

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: “NATURAL ENEMIES<sup>1</sup>” OR INTENTIONAL ALLIES? TEACHERS’ & PARENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS OF COLOR.

Shasha Yolande Lowe, Doctor of Philosophy,  
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Dissertation directed by: Professor Victoria-María MacDonald,  
Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy  
and Leadership

This study examined the perspectives and “shared knowledge” of parents and teachers of boys of color. The following overarching research question guided this study: “What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son or student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?” Additionally, it explored the challenges and opportunities for shared knowledge and understanding of their (respective) son’s’ or students’ academics and engagement. The methodology was qualitative in nature and the intent in conducting this case study was to describe, interpret, and explain the “shared knowledge” between these stakeholders at a predominantly minority middle school. A sample of seven parents and seven teachers from one school in a mid-Atlantic state participated in interviews and focus groups. Results indicated that parents and teachers of boys of color viewed each other as “intentional allies.” Results further showed that parents and teachers were aware of the challenges faced by boys of color in and out of school. That awareness was reflected in

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<sup>1</sup> Willard Waller (1932) described the parent-teacher enmity. Waller introduced the term “natural enemies” and notes that the two parties are predestined for the discomfiture of each other.

strategies that both groups employed to support, prepare, and protect their son/students. Lastly, the study found that teachers received no formal training in building parent-teacher partnerships, but gathered experimental knowledge on how to build those relationships. These findings have implications for teacher education programs, schools, parents, and teachers.

“NATURAL ENEMIES” OR INTENTIONAL ALLIES? TEACHERS’ &  
PARENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS OF COLOR.

by

Shasha Yolande Lowe

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Advisory Committee:

Dr. Victoria-María MacDonald, Assistant Professor and Dissertation Chair

Dr. Lawrence Clark, Associate Professor

Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt, Professor

Dr. Maria Hyler, Associate Professor

Dr. Jennifer D. Turner, Associate Professor

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## Dedication

To my little boy of color, Andre Lathan Letren, I hope when you are old enough to read this, it reminds you of my great and enduring love for you. Even more, I hope it propels you toward achieving your own greatness, whatever you define that to be.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

When teachers and parents work together to build relationships and support learning, children tend to perform better in school and stay in school longer (DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho, 2005; Kim, 2009; Angell et al., 2009). Parent-teacher relationships could be comprised of collaboration or confrontation, but are best when there is “shared knowledge<sup>2</sup>” and ultimately synergy. One depiction of the ideal positive interdependence between teachers and parents is offered in Ray A. Lingenfelter’s poem “Unity<sup>3</sup>.”

### Unity

I dreamed I stood in a studio  
and watched two sculptors there.  
The clay they used  
was a young child's mind  
and they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher  
and the tools she used  
were books and music and art.  
One was a parent  
with a guiding hand  
and a gentle, loving heart.

And when at last  
their work was done,  
they were proud of what they had wrought.  
For the things they had worked  
into the child  
could never be sold or bought.

And each agreed  
she would have failed  
if she had worked alone  
for behind the parent  
stood the school

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<sup>2</sup> Shared knowledge is defined broadly here as an activity through which information and expertise is exchanged.

<sup>3</sup> Poems by Teachers. Retrieved from <http://www.kidactivities.net/category/xlnt-poems-quotes-for-teachers.aspx> October 18, 2014.

and behind the teacher  
stood the home.

“Unity” is an idealistic artistic representation of the collaboration between two forces, the home and school. This collaboration yielded a student that both the teacher and parent could take pride in. The poem depicts the child as clay that requires molding at the hands of both parties, and each party as having a mutual respect and acknowledgement of their power when united. It also captures the fact that parents and teachers use different tools and bring individual strengths to this “essential relationship.”<sup>4</sup>

Analyzing research on boys of color<sup>5</sup> and shared knowledge between their parents and teachers is deeply personal work for me. I became a teacher because of the statistics of minority student achievement in the United States, it is also the reason I continue to work diligently in the field of education. I have both a professional and personal interest in the achievement of boys of color. I am a Jamaican immigrant who has been a beneficiary of the American dream, a teacher of children of color, and a parent of a boy of color. Similar to most parents I want to see my son excel in the American education system in spite of the statistics that show how difficult this can be for boys that look like him. Being a teacher did not prepare me for the range of emotion I felt with entrusting him to a teacher for the first time. My wisdom as an educator does little to soothe my angst when I choose a school for him, or sit in a parent-teacher conference. The questions of “Can I trust my child with this person? And “Will this teacher work to bring out the

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) describes the parent-teacher relationship as crucial and calls the dialogue between them the “essential conversation.”

<sup>5</sup> “Boys of color” is a term utilized in this study to refer to African American (Black), Black Immigrants, and Hispanic (Latino) males.

best in my child”? Often echo in my head. Paradoxically, parents who entrust their children with me are most likely asking themselves the same question. My hope is that this “double consciousness” as both a parent and teacher gave me special insight as I explored the shared knowledge between these two groups.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011, for the first time in history, the majority of babies born in the U.S. are of color (Schott Foundation, 2012). Therefore, in the not too distant future, the viability of our country’s communities, labor force and democracy will largely be shaped and predicated on the opportunities we provide for children of color (Schott Foundation, 2012). Most indicators of academic achievement suggest that, as a group, boys of color are struggling. These indicators are varied and show that there is a significant gap in achievement between Latino & Black males as compared to Whites and Asians (Schott Foundation, 2012; The College Board, 2010; Noguera, 2009).

Black & Latino males are disproportionately placed in remedial classes, expelled and disciplined (Boute 1999; Collegeboard 2010; Washington & Newman, 1991). Alarming, the Black male high school graduation rate in 2010 was 52%, while Latino males graduated at a rate of 58% (Schott Foundation, 2012). These troubling statistics illustrate an absence of opportunity in the educational arena and therefore economic self-sufficiency. This is not an isolated issue that only has relevance for minority communities. Failure to address the issues of Black and Latino males in schools has implications for the nation as a whole. Lost educational opportunities potentially equals lost earning power, lost innovation, and ultimately lost human capital.

The educational disparities that exist between Black and Latino males and their White

counterparts in education are glaring and directly affect their future degree attainment, career opportunities, and overall life trajectories (The College Board, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2012). In response to these disparities national, state, and local school reforms have emerged. In 2014, President Obama launched the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative that addresses the gaps in opportunity that boys of color face. One aim of the initiative is to provide boys of color supports that can assist in their educational upward mobility. It is increasingly important for educators, parents, and policymakers to understand these gaps in achievement between dominant and marginalized groups, such as boys of color. Specifically, elements of the schooling experience for boys of color, that contribute to the creation and maintenance of those gaps warrants exploration. The role of teachers and parents and the dialogue between the two groups is one such element. Collaboration between parents and teachers, two stakeholders in the education of students of color, is directly tied to positive educational achievement (DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho, 2005; Kim, 2009; Angell et al., 2009). A growing body of work has focused on communication between parents and teachers, parent and teacher perception, and boys of color and their educational process. While this research sheds light on each topic, there is a dearth of research that addresses these topics simultaneously, especially as it relates to the critical middle school grades.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined parents’ and teachers’ shared knowledge regarding their middle school sons of color. Exploring the shared knowledge and communication between parents of boys of color and teachers shed light on factors that could mitigate the challenges that engulf the educational experience of this group. A secondary purpose of this study was to examine relationships between parents and teachers of boys of color. A middle school was chosen



because it is during these formative middle school years that the academic and social path a boy of color chooses counts, middle school outcomes are a significant predictor of their future success in school. Heller et al.'s (2014) review of middle school research, lists creating a supportive climate and parental involvement as a best practice for all middle school students. The authors also propose that more research is needed on how to bolster parent participation and parent-teacher communication. The relationship between teachers and parents of boys of color has a strong effect on the path the student chooses and therefore his educational trajectory.

This study explored teachers' and parents' perceptions of each other, beliefs about creating and maintaining a relationship, and overall shared knowledge between the two groups. The research also attempted to unpack middle school teachers' and parents' perceptions about their relationships with each other and what each party articulates as challenges and opportunities for shared knowledge/understanding of their (respective) son's/students academics, engagement, and behavior. The following overarching research question and sub questions guided this work:

1. What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?
  - a. What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?
  - b. What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?

## **Study Design**

The methodology was qualitative in nature and the intent in conducting this case study was to describe, interpret, and explain the shared knowledge between these stakeholders at an urban school of color. Consistent with case study methodology, data for the study was collected through a variety of methods including a demographic survey, individual semi-structured

interviews, and focus groups. Study participants were seven parents and seven teachers of boys of color. The study design was also influenced by Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2003) work that focused on the exchange between teachers and parents. Lawrence-Lightfoot employed qualitative methodology, she interviewed parents and teachers and observed parent-teacher conferences. This study differs from Lawrence-Lightfoot's work in sample size, duration, and its focus on boys of color.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Four frameworks were selected to design the conceptual lens for the study. They include: Keyes (2000) theoretical framework for parent-teacher partnerships, Angell, Shelden & Stoner (2009) perspectives on trust in educational professionals, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Latino (a) Critical Theory (LatCrit). Each perspective added important factors useful for understanding the shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. Drawing on these perspectives (Keyes' framework, Angell et al. perspectives, CRT, and LatCrit) I developed on a conceptual model called "Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model." Moreover, this study's design was informed by an extensive review of the literature in the areas of minority parent and teacher perception, parent-teacher interactions, and boys of color and their educational experiences.

### **Research Site**

My research site is Lakecrest Middle School,<sup>6</sup> a comprehensive public school serving 879 students in grades 6 through 8. The school is located in a mid-Atlantic state in Berry County,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For purposes of anonymity the name of the school has been changed.

<sup>7</sup> For purposes of anonymity the name of the county has been changed.

one of the most affluent counties in the United States. With a median household income of \$92,000, Berry County is the second richest county per capita in the state. However, the majority of the students at Lakecrest do not come from families that enjoy the same level of affluence as the rest of the county, this is reflected in the high percentage of F.A.R.M.S students. Approximately 52.2% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch (*Berry schools at a glance*). The ethnic/racial composition of the school is more diverse in contrast to the county overall, which is predominantly White (Table 1.1). Special programs in the school include an English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) program serving less than 5% of the student population and 10.6 % of the students receive Special Education services. The teaching staff at Lakecrest is predominantly White and female. Sixty one percent of the teachers at Lakecrest are White, 35% are Black, and 2% are Hispanic.

Boys of color make up about 76% of the male population at Lakecrest and show a need for support in several in several areas (Table 1.2). The administration has created special programs in hopes of improving the group's test scores. At the time of the study a principal new to Berry County, Dr. Mason, headed Lakecrest.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Mason, a Black male, started "Men of Tomorrow" a mentoring program for boys of color. In spite of that program at others many boys of color are still seemingly sinking academically at Lakecrest. It is too soon to know the potential impact of the programs put in place for boys of color at Lakecrest, who urgently need assistance in achieving their academic potential. The academic gap between them and their White counterparts are widening. Although being both a teacher and school leader in Berry

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<sup>8</sup> Pseudonym.

County provides me with some insider access, it will also raises possible limitations discussed in the methodology.

