality the student was learning how to navigate the student-teacher relationship to be successful in school.

The student participants told a very different story than the teachers. Thin trust was a common thread expressed by the students throughout the interview process. All students in the study portrayed a sense of "playing the game" during interactions with teachers. The students reported instances where they experienced racial tension and discrimination that prevented teachers to earn thick trust. All student participants indicated that racial tension and discrimination played a key factor in the way they interacted with teachers. Students communicated a clear disdain for their teachers that resulted in a hopelessness that racial tension and discrimination would not continue.

A sense of belonging is very crucial for students in school, as this study emphasized the importance of having at least one teacher to trust and rely upon. The students interviewed in this study seemed to relay having good relationships with some teachers, but never indicated that they fully trusted them. The constantly evolving teacher-student relationship was consistent with Social Capital Theory where students, especially Black students who depend on social capital to succeed in school, have a difficult time acquiring the social capital necessary to be successful in a school taught by

a majority of White teachers. It was evident that barriers existed to securing social capital for students based on race and trust.

### **Critical Race Theory**

When comparing this study's results with Critical Race Theory, there were similarities and differences that emerged. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) model has several elements, which include (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano, 1997). CRT aims to dismantle negative stereotypes associated with Black students held by White teachers. While the results of this study confirmed that White teachers avoided discussing race altogether, the teachers in this study mentioned trying to figure out new ways to address behavior referrals and suspensions for Black students. Challenging systemic racism within schools was a focal point in this study, however, the teachers did not express the desire or interest to tackle issues pertaining to race.

Central to the CRT framework is confronting the reality that Black students cannot trust their White teachers. There was an overwhelming evidence that teachers did not want to discuss any topics that pertained to race. The notion of colorblindness was woven throughout the teachers responses to interview questions. By avoiding race and not discussing racial topics the teachers were not challenging the dominant ideology. In order for the teachers to acknowledge their Black students there would have to be an admission of White privilege and all of its benefits. White teachers are not attempting to

dismantle racism, in fact they are reinforcing negative stereotypes associated with Black students.

It was much easier for teachers to not address racial issues in their teaching practices because the teachers were not directly affected by inequality. Furthermore, the teachers in the study did not acknowledge how their Whiteness was a barrier to challenging the existing power structure formed on White norms and values. Based on the data, teachers did not want to upset the current system that gave them an advantage because in order to create an environment that benefitted Black students White teachers would have to give up some privilege that would be afforded to them purely because they were White. If teachers were to confront their Whiteness and start to understand how things are beneficial to them, they might become defensive and make excuses as to why they treat everyone the same. Lastly, teachers would dig their heels in and not recognize CRT as a valuable framework to help them build good relationships with students and teach lessons that were culturally relevant to their Black students.

### **Critical White Studies**

Critical Whiteness Studies is a framework that attempts to unmask invisible privileges that are afforded to White people in society (Cabrea, Franklin, & Watson, 2016). The results of the study confirmed that the teacher participants did not study their race and how it affected their teaching practice. Teachers described having good relationships with their Black students, but did not say anything specific that they were doing in the classroom, especially in terms of cultural relevance. As a result, the teachers had a perceived or inflated view of what the students believed. In other words, although the teachers felt like they were building trust with their Black students, however they did

not have any hard data to support their thoughts. The only teachers who brought up any amount of information about cultural relevance were the ELA teachers. Although these teachers touched upon topics of interest for students they did not deliberately seek out texts or learning materials that directly related to the Black experience. I believe teachers did not want to create culturally relevant classrooms, first and foremost because they did not know how to establish them and secondly the perception it would create amongst other individuals and teachers within the school building.