*Table 1.1 Lakecrest/Berry County Middle Schools Comparison Chart*

<b>Racial/Ethnic Composition</b>	<b>Lakecrest</b>	<b>Berry County</b>
Asian	10.6%	14.9%
Black	61.0%	20.7%
Hispanic	16.8%	26.8%
White	6.3%	32.6%
MU (Multi-Ethnic)	5.2%	<5.0%

Berry County Schools At A Glance

*Table 1.2 Boys of Color at Lakecrest –Honor Roll at a Glance*

	<b>White Males</b>	<b>Black Males</b>	<b>Hispanic Males</b>	<b>Asian Males</b>	<b>Multi-Ethnic Males</b>
<b>Total % male population</b>	5%	59%	17%	15%	4%
<b>Honor Roll Quarter 2 2015-2016</b>	61%	28%	28%	64%	55%

*Table 1.3 Boys of Color at Lakecrest –MAP Tests at a Glance*

	<b>White Males</b>	<b>Black Males</b>	<b>Hispanic Males</b>	<b>Asian Males</b>	<b>Multi-Ethnic Males</b>
<b>Total % male population</b>	5%	59%	17%	15%	4%
<b>Met Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)-Reading Proficiency (MAP-R) county benchmark. Fall 2016 Proficiency Rates &gt;202 Advanced &gt;218</b>	73%	60%	56%	82%	75%

Met Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)-Math Proficiency (MAP-M) county benchmark. Fall 2016	57%	34%	24%	78%	Not Avail.
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Lakecrest School Database

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study draws from a broad literature base to address the complexities of boys of color and shared knowledge between their parents and teachers. Literature was reviewed in the field of education focusing on minority students, their parents, and relationships with teachers. The literature was selected according to the following criteria: a) literature specifically focused on minority parents and their involvement in their students' education, perceptions of teachers, and relationships with teachers; b) teacher perceptions of minority parents or parent involvement was the main focus; c) information about parent-teacher interactions was included; and/or (d) boys of color were included or served as the principal focus. Both qualitative and quantitative studies published between 2000 and 2012 were utilized in order to ground my work in the most recent literature.

“Shared knowledge,” as applied in this paper, is defined broadly as an activity through which information and expertise is exchanged. In this study, “Boys of color” is a term used to denote both African American/Black immigrant (Black) and Hispanic (Latino) males.

Additionally, parent-teacher interactions refer to communication between both teachers and parents concerning students. In this section, I addressed the following questions: What have researchers found as central to the educational experiences and outcomes of boys of color? What themes emerge about teachers' perception of minority parents? How do minority parents perceive teachers? What are recurring themes in the literature concerning minority parents and

teachers? What conclusions can be drawn from the extant literature about the shared knowledge between parents of boys of color and teachers after analyzing issues specific to that population and perceptions/interactions between the two stakeholders?

I will begin by setting a context for the broader issue of the achievement of boys of color, and the importance of studying this group's educational experiences. An extensive examination of the factors that impact the academic success of boys of color, including their experiences and relationships with teachers follows. I will then review the literature on minority parent and teacher perception, followed by an examination of the literature on teacher-parent interactions. Implications from the research for this study are provided along with questions that emerged from the analysis of the literature. Lastly, I will interrogate the literature to situate how this study potentially fills a gap in the current literature.

### **Boys of Color & Their Educational Experiences**

These unconscionable outcomes for these young boys and men are not reflective of their potential nor their abilities- but a direct result of denying them equitable supports and resources they need to be fully engaged and succeed.

John H. Jackson, President of Schott Foundation for Public Education (Schott Foundation 2012)

Boys of color are underrepresented on (all or most) indicators associated with success, whereas they are overrepresented on most indicators that show failure. The College Board Advocacy Report (2010) is one of many reports and special groups that have addressed the plight of boys of color in the past decade. The Schott report notes that there are not only "Two Americas," one characterized by both wealth and opportunity and the other by social and economic strife, but there is also a "third America" that is almost totally ignored by mainstream society. This third America is often portrayed in popular television documentaries and newspaper and other media and includes statistics about unemployment, poverty, police

brutality, and high rates of incarceration. According to the Schott report, the “third America’s” citizens are primarily men, and mostly men of color that live outside of the margins of our social, cultural, and economic systems. Some of these men may be disenfranchised by criminal records or undocumented status. Moreover, citizens of the “third America” are, “the byproduct of many societal failures — including the failure of our nation’s schools” (p. 2). Despite some progress in recent years, the United States is facing an educational challenge that is most particularly acute for boys of color. The Schott report also asserts that if current demographic and educational attainment trends continue for youth of color, the overall educational level of the American workforce will possibly decline (p. 2). Trends in research during the last two decades support the findings of this report and reveal persistent gaps in the educational pipeline among boys of color and their counterparts (The College Board, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2012).

Several key themes emerged from the literature review that pertained to the educational experiences and outcomes of boys of color. Researchers included the connection of families to academics/experiences that shape the experiences of boys of color in elementary and secondary education, thereby providing the students’ academic foundation. The experiences and relationships formed with teachers are also an integral part of this foundation. The following section will briefly review the literature on boys of color with an emphasis on their educational experiences. The literature examined is from not only the field of education, but different disciplines including sociology and biology. The following topics related to family characteristics and academic abilities and experiences are examined: 1) family structure 2) income 3) social & cultural capital 4) teacher expectations 5) academic disengagement, 6) teachers and diverse learners 7) role models in schools, and the 8) “push out” & 9) “lock out” crisis.

## **Family Characteristics**

**Structure.** Parents are an integral part of their children's educational experiences and trajectories. They provide the emotional and financial support for students. According to Kids Count data (2013) only 33 percent of African American children live in a two-parent household. Thus two-thirds of African American children are living in one-parent households, which are usually female headed. Researchers have found a direct effect between family structure and students' educational experiences. Comparatively, 42 percent of Latino children live in single-parent households, a stark contrast to the 25 percent of white children living in similarly situated homes. For disciplining children, helping them with homework, and other reasons, the availability of a parent in the home has a direct correlation with educational achievement (Epstein 2010). With one parent it can be difficult to participate fully in a child's education. Thus, the structure of the family affects a child's education in numerous ways; availability, role modeling, and income are noted among the most important. Epstein (2010) found that single parents reported significantly more often than married parents that they spent more time assisting their children with homework but still did not have the "time and energy" to do what they believed the teacher expected. Not surprisingly, married parents were found to spend significantly more days in the school as volunteers, as classroom helpers, and at PTA meetings than single parents in this study.

**Income (SES).** Single parent households tend to fall into lower socioeconomic levels because they have only one income. If the single parent does not have a college education this can negatively affect the household's economic status. For both dual and single parent households, it is important to note that the average income for African American families in the United States is \$32,068, and for Latino families it is \$37, 759. For White families the average



income is \$54, 620 ("Income, expenditures, poverty," 2013). Black families have a poverty rate of 35 % and Hispanic families 33%, which is significantly higher than White families who have a poverty rate of only 13% ("Income, expenditures, poverty," 2013). Furthermore, according to Knapp & Woolverton social class and education are interrelated. They assert,

There is an enduring correlation between social class and educational outcomes. It is almost universally true that averages of educational attainment-measured by years in school or the rate of dropping out-and educational achievement-measured by grades and test scores-vary by social class. (Knapp & Woolverton, 2004)

Socioeconomic status affects the education of boys of color in a number of ways. For example, researchers report that SES usually determines not only where they live, but the kind of school they will attend, and the caliber of school you attend unless parent seek magnet programs or other opportunities. The kind of school you attend affects the level at which you are prepared for higher education, whether or not you choose to attend.

**Social/Cultural capital.** Sampson (2002) addresses social and cultural capital when he argues that middle class parents tend to properly prepare their children for educational experiences not because they have more money or greater intelligence, but rather because they have the values, attitudes, and beliefs upon which the experiences in U.S. public schools are based. According to Perna (2000) whose work examines racial and ethnic group differences in college enrollment:

*Social capital* may take the form of information-sharing channels and networks as well as social norms, values, and expected behaviors. *Cultural capital* is the system of factors derived from one's parents that defines individual's class status. Members of the dominant class possess the most economically and symbolically valued kinds of cultural capital. Individuals who lack the required cultural capital may lower their educational aspirations or self-select out of particular

situations because they do not know the particular cultural norms. (p. 74).

Boys of color are less likely to come from families in the dominant class, and thus do not possess what Perna (2000) calls “valued kinds of cultural capital.” This can negatively affect their educational and occupational aspirations. Latino boys, like Black boys do not always have the kind of capital valued in schools. It is important to note that, “An estimated two-thirds of Latinos are either immigrants or the children of immigrants” (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Doucet, 2004, p.420). Additionally, Latinos are settling in unprecedented numbers in highly segregated, deeply impoverished urban settings, and attend the most highly segregated schools of any group in the United States today (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Doucet, 2004). This low socioeconomic status among a large number of Latinos, coupled with language and cultural differences, negatively affect Latino boys’ access to the kind of capital valued in schools.

### **Academic Abilities & Experiences**

Many boys of color are disadvantaged very early on in their educational careers. Torres & Fergus (2012) argue that Latino children continue to be woefully underserved in the early years of childhood as they are less likely than their White and Black peers to attend a preschool program due in part to limited access to programs, low socioeconomic status, language barriers, and maternal education levels. Ladson Billings (2006) addresses how property is linked to how much power one has and the education one receives (p. 6). Scarce resources tend to get allocated to the students whose parents, advocates, and representatives have the most political clout and power. This relationship directly impacts the education of many boys of color.

**Teacher Expectations.** The educational achievement of boys of color cannot be analyzed without also considering the impact and influence of teachers. Boutte (1999) explains, “Teacher expectations have a subtle but powerful effect on students” (p.84). She goes on to

explain that teachers frequently hold lower expectations for children of color, which can be attributed to what teachers have learned, often erroneously, about students' ethnic groups from society. Teachers also hold lower expectations for children from lower socioeconomic groups, which includes students who do not speak Standard English. These three factors put some boys of color at a disadvantage. Furthermore, low expectations lead to labeling, which results in many minority students being placed in remedial classes. This creates an unrelenting cycle of underperformance for boys of color that is directly linked to the low expectations of teachers. Students' expectations for their own successes correlates with both teacher feedback and students' histories of successes or failures in school settings. This phenomenon has been examined in the courts. Moreover, the disproportionate placing of minorities in remedial classes has been so conspicuous that courts in several jurisdictions have ruled them to be racially discriminatory (Boutte 1999; Washington and Newman, 1991; Noguera 2009; College Board, 2010; Schott Foundation 2012).

Boys of color are also disciplined, expelled, and suspended at higher rates than are any other group (Washington and Newman, 1991; Collegeboard, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2012; Noguera, 2009; Rios, 2011, Pantoja, 2013). Black males are at greater risk of being disciplined because of stereotypes and because they may also display assertive behaviors. This assertive behavior may be accepted and encouraged at home and in their community, but is seen as negative behavior by teachers (Boutte 1999, Washington and Newman 1991, p.23). The allegation of many Black boys' negative attitudes toward schooling is often a consequence of mistreatment they encounter in the school system (Boutte 1999, Washington and Newman 1991, p.23). All these negative factors impede many boys of color from connecting with the educational process.

**Academic Disengagement.** Academic engagement can be defined as, “student’s sense of connection with academics and his or her valuing of academics and related outcomes” (Macmillian, 2003, p.27). Researchers use several different terms when addressing academic engagement and disengagement. Some terms used for *engagement* are valuing and identification. The terms devaluing and dis-identification are used for *disengagement*. The academic engagement model contends that:

- a) poor school performance (e.g. low grade point average) leads to b) an impaired view (e.g., academic self-concept) and c) subsequent opposition to the academic environment (e.g., outcomes such as completing fewer years of school, dropping out, and choosing an unchallenging curriculum)
- (Macmillan, 2003).

Major & Billson (1992) argued that black male students are particularly vulnerable to academic disengagement (p.72). The authors cite research done by Steele, Graham, Taylor & Hudley, and Rodkin to support this claim. It has also been found that black male students are more likely to respect their low-achieving male counterparts.

**Teachers and Diverse Learners.** The schooling process, in many ways, inhibits the performance of boys of color, including access to quality teaching. Teacher researcher Darling-Hammond (2003) states, “Minority and low-income students in urban settings are most likely to find themselves in a classroom staffed by an inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill qualified teachers” (p. 613). High quality teachers and strong academic performance are highly correlated (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Several studies find that much of the difference in school achievement between African Americans and others is due to the effects of substantially different school opportunities, in particular access to high quality teachers and teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p.613).

Hargrove & Seay's (2011) research explored whether teachers felt that non-school-related or school-related factors served as barriers that limited the number of African American males from participating in gifted programs. The authors identified school experiences and the disapproving mindsets of some teachers and administrators as contributing to negative outcomes for some African American students. Additionally, they argue that the inability of some teachers to recognize gifted characteristics in black males has been related to racist predispositions and socioeconomic biases. They offer that other studies have demonstrated teachers were more likely to nominate White students than Black and Hispanic students for gifted education participation. The authors quote Hyland, "Teachers are often well-intentioned but unaware of their racist points of view." Hargrove & Seay (2011) also contend that teachers are often unwitting agents of racism when they insist the standard U.S. curriculum is race neutral, spoon feeds rather than challenges their students' academic capabilities, and are not alarmed at data demonstrating an overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. The authors suggest that teacher behaviors such as those described above are manifestations of deficit thinking.

The most striking finding from Hargrove & Seay (2011) was the difference of opinion between White and minority teachers on the major contributors to Black male students' educational disengagement. For White teachers, the major sources of concern existed outside of the schools. Drawing upon Hyland's (2005) work, the authors note that this finding is not surprising. Even for teachers who described themselves as good teachers of Black students, "Hyland found it nearly impossible for them to recognize racism within their commentary concerning the need to water down the curriculum for Black students or the students' need for teachers to be caretakers rather than instructional deliverers" (pg. 5).

**Role Models in Schools.** For some boys of color there are few if any positive role models in their lives. This begins in the home with two thirds living in female-headed households, and is also very evident in the school system. The Children’s Defense Fund (2011) found that 17 percent of public school students are African American, but less than two percent of teachers are African American males. According to the 2012 report “Challenge the Status Quo,” Black and Latino male teachers together make up a little over 3 percent of the K-12 teaching force, which is disproportionate to the amount of Black and Latino male students (approximately 17 percent) occupying classroom seats. The dominance of females in the education system diminishes the number of role models in schools for boys of color. Boutte (1999) also addresses this issue when he writes that, “the presence of culturally familiar role models, both in person and in printed materials or textbooks, impacts the cognitive learning of all students” (p.183).

**“Push-out Crisis.”** Statistics show that in today’s schools, Black and Brown students have fewer learning opportunities, and on average spend more days out of school than any other group (Gilliam, 2005). The “push out” crisis is used to describe the disproportionate number of Black and Latino males who are not in school receiving the sufficient learning time that would allow them the opportunity to succeed. One of the main contributors to the increase in their out-of-school and decreased learning time is state and district approaches to discipline (Schott Report, 2012). Black preschool boys are more likely to be expelled from preschool than are White boys (Gilliam, 2005; Scott Report 2012). As a group they are also more likely to be expelled from both elementary and secondary school (Gilliam, 2005; Scott Report 2012). This disproportionate use of out of school suspension for Latino and Black children is the first step to pushing them out of school and therefore lowering their chances to graduate. One reason offered

is insufficient cultural competence training at colleges and universities. To effectively educate boys of color, teachers need a deeper understanding of cultural norms and values in addition to their knowledge of content. Ray (2011) points out that teachers often react to boys of color with an emotionally distant or overly punitive approach, which exacerbates the push out crisis.

**“Lock-out” Crisis.** The Schott Foundation (2010) describes the “lock out” crisis as young people who are in schools, but lack access to the critical resources and supports needed to have a substantive opportunity to learn. Research indicates that Black and Latino males are locked out of several important resources. These include both sufficient and quality early childhood education; student centered learning, well-resourced community schools, gifted/talented and advanced placement opportunities, and post-secondary attainment opportunities (Schott Foundation, 2011). Using U.S. Department of Education data from 2000 to 2006, Torres & Fergus (2012) found that Latino males were suspended and classified with a learning disability at slightly higher percentages than white males. Another alarming finding was nearly double the percentage of White males were in talented and gifted programs when compared to Latino males; this is significant because participation in such programs provides a student with access to rigorous curricula (Torres & Fergus, 2012). This becomes problematic for students because those placed in lower tracks are typically exposed to a more limited, “rote-oriented” curriculum; ultimately, these students achieve less than students of similar aptitude who are in more rigorous classes. Patterns of limited academic performance and attainment result in few Latino males over 18 years old achieving educational distinction and consequently upward mobility. This lack of educational upward mobility is also reflected in a 2009 population survey of 16 million Latino males 18 years and over, which found that only about 30 percent were high school graduates and less than 10 percent were college graduates (Torres & Fergus,

2012). The gaps between boys of color and their White and Asian counterparts are pervasive and Hunter and Bartee (2003) offer compelling reasons for seeking to eliminate them, the particularly human capital loss in productivity of the U.S. economy (p.157). They also note that, “The maintenance of a humane and harmonious society depends to a considerable degree on minorities’ reaching educational parity with whites” (p.157). “Locking” boys of color out of access to educational resources has a negative impact on not only minority communities, but the nation as a whole.

### **Minority Parent Perception Literature**

“Parents are expected to act as buffers, liaisons, and advocates for their children, protecting and advancing their children’s rights to participate in school programs and receive needed social, health, and educational services. Some families neither understand nor perform these responsibilities.” Joyce Epstein

In this section I review studies that examine the nature of how parents are perceived by teachers, with an emphasis on minority parents. Though different in focus and findings, all of these studies contributed to understanding how minority parents are perceived, and some helped to illuminate how these perceptions play out in parent-teacher interactions.

**Teacher perception of parents of color.** A recurring theme in parent perception literature is that less educated and minority parents do not want to become or cannot become involved in their children’s education (Huss-Keeler 1997, DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho 2005, Lopez 2002, Kim 2009, Tomez 2004). Conversely, Huss-Keeler’s (1997) ethnographic study finds that ESL parents were very interested in their children’s learning. The parents in the study demonstrated interest in their children’s education in a culturally different way than middle class parents. Teachers misinterpreted this difference as a lack of interest on the parent’s part, which can also lead to students learning and achievement being underestimated (Huss-Keeler 1997,



Lopez 2002). What results from this perception of poor and minority parents is a harmful myth of their lack of interest in their children's educational process that can negatively affect the parent-teacher relationship and ultimately student success.

DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho's (2005) study examines how teachers view parents and children of diverse cultural groups. The researchers find that "the participants continued to believe that the home and the lack of value that parents place on education were responsible for their student's deficient academic achievement" (p. 45). This finding supports work by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978), who explained that there exists a myth about black and poor parents. The myth that about black and poor parents is further exacerbated by what is defined as a "good" parent in American schools. DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho (2005) offer that a "good" parent is generally defined as those who volunteer in the classroom, fundraise, actively assist with homework and projects, and advocate for their children when necessary. According to Lopez (2002), it is considered presumptuous by most Latino immigrant parents to impose their expectations onto teachers. This distance and respect is counter to the definition of a "good" parent offered by DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho, and may result in teachers developing unfounded and inaccurate judgments of parents.

A literature review conducted by Kim (2009) synthesizes research on barriers that prevent minority parent's participation in their children's schooling. He acknowledges that minority parents are viewed as less involved in their children's schools. He asserts:

When these data are combined with the hierarchical view of parental involvement, it may lead to the misconception that the underachievement of minority children is related their parents' lack of participation in the school. This view has double jeopardy because there is a tendency to assume that parents' lack of participation in the school also means a lack of interest in their children's

education and their participation at home. The truth is that minority parents are no different from their counterparts regarding their interest in their children's education and their participation at home (p. 81).

The perspective offered above ignores the role that school policies, socioeconomic, and socio-demographic barriers can play in fostering parental involvement. Some factors that constrain minority group parents' participation in schools include: a narrow vision of parental involvement, school personnel's negative proclivity, lack of teacher training, pressing employment issues, cultural differences, language barriers, education, low socio-economic status, and lack of bilingual staff (DeCastro-Ambrossetti & Cho 2005, Kim 2009).

**Social & Cultural Capital**<sup>9</sup> . Scholars assert the link between social/cultural capital and parental involvement. Linguistic and cultural competence and a familiarity with styles, tastes, and dispositions of dominant culture are more matched to middle class white parents' beliefs, capacities, and involvement styles (Kim 2009, Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Doucet 2004). Parents who have more cultural capital and resources, such as time, education, communication style, and competence in dealing with the school culture are at an advantage. Therefore their children, more frequently, perform better in school than children from lower SES and ethnic minority groups (Kim 2009; Tomez, 2004). For example, Stanton-Salazar (2001) found that while low income Mexican immigrant parents highly valued educational success for their children, few of them really understood their children's school experiences or the role they as parents had in facilitating their children's access to higher education.

Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Doucet (2004) note that Latino parents have high aspirations for their children's education, but are often unable to provide the support that is congruent with American expectations and cultural models. They explain, "many come from traditions that revere school authorities and expect parents to keep a distance from the day-to-day workings of their child's education. This stands in sharp contrast to U.S. expectations of parental involvement" (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Doucet, 2004, p. 431). Lack of knowledge and participation is at the core of a widespread belief that some minority parents are apathetic and "don't care" about their children's education (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Douchet 2004). Boys of color are at a disadvantage if their parent/guardians do not possess the valued kinds of

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<sup>9</sup> *Social capital* may take the form of information-sharing channels and networks as well as social norms, values, and expected behaviors. *Cultural capital* is the system of factors derived from one's parents that defines individual's class status. Members of the dominant class possess the most economically and symbolically valued kinds of cultural capital (Perna, 2000).

social/cultural capitals when they interact with the school system. Kim (2009) offers that, “Since children whose parents share the same values as the school system are perceived by teachers as having advanced academic skills and brighter academic futures, again social class can be reproduced by the school system” (p. 82). Reproduction of society’s class structure by the educational system can negatively affect the relationship between parents and teachers of boys of color.

### **Teacher Perception Literature**

“Literature describes [teachers] as—assumes them to be—neutral unemotional and static adults with no interior life, no phantoms from the past, no ambivalence, and no fears.” Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

This section of the paper relies heavily on Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s work *The Essential Conversation* as her study focused on teachers and how they perceive parents as well as how parents perceive them.

**Parent View/Perception of Teacher.** Parents of children at all grade levels respond favorably to teachers’ practices that stress the cooperation and overlap of schools and families (Epstein 2010). Epstein (2010) found that teachers who include the family in the student’s education are recognized by parents for their effort. They are also rated higher by parents than are other teachers on interpersonal and teaching skills, and they are rated higher in overall teaching ability by their principals. There are however clear socio-economic divides on what qualities parents value in their perception of “good teachers”. Specifically, parents with less formal education and/or lower incomes are more likely to emphasize teachers’ academic credentials and experience in the classroom, as are Black and Hispanic parents (Elliot & Agiesta,

2013). Parent views of teachers vary based on socio-economic status, however most parents value teachers who include them in their child's educational process.

Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2003) research focuses on the crucial exchange that occurs between parents and teachers. She asserts that the literature describes and assumes teachers to be neutral, unemotional. She goes on to note, "inevitably, teachers embody many of the schools social and cultural traits; they are the human face of the institution, receiving, absorbing, and deflecting the praise and blame" (p. 10). Additionally, "they are expected to be more "adult" than the rest of us, more responsible and constant, less impetuous and erratic. We want them to model for our children the values and norms that ordinary adults rarely enact consistently in our own lives" (p. 12). This view of teachers has an effect on the interactions parents have with them, as well as the parent-teacher relationship.

**Teacher Preparation.** According to several scholars, teachers often reported that they did not feel adequately prepared by their teacher education programs to communicate effectively with parents (DeCastro-Ambrossetti 2005, Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003). Lawrence-Lightfoot found that teachers describe training in which there was no central value put on the importance and complexity of building productive parent-teacher relationships. As a result, teachers felt ill equipped to face what the author calls the "most vulnerable" part of their work, building relationships with parents.

### **Parent-Teacher Interactions**

"In this ritual [parent-teacher conference], so friendly and benign in its apparent goals, parents and teachers are racked with high anxiety. In this scene marked decorum, politeness, and symbolism, they exhibit gestures of wariness and defensiveness. In this dialogue where the conversation appears to be

focused on the child, adults often play out their own childhood histories, their own insecurities, and their own primal fears.” Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

This section reviews literature that outlines challenges teachers and parents face when they try to collaborate. Literature that explains the ideal communication between the two parties is also examined. While the studies do not use the term “shared knowledge,” they do inform the concept.