Also, the majority of the teachers did not see racial tension in the school, classroom, or community. The general consensus of the teachers in this study was that for the most part students got along and there seemed to be no real racial issues, especially in their classrooms. Furthermore, the teacher participants had a difficult time remembering any racial issues throughout their teaching careers. Many of the teachers included in this study have been teaching for 20 plus years. Lastly, many of the teachers interviewed did talk about racial tension for a portion of the interview and then transitioned to other issues such as gender bias and races that were not African-American. Teachers seem to group Black students and people in with other marginal groups so they did not have to address what was going on in the Black community and within the school. It was much easier to ignore something that was going on with a specific population and chalk it up as other people were suffering as well.

Another finding in the study that was related to CWS was the notion of teachers not having enough time to discuss racial tension and injustice. The teacher participants not only cited the idea of not having enough class time, but thought that students were not necessarily interested in these topics at school. It seemed to me that the teachers were

avoiding the topics because they felt uncomfortable discussing them with their Black students. It is also my assertion that teachers were uncomfortable only because they had not investigated and tried to understand their Whiteness. Instead the teachers made excuses why they did not talk about race such as the kids didn't want to discuss racial tension in society, they didn't want any hurt feelings from any of their students, and if the students were not bringing up issues then it must not be important to them. Interpreting the study's findings through a CWS framework was a key component to understanding how teachers interpreted or acknowledged their Whiteness when teaching Black students.

### **Adolescent Development Theory**

Adolescent Development Theory focused on youth becoming separate individuals and creating an awareness of their own perspectives and identities (Gemeli, 1996). In this study students interviewed reported experience with teachers as largely negative. The students' perceptions were consistent with Piaget's cognitive development theory of students who are age 12 and older. The study's conclusion was supported by Piaget's research of students 12 and older. These adolescents are in the formal operational stage of development where students are acquiring reasoning skills and understanding abstract ideas. The findings confirmed that the student participants were developing their own sense of trust.

Trust is a complex idea and in terms of the adolescent stage of development one that is very abstract. Moreover, the literature suggests that at this stage of development adolescents are beginning to distinguish between trust and mistrust. One of the major findings of the study was the difference in behavioral expectations between White

teachers and Black students. White teacher participants expressed a half hearted interest in viewing disproportionate discipline data for their Black students and were at a loss trying to find possible solutions to curtail these referrals. The teacher sentiments towards disproportionate discipline for their Black students was a prime example of where teachers had a lack of awareness surrounding their White identities. Behavioral referrals were not directly affecting them as teachers, therefore there was no real sense of urgency to find a solution. This type of behavior from the teachers was the epitome of White privilege and maintaining a White power structure within school.

In contrast, students interviewed in the study communicated the lack of trust with teachers. Two reasons from the literature support these perceptions from the students. First, students already have preconceived notions of racism and how it plays out in society and schools. Based on the study's conclusion the literature points out that for trusting relationships to form between the teacher and student a common ground of caring was mutually required. The only problem is that the teachers are not reciprocating the trust that was involved to gain the buy-in of students. The literature confirmed the study's conclusion that when White teachers have students that match their racial and ethnic background they were more likely to perceive the relationships as positive (Saft & Pianta, 2001). This finding suggests that before any teacher-student interactions or relationship building, Black students who were taught by White teachers were already up against some barriers.

Secondly, the student reactions were consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (2006) Ecological model affecting the development of Black students, especially in the realm of social and cultural factors. It made sense that students would not trust teachers because

White teachers lacked the cultural consciousness to relate to Black students. Furthermore, White teachers had a view of what schooling should look like from their perspective that was not representative of their Black students. Based on what teachers conveyed during the interviews, the learning environment was not structured to best support students of color from the standpoint of academic success, trust, or establishing authentic teacher-student relationships.

### **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this research study. The research was conducted with five White middle school teachers; therefore the results could not be generalized to other similar teachers because the sample size was relatively small. The teacher interview data were their perceptions of trust, teacher-student relationships, and racial tension. As a result, these teacher interview responses could not necessarily be applicable to other teachers.

There were some possible limitations to the teacher protocol itself. Although the teacher interview protocol was carefully constructed and piloted, it may not have yielded the most authentic responses regarding the issues of trust, race, and building positive teacher-student relationships. In addition, based on the sensitivity of questions teachers possibly could have been less authentic or not forthcoming with information. Teachers tended to answer the questions as if there was a correct answer making the responses feel like they were holding back somewhat.

Another limitation of the research was about what the information that the teachers reported doing in their classrooms. Since teachers developed several things they did within their classrooms, there was no real way of truly knowing if they indeed applied

these beliefs, attitudes, or classroom practices. The teachers could have said one thing, but practiced something completely different. All teachers agreed that building positive relationships with their students based on trust was imperative. Furthermore, the teachers discussed earning the trust of their students, but never relayed any examples from students that suggested trust was built. A survey that assessed students' trust perceptions of their teachers would have been a great tool to use to understand if the strategies teachers were utilizing actually built good relationships.

Lastly, since the number of the student participants in the research study was limited, therefore their perspectives cannot be generalized with other similar students and classrooms. The student focus group protocol was created to get a better understanding of the schooling experience for Black middle school students. It was possible that student participants either held back significant information or because the interview was in a group setting there was some peer pressure to answer the questions based on the responses of their classmates. As a result, many of the student participants recounted negative experiences they had with their White teachers.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several avenues for future researchers to pursue based upon this study. First, this study informs future researchers of the necessity to examine teacher-student relationships with a specific focus on how race impacts trust between individuals. This future research is relevant to both teachers and students within the educational setting. The idea of White privilege and White power, are rarely investigated when looking at the way in which White teachers treat their Black students, is another area where future research needs to be conducted. Since the teaching field is filled with White educators,

future research of culturally competent training programs should be explored to understand what necessary work teachers need to change stereotypical beliefs about students of different races, especially Black students.

Secondly, the research study needs to be followed up by classroom observations of both teachers and students. Teacher and student interviews were thoroughly conducted, but classroom observations would have corroborated what the study's participants were saying with their actions within the classroom setting. It would be important for the researcher to observe how the teacher treated their Black students opposed to their White students and other non White students. Conducting interviews with White and non White students would be a way to compare and contrast the Black student experiences with non Black student experiences.

This research needs to be followed up by interviews with building administrators. The teacher and student perceptions revealed some great insight to what factors would promote a positive classroom and school culture, however, a missing piece of the puzzle is the administrators' perceptions. Administrators should be interviewed with a focus on trust, teacher-student relationships, race, and the value of implementing programs that help reframe existing deficit thinking and cultural norms. Also, future research should examine teacher evaluations conducted by the administrator to understand which teachers have attributes that construct positive relationships with their Black students. Those teacher attributes should be studied and those teachers in particular should be interviewed and observed to get a better understanding of their practices.

Lastly, the research study needs to be followed up with an examination of thin and thick trust amongst colleagues. The teacher perceptions shed light on the interactions

teachers have with their colleagues. It is evident in this study that teachers fall into the category of having thin trust with their colleagues based on many comments that avoided racial discussions. There is no evidence that teachers in this study have thick trust with their colleagues because the topic of race was not explored within the classroom. Future research should interview teachers to understand the perceptions regarding thin and thick trust with their colleagues. In those teacher interviews future researchers should study teachers identifying the interactions that promote examples of thin and thick trust.

### **Final Observations**

This research has continued to highlight the teacher-student relationship within schools. While most of the teachers in this study described trust as being a key factor in developing positive relationships with their students, the students who participated in the study expressed that trust did not necessarily influence whether or not they had a good relationship with their teachers. The teachers believed that using trust to build relationships with their students was ultimately a pathway for students to become academically successful. Their demonstrated trust was not always received openly from their students based on negative experiences they had with White teachers. The main reason trust was not a motivator for students to connect on a deeper level with their teachers was the notion of racial tension. The teachers interviewed in this study were thoughtfully chosen based on their veteran experience within the teaching profession. However, the results of the study showed that even these veteran teachers struggled with discussing race, therefore less experienced teachers are likely to have more difficulties building trust with their Black students.