**Power Dynamics.** Parent-teacher communication is bound by silent rules of discourse, and often the teacher is viewed as authority (Lasky, 2000). In parent-teacher communication, the teacher is often in control, choosing topics of discussion, dominating the interaction, and talking about students from their perspective (Epstein 2010, Lasky 2000, Bernhard & Freire 1999). Lasky (2000) explores how power, culture, and sense of purpose impact the emotions of teachers in her research. She discusses notions of teacher professionalism that are built primarily on the idea of “teacher-as-expert.” She suggests that many of these influences have created symbolic and actual separation between parents and teachers in relation to schooling.

Bernhard & Freire (1999) affirm Lasky’s research when they find that a combination of fear and a cultural tendency to defer to the authority of teachers often prevented parents from asking clarifying questions. Epstein (2010) also addresses this notion of power by offering that teachers are in a position of power in teacher-parent relationships as they control the flow of information to parents, “by limiting or reducing communications and collaborative activities, teachers reinforce the boundaries that separate the two institutions. By increasing communications, teachers acknowledge and build connections between institutions to focus on the common concerns of teachers and parents” (p. 50). Communication is one of the barriers involving power that can stall parent-teacher relationships. Teachers and parents sometimes can

feel confused, powerless, and misunderstood as a result of their interactions with each other, these feelings are exacerbated when power is not shared between both parties.

**Role of cultural and social capital in interactions.** Howard & Lipinoga's (2010) ongoing ethnographic project analyzes communication and miscommunication through the lens of pretextuality. Pretextuality, according to these researchers, highlights the conditions of communication between social actors who bring diverse expectations (evaluations) and knowledge (communicative resources) to the tasks of knowing and producing what is required and hence will be recognized as meaningful in institutional encounters. The researchers contend that communication is particularly crucial in diverse classrooms, where teachers and families may bring unequally valued cultural resources and perspectives to the task of educating the child.

One major finding of Howard & Lipinoga's study was that families had unequal access to the communicative resources that would facilitate the exercise of their agency and their voice in encounters with teachers. Essentially, inequality in a society is often reproduced in these parent and teacher encounters. Examining miscommunication in these encounters through the lens of pretextuality allowed the researchers to explore the conditions of inequality. Howard & Lipinoga provide suggestions, such as raising teachers' awareness of their own socially positioned knowledge. They also suggest exploring teacher expectations about parent-teacher encounters; especially expectations about how to act in different phases of interaction that might help teachers build on parents' contributions, even when they seem out of place. The researchers note that these expectations seemed to underlie the teachers' (and perhaps previous researchers') theories that Latino parents' relative silence could be explained primarily in terms of deference toward the teachers, whereas from the families' perspectives, the teachers' behavior was understood as rushed or dismissive.

In parent-teacher communications, a difference in communication style could negatively affect the parent-teacher relationship. It cannot be assumed that parents' and teachers' understandings of terms are congruent. Hidalgo, Sau-Fong & Epstein (2004). Explain that parents want more specific and useful information regarding how they can instruct their children. The authors offer the following recommendation based on their assessment of the literature, "Schools need to structure opportunities in which teachers and parents can develop rapport and trust, share their expectations of children, and create partnerships" (p. 638). Hidalgo, Sau-Fong & Epstein also specify that Latino parents benefit from personal outreach, non-judgmental communication, and respect for parents' culture.

Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2003) *The Essential Conversation* devotes a chapter to inequalities and entitlements and how they affect how parent and teacher mutual perception of each other. She notes that at one end of the spectrum there are privileged parents who bring the power of money, status, and influence to school with their children. "Their expectations are high, their demands rigorous and their sense of entitlement assumed" (p. 25). At the other end are the poor parents, often parents of color or newly arrived immigrants, who feel uncomfortable coming to school or approaching their child's teacher. This group tends to see the teacher as the ultimate authority and rarely question his/her judgment. While affluent parents' behavior toward teachers is characterized by frequent aggressive encounters and fierce, determined, advocacy; on the other hand poor parents appear withdrawn, uncomfortable, and passive. For both sets of parents the anger they feel, for example, when schools do not live up to their expectations and produce the results they want, becomes evident in their dialogues with teachers, who are viewed as the school's gatekeepers.



Several scholars found that teachers were more comfortable with parents who filled a related set of expectations in line with their value systems. Lasky (2000) address this and finds that teachers sometimes felt demoralized, angry and discouraged with parents who did not fulfill this set of expectations and values. Lasky also noted that teachers had a tendency to “other” parents, to judge and classify them according to a range of normality. Teachers applied these norms to all parents regardless of socioeconomic and marital status. For example, single parents were often seen as not caring for their children (Lasky, 2000). Lasky also explains that these negative judgments and classifications of parents were often a result of teachers feeling that parents challenged their purposes and caring ideals by questioning their expertise, by failing to support their discipline practices, or rearing children according to standards and values that differed from those of the school.

**Trust.** In two exploratory studies, Adams & Christenson (1998, 2000) explored the role of trust in parent-teacher relationships. The researchers focused on levels of trust between parents and teachers and how income, and ethnicity affect those levels of trust. The authors offer the following definition of trust, “Confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship to achieve positive outcomes for students” (p. 6). Adams & Christenson (1998) hypothesize that the limited contact between parents and teachers often causes the relationship to remain stalled at the lowest level, predictability. In this stage parents and teachers continually search for behaviors as evidence of the other person being trustworthy.

Adams & Christenson found that parents displayed higher levels of trust than teachers. One explanation for this finding is that parents have more at stake personally than teachers. Parents, “place their children’s education in the hands of a stranger, which requires trust that

teachers or the institution is capable of successfully completing the task” (p. 15). Another finding was that trust and level of involvement might mutually support each other, with more parent involvement leading to increased trust and increased trust leading to more parent involvement. Another study by Adams & Christenson (2000) yielded the following findings: improving home school communication was identified as a primary way to enhance trust, and the perceived quality of family-school interaction was a better predictor of trust than the frequency of contact or demographic variables.

**Unpacking identity.** In Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2003) *The Essential Conversation* she discusses what she has dubbed “ghosts in the classroom.” These ghosts refer to the past of both teachers and parents. She suggests that every time parents and teachers encounter one another in the classroom, their conversations are shaped by their own autobiographical stories and by the broader cultural and historical narratives that inform their identities, values, and sense of place in the world. Lawrence-Lightfoot believes that communication between parents and teachers is enhanced when there is an awareness of this “subterranean content,” when the adults begin to understand the forces within them and around them that shape their views of one another, their perceptions of the child and the values they attach to education. She contends that this subtext should be seen as a legitimate and critical piece of the parent-teacher dialogue.

Lawrence-Lightfoot refers to sociologist Waller’s (1932) classic work on teachers where he describes parents and teachers as “natural enemies.” Waller noted that tensions arise from the different functions and roles teachers and parents play in the lives of children. Parents, he claimed, have a particularistic relationship with their children, where the bond is deeply passionate and individualistic. They speak from a “position of intimacy, advocacy, and protection for their child.” Teachers, on the other hand, have a more distant and dispassionate

relationship with students. “They work hard to find a balance between responding to the needs and capacities of individual students and supporting the development of a classroom community in which children learn to be responsible and accountable to the group” (p. 43). Lawrence-Lightfoot describes Waller’s parent vs. teacher adversarial scenario as follows:

In other words, when parents plead with the teacher to be fair to their child, they are usually asking for special consideration for their youngster. They want the teacher to consider the unique struggles and strengths of their child and offer a differentiated response. But when teachers talk about being “fair” to everyone, they mean giving equal amounts of attention, judging everyone by the same objective, universal standards, and using explicit and public criteria for making judgments. Fairness, for teachers, ensures a more rational, ordered, and dispassionate classroom. Inevitably, said Waller, these differences in perspective produce conflicts and distrust—often masked and oblique—between parents and teachers, even though both would claim that they are laboring with “the best interest of the child” foremost in their minds (p. 44).

Lawrence-Lightfoot describes Waller’s notion of “natural enemies” as both overly cynical and piercingly honest. Her position is that the relationship is complex, one in which a wrong move or careless step could lead to misunderstanding and distrust. On the other hand the right words can lead to deeper understanding and mutual appreciation.

Of the communication between parent and teacher that lead to breakdown Lawrence-Lightfoot writes that, “they are all defined by a lack of empathy, a disrespect for the others role and perspective, and imbalance of knowledge, authority, and power” (p. 49). Lawrence-Lightfoot notes that when there is asymmetry between parents and teachers, it is difficult for the conversation to be productive. This can happen when teachers are made to feel like “the hired help” by powerful and influential parents. Similarly raw feelings result when teachers flaunt their status, withhold information, and infantilize parents.

## **Conclusion**

This section provides a conclusion to the examination of shared knowledge between teachers and parents of boys of color. I will draw some conclusions regarding the capacity of the various bodies of literature analyzed to shed light on shared knowledge between parents and teachers. I will also present a set of questions that emerged as I conducted my analysis. Finally, I will discuss areas for possible future research.

Each body of literature illuminates different aspects of the conversation on shared knowledge between teachers and boys of color. The literature on males of color was especially helpful in understanding the groups' unique struggles in the educational system. These struggles can be mitigated through the parents and teachers, forming the type of relationship depicted in Ray Lingenfelter's poem. While boys of color would benefit from this type of relationship, the literature illuminates potential obstacles to the formation of the relationship.

Several issues emerged from the literature on boys of color strongly influencing their experiences and outcomes. Attempts to close the achievement gap over three decades have not fully succeeded because White and Asian students achievement and scores have also increased (Education Trust, 2003). Troubling statistics and the realities they reflect mar their educational experience and can prove devastating for their future trajectories. Specifically as it relates to teachers, the relationships between teachers and boys of color can impede their connection to the educational process or assist them in becoming more academically engaged. Having teachers that are not only highly qualified but those that hold high expectations is ideal. Additionally those teachers need to be reflective and know themselves in relation to students, including boys of color.

The literature on minority parent perception literature yielded many themes that related

directly to the idea of shared knowledge between the groups. For example, the idea of home-school culture compatibility, social/cultural capital, and the notion of responsibility for parent-teacher relationships. That body of literature also helped to demystify many of the myths of minority parents “not caring” about relationships with teachers. Similarly the literature on teacher perception explored ideas such as power, authority, and conflict suggesting that they were inevitable in parent-teacher relationships. The information gleaned from the parent interaction literature was the most useful in informing my understanding of shared knowledge as it related to the two groups. Parents and teachers of boys of color could benefit from interaction, according to the research where empathy and respect exist and when each party is seen as a valued contributor.

The work of numerous scholars addresses the myth about minority, poor, or uneducated parents. At the center of this myth is the misconception that some parents do not want to become or cannot become involved in their children’s education. Minority parents do not always fit middle class White criteria of a “good” parent (one that can volunteer in the classroom, assist with homework, fundraise, and advocate) and often subsequently classified as parents that do not value education. Not having the valued kinds of social/cultural capital and tools that are valued in American school systems often leads to the negative perception of minority parents that pervades the literature. While the negative perception of minority parents is one of the themes that emerge from the literature, the voices of under privileged parents is rarely presented despite examples of minority and poor parents who have organized and fought individually and collectively for their children’s rights. One very clear theme that is present in the literature is the lack of preparation teachers feel in dealing with parents. In terms of interactions between

minority parents and teachers, power dynamics and trust are central. Social and cultural capital affects these interactions as does the parents and teachers own individual experiences.

While conducting this review I was left with a number of questions, for example with so many pieces to this puzzle, where do we start? The literature on boys of color defines the problem as historical, economic, social, and influenced by race. The literature on perception of both parent and teachers adds the nature of relationships between the stakeholders, and their role in the educational trajectories of these males, to the puzzle. With this newfound information another set of questions emerged-how do teachers and parents facilitate the type of relationship they want with each other in order to better serve this group? What could the students themselves offer to the conversation?

Researching scholarship on boys of color and teachers was difficult because there were few studies that addressed both topics simultaneously. There was information available on boys of color and information on teachers, but I was unable to find research that linked the two together. While studies have considered boys of color and their educational experiences, few have addressed how teachers play a role in that experience. Even fewer have explored how parent's relationships with teachers play a role in the education of boys of color. The parent perception literature was lacking in that most of the studies were based on parents in general, not parents of color. There is a dearth of information on how parents of students of color and teachers interact; my experience suggests that there is a need for more research to be a conducted in these areas. When viewed together, these bodies of literature string together scholarly understandings of the experiences of boys of color in schools and why shared knowledge between their parents and teachers is a topic that needs further exploration.