Student participants recognized racial tension within the school, classroom, and their teachers' words, actions, and beliefs. Also, the students realized that in order to do well in school they were to act obedient and not challenge the status quo. In other words, students perceive these relationships to be necessary within the school setting because it was inevitable to have some kind of interaction with their teachers. In most cases these relationships with teachers were not very meaningful for students based on the lack of trust students expressed having with their teachers. The results of this study suggest that Black students are still fighting an uphill battle in schools especially when they are taught by a majority of White teachers. Hopefully, in the future studies there would be mention of White teachers who take steps to understand their Whiteness and adapt their teaching practices to fit the needs of their Black students, not the other way around. Until then, unfortunately problems of racial discrimination, bias, disproportionate discipline and injustice for Black students will remain.

## REFERENCES

- Abend. (2008). The Meaning of “Theory.” *Sociological Theory*, 26(2), 173–199.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00324.x>
- Anderson, C. R., & Dixon, A. D. (2016). Down by the Riverside: A CRT Perspective on Education Reform in Two River Cities. *Urban Education* (Beverly Hills, Calif.), 51(4), 363–389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916638749>
- Aslandogan YA, Cetin M (2007). The philosophy of Gulen in thought and practice. Muslim citizens of the globalized world, contributions of the Gulen movement New Jersey: The Light Inc, IID Press, pp.31-54.
- Baltes, P. B., Staudinger, U. M., & Lindenberger, U. (1999). Lifespan psychology : Theory and application to intellectual functioning. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50(1), 471–507. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.471>
- Barriball, L. & While, A. (1994). Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19(2), 328–335.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x>
- Bennett, J. (2012). White privilege: A history of the concept (Unpublished master’s thesis). Georgia State University, Atlanta.
- Bishop, J. H., & et al. (2004). Why we harass nerds and freaks: A formal theory of student culture and norms. *The Journal of School Health*, 74, 235–251.
- Borsheim-Black, C. (2018). “You Could Argue It Either Way”: Ambivalent White Teacher Racial Identity and Teaching about Racism in Literature Study. *English Education*, 50(3), 228–254.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. “The Forms of Capital.” Pp. 241-258 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bratter, J., Rowley, K., & Chukhray, I. (2016). Does a Self-Affirmation Intervention Reduce Stereotype Threat in Black and Hispanic High Schools? *Race and Social Problems*, 8(4), 340–356. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-016-9187-4>
- Brake, A. (2019). Right from the Start: Critical Classroom Practices for Building Teacher–Student Trust in the First 10 Weeks of Ninth Grade. *The Urban Review*, 52(2), 277–298. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00528-z>

- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 793–828). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Brownstein, M., Madva, A., & Gawronski, B. (2019). What do implicit measures measure? *WIREs Cognitive Science*, 10(5), Article e1501.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1501>
- Byrd, C. M. (2016). Does Culturally Relevant Teaching Work? An Examination from Student Perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 6, No. 3.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016660744>
- Bryk, & Schneider, B. L. (2002). *Trust in schools : a core resource for improvement /* Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Carbado, D. (2011). Critical what what? *Connecticut Law Review*, 43, 1593-1643
- Cabrera, N. L., Watson, J. S., & Franklin, J. D. (2016). Racial arrested development: A critical whiteness analysis of the campus ecology. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(2), 119-134.
- Cohen, G. L., Steele, C. M., & Ross, L. D. (1999). The mentor's dilemma: Providing critical feedback across the racial divide. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 1302-1318.
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. Retrieved July 29, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243>
- COOPER, B. (2002) 'Teachers as Moral Models? The Role of Empathy in Teacher/Pupil Relationships', unpublished PhD thesis, Leeds Metropolitan University
- Corrigan, M., Klein, T., & Isaacs, T. (2010). Trust us: documenting the relationship of students' trust in teachers to cognition, character, and climate. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 8(2), 61–.
- Delgado R, and Stefancic J. *Critical Race Theory : the Cutting Edge /* Edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. Third edition. (Delgado R, Stefancic J, eds.). Temple University Press; 2013.
- Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (2012) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, New York

- Deutsch, M. (1958). Trust and Suspicion. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2, 265-279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002200275800200401>
- Dika, S. L., & Singh, K. (2002). Applications of Social Capital in Educational Literature: A Critical Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(1), 31–60. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072001031>
- Ellingson. (2007). Berg, Bruce L. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Sixth Edition [Review of Berg, Bruce L. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Sixth Edition]. *Communication Research Trends*, 26(1), 24–. Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Ferguson, R. (2006). Recent research on the achievement gap: How lifestyle factors and classroom culture affect black-white differences. *Harvard Education Letter*, November/December 2006.
- Fisher, & Tallant, J. (2020). Trust in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52(7), 780–790. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1692304>
- Freeman, D. J., Brookhart, S. M., & Loadman, W. E. (1999). Realities of teaching in racially/ethnically diverse schools: Feedback from entry-level teachers. *Urban Education*.34
- Gemelli, Ralph J. *Normal Child and Adolescent Development*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1996.
- Gillborn, D. (2013). The policy of inequity: Using CRT to unmask white supremacy in education policy. In M. Lynn & A. Dixson (Eds.), *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 129-139). New York, NY: Routledge
- Glenn, W. J. (2015). Understanding unfamiliar literary aesthetics: White preservice teachers examine race through story. *Action in Teacher Education*, 37(1), 23–44.
- Glitz, B.(1998). *Focus Groups for Libraries and Librarians*. New York: Forbes Custom Publishing.
- Goddard, Salloum, S. J., & Berebitsky, D. (2009). Trust as a Mediator of the Relationships Between Poverty, Racial Composition, and Academic Achievement: Evidence From Michigan’s Public Elementary Schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45(2), 292–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08330503>

- Greene ML, Way N. Pahl K. Trajectories of perceived adult and peer discrimination among Black, Latino, and Asian American adolescents: patterns and psychological correlates. *DevPsychol* 2006;42:218-236
- Gregory, A., & Ripski, M. B. (2008). Adolescent trust in teachers: Implications for behavior in the high school classroom. *School Psychology Review*, 37(3), 337–353
- Gregory, A., & Thompson, A. (2010). African American high school students and variability in behavior across classrooms. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(3), 386–402. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20370>
- Griffith, A. N., Larson, R. W., & Johnson, H. E. (2018). How trust grows: Teenagers' accounts of forming trust in youth program staff. *Qualitative Psychology*, 5(3), 340–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000090>
- Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education* (Vols. I & II). New York: D. Appleton & Co.
- Hambacher, & Ginn, K. (2021). Race-Visible Teacher Education: A Review of the Literature From 2002 to 2018. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 72(3), 329–341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487120948045>
- Hanifan, L. G. (1916). The Rural School Community Center. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 67(1), 130–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271621606700118>
- Harber, K. D., Gorman, J. L., Gengaro, F. P., Butisingh, S., Tsang, W., & OUELLETTE, R. (2012). Students' Race and Teachers' Social Support Affect the Positive Feedback Bias in Public Schools. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1149–1161. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028110>
- Harper, S. R. (2009). Niggers no more: A critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22, 697–712
- Haviland, V. S. (2008). "Things get glossed over": Rearticulating the silencing power of whiteness in education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(1), 40–54. [10.1177/0022487107310751](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487107310751)
- Heidegger, M. (2008). *Being and Time*. HarperCollins.