## **Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework**

### **“Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model”**

The constructionist epistemology contends that we come to know through interactions and therefore guides this study. This study is grounded in Keyes (2000) framework for parent-teacher partnerships and Angell, Stoner, & Shelden’s (2009) perspectives of mothers regarding trust in education professionals. Aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino (a) Critical Theory (LatCrit) are also integrated to create a conceptual model for understanding parent-teacher communication. The conceptual perspectives I use to guide this study illuminated the roles, values, expectations, communication, and trust play in parent-teacher communications. A brief overview of each theory is provided followed by a summary of how these theories are used as a starting point for creating a lens through which to view shared knowledge in parent-teacher partnerships.

#### **Keyes’ Theoretical Framework for Parent-Teacher Partnerships**

Keyes (2000) proposed a theoretical framework to aid in the enhancement of parent-teacher partnerships. The framework is based on sociologist Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems perspective, Getzel’s social systems perspective, Katz, Hoover- Dempsey’s work on the role of parents, and Epstein’s typology of parental involvement. Keyes (2000) offers this model for use as a way of thinking and visualizing approaches to parent-teacher partnerships. The model offers guidance to teachers when reflecting on past interactions with parents (p.115). By using this framework teachers can view events beyond their own perspectives. Keyes also notes that working within the framework may help teachers (1) consider attitudes about the value of



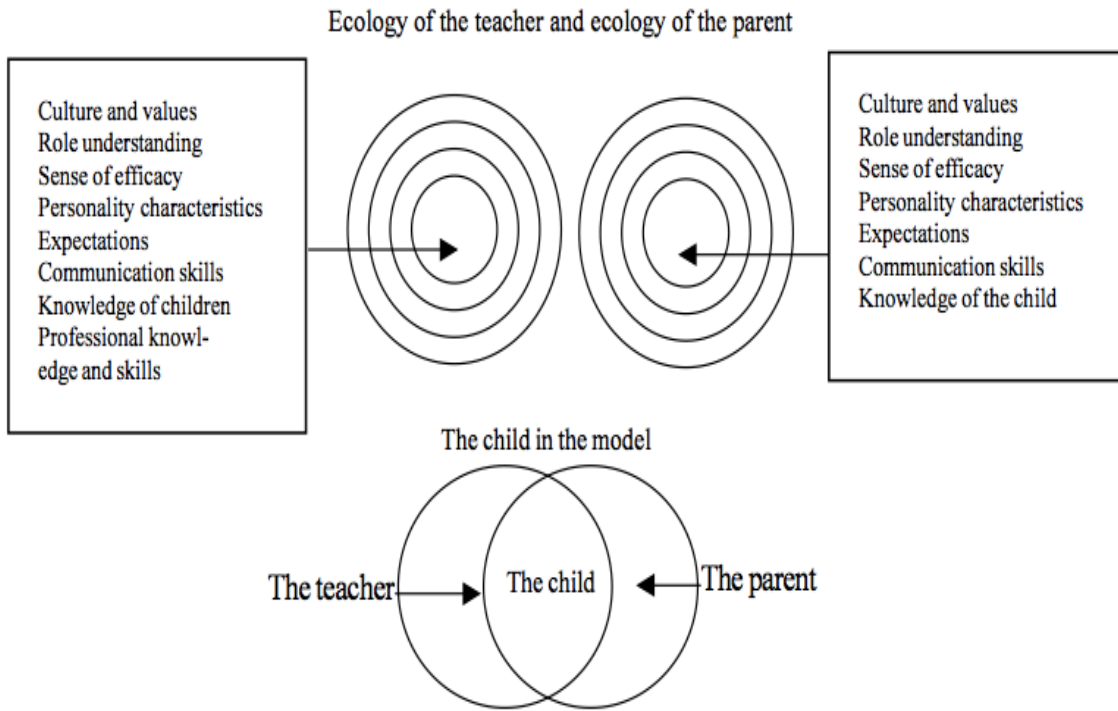
parent-teacher partnerships, (2) the ways those relationships are constructed, and (3) monitor their responses to individual situations.

Keyes' (2000) model places a particular emphasis on the degree of match between teachers' and parents' cultures and values, societal forces at work in family and school, and how both parties view their roles. Keyes integrates research on parent-teacher roles into the Bronfenbrenner model. Keyes's model (Figure 3.1) elucidates all of the qualities a teacher and parent have developed in a microsystem. The inner most circles of the microsystem represent the "teacher as person" or "parent as person" with culture, values, role understanding, sense of efficacy, personality characteristics, expectations, communication skills, and knowledge of the child as essential in building and bridging a partnership between the two. The next circle represents the "mesosystem," where adults and their past experiences interact within school settings. The two outer circles (exosystem and macrosystem) represent societal influences of the workplace, law, customs, and more distant environments. The second piece of the model considers the child's significance, a variable that Keyes describes as "pervasive."

This model is useful for several reasons. First, the model recognizes that parents and teachers are not blank slates when they enter into communication and interaction with each other; demographic backgrounds, educational level, and personalities matter. Keyes explains that in today's mobile world it is less likely that teachers and parents will hold closely matched beliefs and values. This is a pairing that occurs by assignment in which the common interest is the child. The model places necessary emphasis on the complexity of each stakeholder. Finally, the model allows for an examination of the ways that students are affected by the relationship between their teachers and parents. The model does not heavily emphasize trust, social/cultural

capital, and power in the parent-teacher relationship, but is still useful in understanding communication between parents and teachers.

Figure 3.1. Keyes theoretical framework for parent-teacher partnerships (Keyes, 2000)

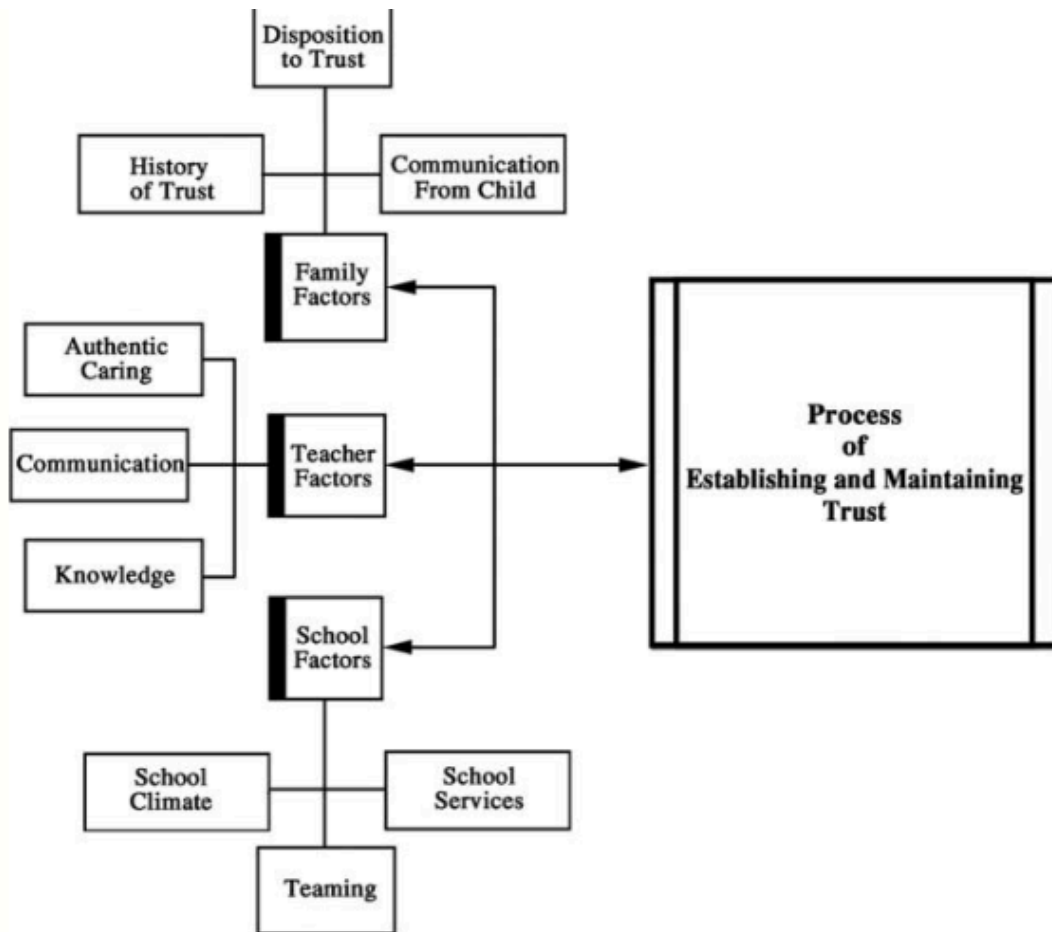


### Angell, Stoner and Shelden (2009) Trust in Educational Professionals

Angell, Stoner, and Shelden (2009) extend research on trust in the family by focusing specifically on the nature of trust between parents of children with disabilities and school personnel. The researchers examined the perspectives of 16 mothers and children with disabilities at all levels of the educational pipeline. The analysis of these perspectives yielded three primary categories that influence trust: family, teacher, and school characteristics (Figure

3.2). The model offered by Angell et al. (2009) offers an example of how to view the development of trust or lack thereof in the creation of relationships between the parents of boys of color and their teachers. This model informs the conceptual framework by helping to elucidate how specific factors individually and interactively affect the establishment and maintenance of trust between the participants.

Figure 3.2. Angell et al. (2009) concept map: *Perspectives of Mothers Regarding Trust in Education Professionals*



### Critical Race Theory & Latino (a) Critical Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) are essential to consider in the education of minority male students because there is a close intersection with race, school,

experiences, and outcomes. Within education literature, Critical Race and Latino Critical theorists argue that the possession of Whiteness and property are connected to everything from test scores to teacher ethnicity (Bernal 2002, Fernandez 2002, Ford & Airhihenbuwa 2010). Solorzano & Yosso (2002) offer that CRT in education is a “framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 25). Similarly, Fernandez (2002) defines LatCrit as a field of legal scholarship that critically examines the social positioning of Latinas/Latinos to help rectify the shortcomings of existing social and legal conditions. She also notes that both CRT & LatCrit prioritize race and class and recognize them not only as social constructions but also categories that have material effects on people.

The three main goals of CRT as outlined by Parker & Lynn (2002) are to (a) present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and in society; (b) argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct; and (c) draw important relationships between race and other axes of domination (p. 10). Bernal (2002) describes CRT and LatCrit as frameworks that “challenge dominant liberal ideas such as colorblindness and meritocracy and show how these ideas operate to disadvantage people of color” (p. 108). He further explains that those working from a CRT & LatCrit perspective understand that education in the United States cannot yet be described as a meritocratic, unbiased, and fair process. Similarly, Ford & Airhihenbuwa (2010) posit that Critical Race Theory is a methodology for helping investigators remain attentive to equity while carrying out research, scholarship, and practice. These two theories can be used to gain a better understanding of the communication between parents and teachers of boys of color.

Race and class are central to both theories and play an integral role in the communication between the two groups. Carrying out this research through CRT and LatCrit lens makes sense when exploring the educational experience of boys and color. Power is central to the discussion of communication between teachers and parents of boys of color as is trust, both of which are affected by race. These theories are particularly germane given that race is a powerful factor in structuring all the participants realities and therefore their interactions.