- Murray, C., & Herrnstein, R. J. (1994). Race, genes, and IQ—An apologia. *The New Republic*, 211(18), 27-37.
- Hope, E., Skoog, A., & Jagers, R. (2015). It'll Never Be the White Kids, It'll Always Be Us: Black High School Students' Evolving Critical Analysis of Racial Discrimination and Inequity in Schools. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 30(1), 83–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558414550688>
- Howard, T.C. (2008). Who Really Cares? The Disenfranchisement of African American Males in PreK-12 Schools: A Critical Race Theory Perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 110, 954-985.
- Husserl, E. (2001). *The Shorter Logical Investigations* (D. Moran, & D. Moran, Eds.) (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203420034>
- James. (1952). *The principles of psychology*. Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Jarvis. (2010). Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods [Review of Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods]. *Reference Reviews*, 24(1), 26–27. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09504121011011879>
- Joseph, N.M., Viesca, K. M., & Bianco, M. (2016). Black 1 Female Adolescents and Racism in Schools: Experiences in a Colorblind Society. *The High School Journal*, 100(1), 4–.
- Johnson-George, & Swap, W. C. (1982). Measurement of specific interpersonal trust: Construction and validation of a scale to assess trust in a specific other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43(6), 1306–1317. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.43.6.1306>
- Jupp, J. C., Berry, T. R., & Lensmire, T. J. (2016). Second-wave white teacher identity studies: A review of white teacher identity literatures from 2004 through 2014. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1151–1191. [10.3102/0034654316629798](https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316629798)
- Jupp, J. C., & Slattery, G. P. (2010). Becoming teachers of inner-city students identification creativity and curriculum wisdom of committed white male teachers. *Urban Education*, 47, 280–311.

- Kerbow, D. and Bernhardt, A. 1993. "Parental intervention in the school: The context of minority involvement". In *Parents, their children, and schools*, Edited by: Schneider, B. and Coleman, J. 115–146. San Francisco: Westview Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children. 2. ed. In *The dreamkeepers*. Jossey-Bass.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72, 37–53
- Lawrence, S. M., & Tatum, B. D. (1999). White racial identity and anti-racist education: a catalyst for change. In E. Lee, D. Menkart, & M. Okazawa-Rey (Eds.), *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development* (pp. 45e51). Washington, DC: Network of Educators on the Americas
- Lee, G., & Schallert, D. (2008). Constructing Trust Between Teacher and Students Through Feedback and Revision Cycles in an EFL Writing Classroom. *Written Communication*, 25(4), 506–537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088308322301>
- Liou, D. D., Leigh, P. R., Rotheram-Fuller, E., & Cutler, K. D. (2019). The Influence of Teachers' Colorblind Expectations on the Political, Normative, and Technical Dimensions of Educational Reform. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 28(1), 122–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056787918824207>
- Matias, C. E., & Mackey, J. (2016). Breakin' down whiteness in anti-racist teaching: Introducing critical whiteness pedagogy. *The Urban Review*, 48(1), 32–50
- McIntosh, P. (2003). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In S. Plous (Ed.), *Understanding prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 191–196). McGraw-Hill.
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. (2003). The development and consequences of stereotype consciousness in middle childhood. *Child Development*, 74, 498 –515. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.7402012
- Midgley, C., Feldlaufer, H., & Eccles, J. S. (1989). Change in teacher efficacy and student self- and task-related beliefs in mathematics during the transition to junior high school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(2), 247–258. <https://doi-org.huaryu.kl.oakland.edu/10.1037/0022-0663.81.2.247>

- Miles, & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis : an expanded sourcebook* / Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman. (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Noddings, Nel. *The Challenge to Care in Schools : an Alternative Approach to Education* New York: Teachers College Press, 1992. Print.
- Ng, J., & Nagayama Hall, G. . (2011). Cultural Influences on Adolescent Development. In *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* (pp. 44–51). Elsevier Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-373951-3.00047-8>
- Oogarah-Pratap, B., Bhoola, A., & Ramma, Y. (2020). Stage Theory of Cognitive Development—Jean Piaget. In *Science Education in Theory and Practice* (pp. 133–148). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43620-9\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43620-9_10)
- Parsons, E. C. (2005). From Caring as a Relation to Culturally Relevant Caring: A WhiteTeacher’s Bridge to Black Students. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 38(1), 25–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680390907884>
- Payne, C. M. (2008). *So much reform, so little change: The persistence of failure in urban schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press
- Phillippo, K. (2012). “You’re trying to know me”: Students from nondominant groups respond to teacher personalism. *The Urban Review*, 44, 441–467
- Pit-Ten Cate, I., & Glock, S. (2019). Teachers’ Implicit Attitudes Toward Students From Different Social Groups: A Meta-Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2832–. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02832>
- Putnam, R. (1995a). “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital.” *Journal of Democracy* 6(1):65-78.
- Putnam, R. (1995b). “Tuning in, Tuning out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 28:664-683.
- Rogers, R., & Mosley, M. (2006). Racial literacy in a second-grade classroom: Critical race theory, whiteness studies, and literacy research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(4), 462–495. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.41.4.3>
- Rotter, J.B. (1967), A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality*, 35: 651-665. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1967.tb01454.x>

- Ruck, M., Harris, A., Fine, M., & Freudenberg, N. (2008). Youth experiences of surveillance. In M. Flynn & D. C. Brotherton (Eds.), *Globalizing the streets: Cross-cultural perspectives on youth, social control and empowerment*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Russell, S. L., Wentzel, K. R., & Donlan, A. E. (2016). Teachers' beliefs about the development of teacher–adolescent trust. *Learning Environments Research*, 19(2), 241–266. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-016-9207-8>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Saft, E. W., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students: Effects of child age, gender, and ethnicity of teachers and children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 16 , 12
- Sampson, D., & Garrison- Wade, D. (2011). Cultural vibrancy: Exploring the preferences of African American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons. *Urban Review*, 43(2), 279-309. doi:10.1007/s11256-010-0170-x
- Self, E. A., & Milner, H. R. (2012). Cultural discontinuities and education. *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*. doi:10.4135/9781452218533
- Siddle Walker, V., and R. H. Tompkins (2004). “Caring in the Past: The Case of Southern Segregated African American Schools.” In *Racing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice*, edited by V. Siddle Walker and J. R. Snarey, 77–92. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Siegel, M., & Carter, R. (2014). Emotions and White Racial Identity Status Attitudes. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 42(4), 218–231. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2014.00056.x>
- Siisiäinen, M. (2001). Two Concepts of Social Capital : Bourdieu vs. Putnam.
- Singh, K., Granville, M., & Dika, S. (2002). Mathematics and Science Achievement: Effects of Motivation, Interest, and Academic Engagement. *The Journal of Educational Research* (Washington, D.C.), 95(6), 323–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670209596607>

- Solorzano. (1997). Images and Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping, and Teacher Education. *Teacher Education Quarterly* (Claremont, Calif.), 24(3), 5–19.
- Staats, C. (2015). Understanding implicit bias what educators should know. *American Educator*, 39(4), 29 - 33
- Stovall, D. (2013). Against the politics of desperation: educational justice, critical race theory, and Chicago school reform. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(1), 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.739192>
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 1–40.
- Taylor, P., Funk, C., & Clark, A. (2007). *Social trends: Americans and social trust: Who, where and why*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2004). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive Schooling U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- van den Bergh, L., Denessen, E., Hornstra, L., Voeten, M., & Holland, R. W. (2010). The Implicit Prejudiced Attitudes of Teachers: Relations to Teacher Expectations and the Ethnic Achievement Gap. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 497–527.
- Van Maele, D., & Van Houtte, M. (2011). The quality of school life: Teacher-student trust relationships and the organizational school context. *Social Indicators Research*, 100(1), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-010-9605-8>
- Watson, W., Sealey-Ruiz, Y., & Jackson, I. (2016). Daring to care: the role of culturally relevant care in mentoring Black and Latino male high school students, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19:5, 980-1002, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2014.911169
- Wimberly, G. (2013). Chapter Three: Understanding Social Capital and the African American School Experience. *Counterpoints*, 383, 37-52. Retrieved July 29, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981247>