Table 3.3 Framework for the Study

Theory/Model	Concept & Definition	Shared Knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color Application.
<b>Keyes Framework</b>	The degree of match between teachers' and parents' cultures and values. Teachers' backgrounds affect how they relate to parents. Parents' child rearing practices and values may conflict with those of teachers.	The teachers and parents in the study will be of a different race/ethnic group. Possibly also a different socioeconomic class. These differences can also be associated with different interactional styles, language systems, and values and could present challenges in developing partnerships.
	<p><b>Parents Role Construction.</b> How parents view their role in relation to school.</p> <p><i>Parent focused</i> – parents consider that they have primary responsibility for their children's educational outcomes.</p> <p><i>School focused</i> – parents feel school is primarily responsible.</p> <p><i>Partnership focused</i> – Teacher and parent working together for responsible educational outcome.</p>	Parent participant's role construction and its effect on communication.
	<p><b>Teachers Role Construction.</b></p> <p>How teachers view their role.</p> <p><i>Parent focused</i> – Teachers and parents worked side by side.</p> <p><i>School focused</i> – Teachers believe in an effective separation of roles and functions between home and</p>	Teacher participant's role construction and its effect on communication.

	<p>school.  <i>Partnership focused – Family and school work cooperatively.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Teachers’ &amp; Parents’ Efficacy Beliefs.</b> Teachers and parents who have had successful interactions with each other, observed or heard about others’ successes, and/or felt that efforts were worthwhile are more likely to have a personal sense of efficacy.</p>	<p>Level of participant’s sense of efficacy.</p>
	<p><b>Teachers &amp; Parents’ Expectations.</b> Emphasis placed on factors central to developing confidence in their relationship.  <i>Parents may emphasize teachers’ knowledge and skills. Teachers may have more confidence in parents who have similar ideas about teaching issues, child rearing practices, and who freely share important things about their children.</i></p>	<p>Factors central to participants developing confidence in relationships.</p>
<p><b>Angell et al. Perspectives of Mothers Regarding Trust in Education Professionals</b></p>	<p><b>Family Factors:</b> <i>Disposition to trust</i>-their view of themselves as willing to trust in most relationships.  <i>History of trust in education professionals</i>-previous history or incidents of trust or distrust related to education professionals.  <i>Child communication with parent</i>-child’s reports and behavior associated with school.</p>	<p>Parent participants family factors and their effects on trust.</p>
	<p><b>Teacher Factors:</b> <i>Authentic Caring</i>-actions and behaviors that parents identified as genuine, voluntary, child focused, and benefitting children or the parents themselves. (teacher actions that go above and beyond the call of duty)  <i>Communication</i>-frequent, honest, and immediate when concerns arose facilitates trusting relationships-its absence inhibits trust. Immediate communication when problems occurred.  <i>Lack of knowledge about children’s disabilities</i></p>	<p>Teacher participants teacher factors and their effects on trust.</p>
	<p><b>School Factors:</b> <i>School Climate</i>-</p>	<p>Parents participants view of</p>

	overall disposition of school personnel regarding parents and children with disabilities. Serves as a strong facilitator of trust or led to distrust.	school factors.
<b>Critical Race Theory/ LatCrit Theory</b>	Race consciousness- Explicit acknowledgment of the workings of race and racism in social contexts or in one's personal life	Participants race consciousness (i.e. ability to acknowledge privilege)
	Emphasis on Experiential knowledge- Ways of knowing that result from critical analysis of one's personal experiences	Focus on how the participants make sense of their own realities. Experiences of parents of color as a strength and an asset (Family knowledge as strength). Counterstory- "they don't want to be involved" Parents insights as legitimate, appropriate and critical for understanding "testimonio"
	Primacy -Prioritizing the study of racial influences on outcomes	Race is not peripheral or incidental to the experiences of these boys and their parents-it is central and therefore affects the interactions between teachers and parents.
	Critical consciousness -Digging beneath the surface of information to develop deeper understandings of concepts, relationships, and personal biases	Identifying researcher bias/assumptions and potential implications on the research process.
	Commitment to social justice	Implications of research results for social change.

### **Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model**

The conceptual framework for the study integrated each of the perspectives outlined above in order to illuminate and provide insight into the communication between a select group of parents and teachers of boys of color. This framework also guided the development of interview protocols and data analysis procedures. Specific aspects of the aforementioned

perspectives were explored to gain a better understanding of how the concepts present in these models/theories were relevant to understanding the shared knowledge between the parents and teachers of boys of color (Table 3.3). These perspectives taken together create a comprehensive lens to analyze the shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. These perspectives suggest that a number of background factors affect the interactions between parents and teachers of boys of color, including class, expectations, and beliefs. Moreover, these perspectives suggest that race is a powerful factor in structuring the realities of parents and teachers of boys of color, and undergirds their interactions.

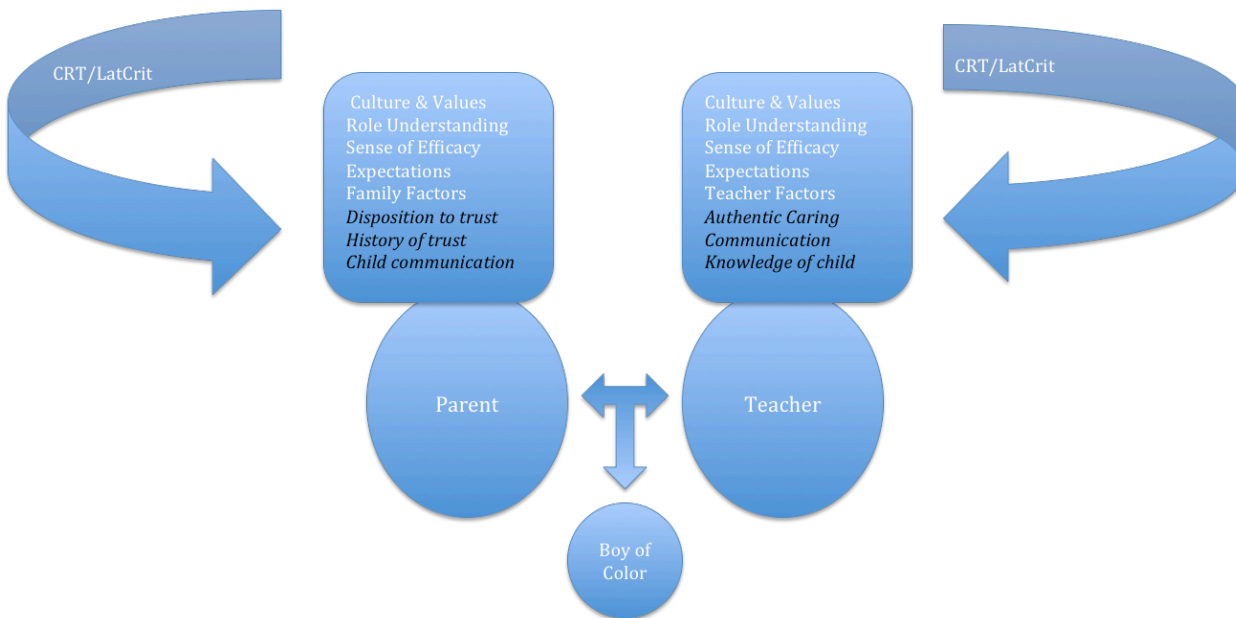
Central to the Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model developed for this study is race and its effect on the communication between parents and teachers. In model 3.3 Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) intentionally encapsulate the model, as they are integral to the communication between the two parties. The circles are representative of the parent, the teacher, and the boys of color; the arrows represent the relationship between the three parties. Though the “boys of color” appears in a small circle, the child is a variable that is pervasive. The teacher and parent come together as adults in the common interest of the student, bringing with them their culture/values, role understanding, sense of efficacy, expectations, and other factors as represented by the squares.

Also included in the squares are dispositions to and history of trust along with communication for parents. Authentic caring, knowledge of the child, and communication are included for teachers. These variables operate independently and collectively when the parties engage in communication. The model shows the “teacher-as-person” and the “parent as person” and the elements that are required to bridge the differences that might exist between them



(Keyes, 2000). The Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model highlights the complex nature of parent-teacher shared knowledge. The interplay between all the elements in the model is present as information and expertise is exchanged between parent and teachers of boys of color. The Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model used in this study as a lens to (1) consider the role race plays in parent-teacher communication for participants; (2) think about and visualize the interplay between variables that affect the nature of the communication between the participants; and, (3) highlight the challenges and opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups.

### 3.3 Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model



## Chapter 4: Methodology

This study integrated aspects of the work of Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003), Keyes (2000) and Angell et al. (2009) into a comprehensive conceptual model for understanding the communication between teachers and parents of boys of color. Lawrence-Lightfoot's work in *The Essential Conversation* informed the study in that it focused on the exchange between teachers and students, and employed much of the same methodology except with a smaller sample over a shorter span of time.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. Furthermore, this study sought to identify and explore teachers' and parents' perceptions of each other, and beliefs about creating and maintaining a relationship. As noted in chapter one, the following research questions were designed to guide this study:

1. What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?
  - a. What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?
  - b. What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?

This chapter begins with the description of a pilot study and brief discussion of how the results informed the study. The epistemological framework guiding the study, the study's design, and strategies of inquiry are then provided. Next, I describe the sampling process, gaining access to the research participants, and participant selection. I then explain the data collection processes and procedures for analysis. Finally, I discuss my positionality and

strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Pilot Study**

**Background.** In order to improve the design of my study, I conducted a small informal pilot study of “shared knowledge” between parents and teachers of boys of color at Sunnybrook Middle School<sup>10</sup>, a middle school in the same district as Lakecrest Middle School. At the time of the pilot study I was an employee at Sunnybrook, serving as both a teacher and Literacy Coach. Sunnybrook was the original intended research site for this study, hence its choice for the informal pilot. (An explanation of the change in site is provided in the Appendix A: *Analytic Memo #1-Site Access*.) The informal pilot study was carried out on two members of the relevant population of my study, middle school faculty and parents at Sunnybrook Middle School. The preliminary investigation was a series of conversations followed by an interview with one matched pair (a parent of a boy of color and one teacher of that student).

The goal of the pilot study was to get to a deeper understanding about the relationship and communication between parents of boys of color and their teachers. In the pilot study, I set out to explore the participants’ views as it related to their relationships with each other and the challenges and opportunities they encountered. The participants were an African American parent and a female Korean math teacher. The student was an average student as described by his parent, and was not one that would be considered a “behavior problem.” The teacher was a veteran teacher with an advanced professional certificate who had achieved Masters plus 60 credits status as noted by the State Department of Education. Both parties were aware that this

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<sup>10</sup> Pseudonym

was an informal study that would provide me with some direction as I created a formal study in my graduate program.

The participants were asked questions based on the literature presented in chapter two of this study, and my experiences. Other questions were added during the interview based on the direction of the conversation. The shared questions explored the responsibility for parent-teacher communication; tools needed in the communication, the role power plays in those encounters, and misconceptions in their respective relationships. The individual questions for the parent focused on her vision of the “ideal teacher” for her son of color, her role in his educational process, and trust. The teacher was specifically asked about her perceptions of minority parents, being effective with students of color, and her own relationships with her teachers.

**Pilot Influence on Methodology.** Based on my analysis of the interviews, I found that the literature on parent-teacher communications characterized the relationships and misconceptions accurately in a number of different ways. The responses of the participants illustrated that there are misconceptions on both sides, ideas about power, and responsibility for creating/maintaining relationships and trust that permeate the relationship between parent and teacher. Cultural capital or the lack thereof, the role of race, beliefs about power, and background characteristics were also central themes that emerged from the pilot study. In Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2003) study teachers claimed their teacher preparation programs did not provide tools or practical guidance in communicating with parents. Similarly, in the pilot study, the teacher reported lack of training emerged as an important factor that impacted parent-teacher communication.

Some new ideas also emerged from my analysis of the pilot. For example, the belief in equity and its relationship to teaching boys of color, and teachers who go “above and beyond” emerged. It would be interesting to explore what this idea of “above and beyond” looks like to

each party, and how its presence or absence affects the relationships between the two parties.

Exploring this was further achieved by adding questions to the interview process that address this idea.

An alarming finding was that the teacher did not believe in equity as it relates to educating boys of color, even though she was well aware that the data suggested a dilemma in her school that needed to be addressed. The teacher also expressed that she was “color blind” in her approach to working with students and suggested that the race of her students was inconsequential. Her commitment was ensuring they had access to good teaching. Good teaching for her meant good planning, not necessarily relationship building. It was also interesting that the parent held the belief that a truly effective teacher for boys of color was one that understood the dilemma they face in schools and was somewhat committed to changing it. These two opposing views were further explored in the study I conducted. Thus, the questions I developed for the study examined this more fully. I also believe that my research on the communication between teachers and parents should also include explorations of culturally responsive teaching as described by Gay (2010), and the idea of color blindness and its effects when teaching boys of color.