Yin. (2009). Case study research : design and methods / Robert K. Yin. (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

## APPENDIX A

### SIGNED IRB APPROVAL LETTER



## **Institutional Review Board**

**Date:** June 21, 2022

**Study #:** IRB-FY2022-296

**Study Title:** White Teachers and Building Trust with their Black Students Submission

**Submission Type:** Initial

**IRB Decision:** Approved

**Research Team:**

Joseph Trobaugh

Julia Smith

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to involve no more than minimal risk to participants and to be Approved, with the following expedited categories:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

**Letter and Consent Document:**

This letter along with the three IRB approved (date-stamped) consent documents can be found in Cayuse in the Submission Details page under Letters and Attachments, respectively.

The IRB approved version of the consent documents must be used in consenting participants. Federal regulations require that each participant receive a copy of the

consent document unless a waiver is granted by the IRB. Signed consent forms must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project. Please remember that informed consent is a process that continues throughout the project, starting with recruitment and assurance of participant understanding of the project, and followed by a signed consent form when applicable.

**Permission from Research Sites:**

Please note the following:

- This IRB approval letter means that the research has met the federal criteria for approval per 45 CFR 46.111 Criteria for IRB Approval of Research.
- Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your records.
- It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

**Modifications:**

Any changes to the approved project must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation by submitting a MODIFICATION request. Do not collect data while the changes are being reviewed. Data collected during this time cannot be used in research.

Incidents:

All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, serious and unexpected adverse events, non-compliance issues and/or serious complaints regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB by submitting an INCIDENT report.

You are approved to start the research. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB

## APPENDIX B

### TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Teacher Interview Protocol

1. What are your views of the teacher-student relationship?
2. How do you form relationships with your students?
3. What ways do you communicate respect in your classroom?
4. What ways do you motivate or engage your students in the learning process?
5. Are there particular strategies that you use to make teaching relevant to your students?
6. In what ways do you stress the value of education with your students?
7. Define trust. How relevant is it in your teaching?
8. Have you ever lost trust in your students? Tell me about that. If you had the chance to do anything over again what would you do differently?
9. What are your views about racial tension in the classroom, have you experienced any of that?
10. There have been a lot of situations recently like the Black Lives Matter movement and police officers killing Black people, etc. have you ever felt the need to talk about any of these events with your students? How do you go about discussing these incidents with your students?
11. Have you experienced any racial conflict in the school? Tell me about that, how did that make you feel?
12. When the CRDC (Civil Rights Data Collection) comes out and says that Black students are getting more discipline referrals, what do you think about this? Do you think that is relevant in your school?

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

## Focus Group Questions Draft

Explain who I am and that I'm here to listen to learn about their school experiences. I'm conducting research on how White teachers build trust with their Black students. All of the information shared here will not be shared with any teachers or school administrations so you can be as open and authentic as you would like. Ask students if they have any questions.

1. What is your name and how many years have you attended this school?
2. Tell me about some experiences that stick out in your mind that you have had with White teachers in elementary and middle school?

Follow up questions: Of those experiences were they positive or negative? For either positive or negative experience(s) what are some things the teacher said or did? Have any of you had similar experiences?

3. What do you think about when you hear the word trust?

Follow up questions: What picture comes to mind? Does everyone have a similar view?

After students give thoughts settle on a general consensus of the term trust

4. Is it important for your teachers to build trust with you? To understand you? Why or why not?
5. Do your teachers trust you? Why, give me some examples?
6. Do you think that there are any White teachers in this school who do a good job building trust with you?

Who are they? List the teachers (if applicable)

7. Based on the list, rank them from best at building trust starting with 1 and so forth.
8. Are there any stories or experiences that any one of you can share about Teacher #1, 2, or 3 that have made them a particularly strong candidate for this list?