The pilot study also affected the methodology in that it influenced my choice of research participants. The parent in the pilot study had experience as a teacher and this gave her a great deal of insight into the educational process and how it ought to function. For my study, I chose parent participants that were not so connected to the educational system, as that is the case for most parents. Also I attempted to recruit second generation American teachers and not teachers who have lived most of their lives in another country. According to the teacher in the pilot study, she had a very different perspective on race/boys of color because of her Korean

background. She reported not understanding the focus on race and equity and her school.

Lastly, the results of the pilot reinforced the importance of questions in interviews that addressed notions of trust, race, and power.

**Research Design.** This study is qualitative in nature, using a case study approach to understand “shared knowledge” between the parents and teachers of boys of color. Qualitative research methods were chosen for this particular study for several reasons. First, to gather an in-depth understanding of “shared knowledge” in one setting. I am interested in *how* the stakeholders (teachers and parents) produce and negotiate meaning and qualitative methods will allow me to capture this level of nuance. I would like to understand the meaning for the participants in the study of the events, situations, and actions they are engaged in, a strength of qualitative methods (Maxwell, 2005). Also, I chose qualitative methods because I wanted to conduct a case study of one institution in order to investigate the “shared knowledge” in its real life context. According to Maxwell (2005) qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to understand the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions (p. 22). Lastly, I chose a qualitative case study because it will allow me to collect rich and detailed information, from multiple methods, and provide the complete story of “shared knowledge” between stakeholders in one culturally and economically diverse middle school.

Lakecrest Middle School permits capturing and bringing attention to the relationships between parents of boys of color and their teachers. My primary goal in conducting this case study at Lakecrest Middle School is to adequately describe, interpret, and explain what is occurring at this site as it relates to the shared knowledge between these two groups. This study also endeavors to contribute to the literature on shared knowledge between parents and teachers

of boys of color. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify and explore teachers' and parents' perceptions and beliefs of each other and about creating/maintaining a working relationship.

**Gaining Access & Recruitment.** As an employee of Berry County schools I possessed some insider access. During a Berry County training required for leaders, I met the principal of Lakecrest Middle School. My existing relationship with the former principal of Lakecrest, who formerly worked at Sunnybrook, helped me to establish an immediate rapport with the current leader in the building. After discussing our research interests and his own doctoral studies, he decided that with Berry county approval I could conduct my study at Lakecrest. The process for securing approval through Berry schools for conducting external research can take four to five weeks, but for this study the process lasted five months. The process begins with approval of a written proposal through the Office of Shared Accountability. Berry County approval is contingent upon the technical soundness of the proposed design, the privacy, and confidentiality of respondents, the data gathering procedures, and the need for the schools to safeguard the personal and legal rights of students, parents, and staff. Written support from the principal of the school research site must be included in a proposal. After one proposal and two amendments to the data collection procedures and research site based on Berry County suggestions, this study received approval. A detailed description of the approval process and amendments are provided in Appendix B: *Analytic Memo # 2 Informal Pilot Site and Gaining Access in Berry County*.

Upon approval of my study by Berry County the principal introduced me to Lisa<sup>11</sup>, a teacher leader at Lakecrest who shared my research interests. My relationship with Lisa, and the principal facilitated access to parents and the teachers of Lakecrest, making it possible to recruit

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<sup>11</sup> Psuedonym

participants. I also attended after school activities in order to gain access to parents. At the suggestion of the principal I focused my efforts on activities hosted by “Men of Tomorrow,” a mentoring program for boys at Lakecrest. At those events I spoke with parents and passed out flyers advertising my study (see Appendix C). Lisa assisted with recruitment through giving me the names of teachers who might be interested in participating in the study. These teachers received an email invitation to the study with a flyer attached. While recruiting participants I shared my background as a teacher and a parent of a boy of color, this helped me to establish an immediate rapport and build trust with parent and teachers, strategies which are central to qualitative inquiry.



**Participants.** Study participants included seven teachers and seven parents of boys of color. The study enlisted fourteen adult participants in total. The sample size was large enough that it permitted sufficient variation in emerging themes and categories, but small enough that it was achievable given the qualitative data collection and analysis. In order to meet the criteria for participation in the study, parents met the following criteria: (1) parent/guardian of a boy who either self-identifies as Black or Hispanic in sixth through eighth grade that attends the research site (a middle school); (2) must also identify as Black (this includes parents of African or West Indian descent that identify as Black) or Hispanic. For teacher participants the criteria was as follows: (1) classroom teacher for two or more years (2) identify as 1.5 generation American (arrived in the United States as children/adolescents) or higher. Identifying as 1.5 generation American or higher ensured that teacher participants have a certain level of familiarity with United States schooling. Having taught for two or more years is an indication that a teacher has some level of experience in forming relationships with parents.

**Methods.** Multiple sources of evidence were collected in this case study to allow for development of “converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration” (Yin, 2009, p. 116). Participants were asked to participate in one 60-minute individual interview that was audio taped and transcribed. Participants also participated in one 60-minute audio taped and transcribed focus group. There were two focus groups, one for parents and another for teachers. The sources of evidence collected through the interviews and focus group provided multiple measures of the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). These primary sources were collected to create a detailed and rich account of each parent and teacher’s experiences and beliefs.

Parent interviews took place at the school site or in the home of the parents. All teacher interviews took place at Lakecrest. I began each interview by explaining the purpose of the

research, providing each participant with a consent form, and completing a brief demographic questionnaire [See Appendix D]. The demographic questionnaire captured general information about the parents and teachers' race/ethnicity, family, economic status and years of teaching experience. This allowed me to capture background information relevant to the research with minimal imposition on the limited interview time with the participant.

The individual interviews were semi-structured in order to allow the participants to discuss what they felt was significant to their experiences. Participants were also asked to state facts as well as their opinions about events. Some questions asked the interviewee to propose insight into certain occurrences. The interview questions addressed topics such as prior experiences when dealing with parents/teachers of boys of color, developing relationships and forming trust, the role of power in those relationships, and challenges/opportunities in the creation of parent-teacher relationships [See Appendix F].

The focus groups were both held two weeks after individual interviews were conducted at the school site at a date and time agreed upon by the teachers and parents. The focus groups were used to further explore patterns in the individual interviews. Additionally, they allowed participants to collectively examine their experiences and perceptions around shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. Both teacher and parent focus groups began with a discussion on statistics about boys of color in education. During the individual interviews some participants, especially parents, required more probing during the line of questioning that focused on race and its effects on boys of color in schools. The fact that those questions required probing indicated to me that some participants might not have been exposed to educational statistics or extant literature that point to challenges faced by boys of color in schools. The focus group discussion prompt introduced participants to statistics. The parents and teachers

were provided with a fact sheet taken from the Schott Foundation (2012) report on education and minority males at the beginning of the focus group. Statistics included grade 8 NAEP proficiency rates, state suspension rates, AP course enrollment, and bachelor's degree attainment rates for Black and Latino males (see Appendix).

In the focus groups, teacher and parent participants had an opportunity to interact and build on each other's ideas. Focus group participants also shared perspectives that they may have been reluctant to share in their individual interviews (Bogdan & Biklen (2007). Triangulation of interviews and the focus group data provides a more complete and accurate account of shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color than either data source could alone [See Appendix E]. The focus groups provided me with a better sense of the communication between parents and teachers, as well as allowed me to check for confirming and non-confirming evidence from the interviews.

**Data Analysis.** Completed interviews were sent to a professional transcription service to be transcribed into text files. I read the interview transcripts while listening to the audio files to ensure accuracy and become more familiar with the data. Data analysis occurred both simultaneously with data collection, and after the completion of the research. This simultaneous data analysis and research guided me as I made decisions about focus group questions. However, most of the analysis occurred after I completed the focus groups in January 2016. Through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework, I identified concepts in order to synthesize and explain larger segments of data (see Appendix F). Marshall and Rossman (1999) define coding as the formal representation of analytic thinking. These concepts or codes were grounded in participant responses and eventually allowed me to organize my data into categories that shared the same characteristic. Concepts that were similar in initial coding

were used to generate categories that became buckets into which I placed segments of texts (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). For example, Table 4.1 and 4.2 show several concepts relating to teacher characteristics as described by parents and teachers for a boy of color. As categories emerged from the data they were organized around the research sub questions and themes based on the conceptual framework. A detailed description of the coding procedures employed in this study is provided in the Appendix G: Identifying concepts and developing preliminary categories.

*Table 4.1 Examples of concepts identified in parent data:*

<b>Initial Codes (Selected)</b> <b><i>Significant/Frequent</i></b>	<b>Preliminary Categories</b>
“Someone that looks like us” (race Lowered expectations by teacher for son of color –“given grades” Colorblind approach-colorblind dinner table Race-my kids are among other kids of color Teacher shared the same experiences with even if not same color-exposes her children Boy of color shut out of opportunity (AP class etc.) Came to this country not thinking about race-experience makes her aware Boy of color-work twice as hard <b>Boy of color-go above and beyond</b> Boys of color face situations in this world today Arms sons with tools/information Suggestion-separate class to help deal with issues Effect of Race has in a + and – way Lack of opportunity for boys of color Systemic Bias/Prejudice Explicit discussion with sons about race	The effect of race.

*Table 4.2 Examples of concepts identified in teacher data:*

<b>Initial Codes (Selected)</b> <b><i>Significant/Frequent</i></b>	<b>Preliminary Categories</b>
Fairness for BOC Parents want BOC held accountable <b>Higher expectations-BOC have to be better</b> BOC need academic challenge BOC need role models	Teacher perception of challenges faced by boys of color in schools

<p>Boys vs. Black boys  Motivation factor in learning  Education perceived as not “cool”  Acknowledges need for fairness for students of color  Extra step for parents of BOC boys of color (advanced course info)  Acknowledges need for fairness for students of color  Extra attention to BOC  Extra step for boys of color  Understanding of Parents of BOC-“I live the internal concerns”  Parents of BOC get extra information (“I’m more friendly”)  Positive view of BOC  Belief in BOC ability to achieve “I believe their son can earn an A”  Challenges for BOC in schools=feminine system, lack of role models in schools  Awareness of challenges BOC face in schools  Building relationships =important to reach BOC Students don’t have the same story  Awareness of challenges BOC face in schools  Boys of color-lack of role models leads to trouble in school  Latino males cultural disconnect leads to trouble in schools  Extra communication with parents of BOC  Mentoring Program=positive results  Talk vs. Referral</p>	
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**Researcher Positionality & Validity.** As stated earlier, work with this population is deeply personal. My beliefs, experiences, and values shape who I am and how connected I am to this work. These factors were taken into consideration prior to conducting and during my research. To minimize the influence of my own biases in this study, it was important that I reflect on these beliefs, feelings, and prejudices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I am both a teacher and a parent of a boy of color and my experiences in both arenas impacted the entire research process. This included my selection of participants, the researcher-participant dynamic during interviews, and my interpretation of the data.

I have strong beliefs about the roles teachers and parents should play in the educational processes of boys of color. These beliefs, along with my status as an insider at the research site, were both an asset and a limitation as I undertook this research. Bogdan & Biklen offer that

strong beliefs are an asset when carefully sorted out, selectively presented, and appropriately expressed and used as an avenue for building rapport and helping to formulate questions that get at participants experiences (2007). I believe I was successful in using my role as both a teacher and a parent of a boy of color in order to build rapport with participants. I am also aware that this could have affected their answers to some interview and focus group questions. For example, two participants used the phrase “you know how it is” as they explained experiences to me. In those instances I asked for elaboration instead of agreeing, even if they were referring to an experience or view that I shared. There were many times I identified with a parent or teacher as I undertook my research. I attempted to remain conscious of this and focused on the research agenda. The education of boys of color can be an emotionally charged subject and there was one instance in an interview where a parent became upset. I gave her time to collect herself, and after asking her if she wanted to continue, we proceeded. I attempted to comfort the participant while maintaining the focus of the interview. Throughout the research process I remained very transparent about my positionality and recognized it’s benefits and limits.

To reflect upon the ways that my beliefs and experiences influence the research process, I practiced reflexivity throughout the study by maintaining a research journal. Bogdan & Bilken (2007) suggest recording of reflections on subjectivity as a way to guard against the researcher’s biases (p. 38). These “research reflective memos” helped me to be more insightful about my own role and offset bias. Acknowledging and taking into account my own biases was one method of minimizing them and increasing my subjectivity.

Additionally, I used several strategies to cultivate internal validity, or trustworthiness, as described below (Maxell, 2005):

Rich Data: The interviews and conferences were intensive and provided detailed and varied data. Findings were reported in a rich, descriptive form, in order to highlight the voices of participants.

Respondent Validation: During the focus groups, I restated and summarized themes from individual interviews. Participants were asked to determine accuracy. The participants were able to affirm or disaffirm that those summaries reflected their views, experiences, or feelings.

Triangulation: Qualitative data was collected from participants in individual interviews and focus groups. These data sources were crosschecked against one another for commonalities and differences.

**Participant Consent & Confidentiality.** Informed and voluntary consent was obtained through a consent form given to each participant [See Appendix H]. Participants also received a copy to retain for their own records. I explained the purposes and uses of this research study to all participants. I also reminded participants that they could ask questions before, during, or after the interviews and at any point during the research process. Participants were provided with my contact information so that they could contact me during and after data collection. I retained the consent forms in a locked cabinet file.

To protect participant identity, they each selected a pseudonym for this project. If someone did not select a pseudonym, one was created for them. Participants real names, contact information, and identifying information was not linked in any way to audio files and/or computers. Participant contact information was only maintained to follow up for the focus group. All contact information was saved on a separate file in my home office. In the focus group setting, participants were reminded to only share information that they were comfortable sharing. Access to contact information, audio files and transcriptions were limited to the researcher. Contact information, electronic audio files and transcription records will be

deleted/destroyed once the research is completed, presented and in accordance with the time period specified by the IRB. A hard copy of transcripts will be retained in my home office.

**Risks & Benefit for Participants.** Interview questions and focus groups addressed topics that might have caused anxiety or uneasiness. For example as discussed above, questions about the unfair treatment of boys of color in schools or a negative interaction with a teacher or parent could make a participant anxious or uneasy. Participants were allowed to refrain from answering any questions that they felt uncomfortable discussing. Also, each participant in the study was informed that they could ask questions throughout the study at any point could withdraw without consequences. There was also the possibility that the confidentiality of study participants might be compromised. However, to mitigate issues related to confidentiality, data was securely stored and will be eventually disposed of.

This study might benefit participants in that it allows minority parents to share their stories and perspectives on educating their sons of color. Focusing on how these parents of color make sense of their own realities could ultimately serve as a tool of empowerment for them. Teachers in the study could benefit in that they are being reflective about their teaching experiences and practices with students of color and communication with parents. This could lead to professional growth for those participants. Several teacher and parent participants stated that they believed studies of this kind were important work, and thanked me for allowing them to share their perspectives. Thus, participants may have benefitted from the opportunity to share their stories in the interviews and the focus group.

**Study Limitations.** There are several limitations to this study, one of which is the small sample size. Maxwell (2005) defines the concept of external generalizability as being representative of a larger population (115). Fourteen participants limit generalizability of



potential findings to the population at large. However, as in qualitative research, the intent of this study is not to generalize, but to learn from a particular case and it is dependent upon the reader to decide which conclusions are applicable.

Secondly, attempting to investigate issues surrounding both Hispanic and Black boys of color and parent-teacher communications could be considered another limitation. While both minority groups have similarities that unite them, there are differences between the groups. The groups' diverse histories, cultural backgrounds, language, and immigration experiences will affect the ways parents and teachers communicate and view each other that cannot be fully explored in the scope of this study (MacDonald & Carrillo 2009). Despite limitations, my intent is that this study provides a richer perspective of these parent-teacher experiences and communication lacking in the literature.

## Chapter 5: Results -Parent & Teacher Perspectives

This study sought to understand shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. During interviews and the focus group the fourteen participants were encouraged to focus on their prior experiences when developing relationships with teachers/parents, forming trust, and the role of power in those relationships. They were also asked to reflect on the challenges and opportunities in the creation of parent-teacher relationships. The parent and teacher participants provided detailed accounts of their experiences and perceptions.

This chapter contains four parts. Part one provides participant profiles based on the demographic questionnaire and interview data for the parent and teacher participants. Through a detailed coding process of the interview and focus group data significant themes emerged. Part two presents seven themes that are relevant for understanding parent's perspectives and experiences. In part three the discussion moves from parents to teachers, and nine themes that emerged for understanding teacher's perspectives and experiences are discussed. The primary research question and two sub questions that guide this study are used as a framework to organize all emergent themes in part two and three: *What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?*

- c. *What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?*
- d. *What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?*

The following two questions are addressed in part four of this chapter: How do the perspectives of parents and teachers of boys of color regarding shared knowledge differ? In what ways do they agree? The data in this chapter sets the stage for the subsequent sections, providing background information on the different perspectives of both parents and teachers and how they diverge and converge.

## **Part 1 -Participant<sup>12</sup> Descriptions**

**Parents.** A total of seven parents participated in this study, all of which resided in Berry County. The participant household incomes ranged from low to upper middle class<sup>13</sup>. All parents in the sample had children who attended Lakecrest Middle School at the time of the study. Of the parent participants 43% identified as Black Americans, 28% identified as Hispanic, and 28% as African. The parent participant demographic is closely aligned with the school student body at Lakecrest, which is predominantly Black/African American and Hispanic. The participant sample consisted of one father, and six mothers of boys of color. Of the parent participants, five were married and two single, with ages that ranged from 36 to 50 years old. Two of the parents had advanced degrees, two had bachelor's degrees, and three were high

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<sup>12</sup> All names are pseudonyms

<sup>13</sup> The definition of “middle class” varies by state; the Pew Charitable Trusts lists the median income for the state of Maryland as \$72,483 in 2015. The middle class lower bound income as \$48,322 and middle class upper bound \$144,966 (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Using these measurements, parents in this sample fit the definition of low to high middle class.

The Shrinking Middle Class. (March 19, 2015) Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2015/3/19/the-shrinking-middle-class-mapped-state-by-state>

How much you have to earn to be considered middle class in every state. (April 2, 2015) Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/middle-class-in-every-us-state-2015-4>

school graduates. Table 5.1 below summarizes the key characteristics of parent study participants.

*Table 5.1 Profile of Parent Participants*

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Household Income (Lower, Middle, Upper Middle Class)	Education	Son's Grade	Son's GPA
Gemini	Black Am.	38	M	Single	Lower	High School	8 <sup>th</sup>	3.42
Nicole	Black Am.	50	F	Married	Upper	College Degree	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.6
Cathy	Black Am.	37	F	Married	Lower	High School	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.5
Eileen	Hispanic	42	F	Married	Middle	High School	7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup>	2.5-3.0
Niara	African (Nigeria)	39	F	Married	Upper	Advanced Degree	8 <sup>th</sup>	3.5
Selena	Hispanic	36	F	Single	Lower	Advanced degree	6 <sup>th</sup>	3.0
Amina	African (Ghana)	50	F	Married	Upper	College Degree	8 <sup>th</sup>	3.7

**Gemini.** Gemini is a 38-year-old single African American male. He is a father of three children who range from ages 13 to 17. He has attended, but not completed college. Gemini's 13-year-old son is currently enrolled at Lakecrest as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader and has a grade point average of 3.42. Gemini started taking a very active role in his children's educational process very early in their lives. He followed his mother's example and modeled the strategies she used with him, with his own children. These strategies include checking their book bags, going through their homework, taking them to the bus stop, and meeting with teachers.

**Nicole.** Nicole is an African American active and engaged mother of three children. She lives with her husband and their children who range from age 11 to 14. Her 12-year-old son is

currently a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at Lakecrest, and maintains a GPA of 2.6. Nicole travels a great deal because of her out of state employment, but is a fixture in the school community when she is home. She is a very involved and concerned mother who reached out to the researcher after hearing about the study. Nicole also touched base before her interview to express angst at the violence against black boys by police in the news. She asked questions such as, “How do I explain it to my children?” Nicole spends much of her time outside of work with her children and works hard to provide them with a strong academic foundation and out of school learning experiences.

**Cathy.** Cathy identifies as African American and is a mother to three children between the ages of 2 and 19. She is 37 years old, married, and a high school graduate. Cathy’s 12-year-old son is a seventh grader at Lakecrest and has a GPA that ranges between 2.0 and 2.5. Although very active in her children’s education, Cathy is often kept away from the school due to an illness. Directly after her interview for the study she was due for another operation. Cathy shared that her own learning disability made her aware of signs in her son. She is very concerned about the education of boys of color including her own sons, and became very emotional in her individual interview as she discussed the challenges students face.

**Eileen.** Eileen, a Hispanic mother of three, currently has two students enrolled in Lakecrest. Eileen has both a 12-year-old 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and a 13 year old 8<sup>th</sup> grader, whose grade point averages range from 2.5 to 3.0. Eileen, now 42, migrated from El Salvador at the age of 10. Eileen graduated from high school, and with her husband she works diligently to give her children a strong academic foundation. When she can’t help her sons with assignments she finds others that can assist them. According to Eileen her work hours negatively affect her ability to be visible at her son’s school, but she uses other means (such as email and the online grading

system) to communicate with teachers and stay abreast of her son's progress.

**Niara.** Born in the Ukraine, Niara identifies as an African woman of Nigerian descent. At the age of 20 the now 39-year-old Niara moved to the United States. Niara is a married mother of three children between the ages of 5 and 13 years old. Her eldest son is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at the school site that maintains a 3.5 grade point average. Niara has a Masters degree in her field and is also an author in her spare time. She is currently working on her second book, a work of fiction. She describes herself as “very involved” in her children's education and holds them to high academic standards. She believes her education and professional experience have made her a great communicator, a skill she uses to build relationships with her sons' teachers. In Niara's interview, she spoke of her African background and her religious faith, and how they influenced the way she raised her children.

**Selena.** At thirty-six-years old, Selena is a divorced single mother of two boys ages 16 and 11. She identifies as Hispanic, specifically Mexican-American. Selena's 11-year-old son is currently a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at the school site and maintains a 3.0 GPA. Her sons are Caucasian and Mexican-American and began their schooling in El Paso, Texas. Selena notes that her sons went from being educated among a predominantly Hispanic population in El Paso, to one that is predominantly African American at Lakecrest. Selena has a PhD in Neurology, and encourages her sons to excel academically. She is an active parent who checks homework, meets teachers, and reads with her youngest son daily.

**Amina.** Amina is a 50-year-old Ghanaian who migrated to the United States at the age of 30. Before migrating to the United States, she and her family lived in England. She is a married mother of four children who range in age from 9 to 21. Amina's 13 year old son is enrolled in

the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Lakecrest, and has a 3.7 grade point average. Amina has strict rules for her children and believes that is why they excel academically. She is college educated, as are most members of her family, several of them have attended prestigious universities. Amina's expectation is that her children will continue this family legacy.

### **Teachers**

Seven teachers from Lakecrest middle school participated in this study. The teachers had between eight and eighteen years of classroom experience. Four of the seven teacher participants were teacher leaders at Lakecrest and were members of the school Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Of the teacher participants 57% were Black American, 28% were White, and 15% West Indian. Two of the teacher participants were male and five female. Four of the participants are themselves parents; two are parents of boys of color<sup>14</sup>. The teacher participants have been employed at Lakecrest ranging from one to seven years. Teachers at Lakecrest received county equity training through professional development for the past three years. This equity training is a part of a unit which provided school leaders and teachers support to build cultural proficiency through the study of equity. One on one support to school, training modules, and study circles, and an excellence in equity certificate program are all offered by Berry County. Table 5.2 summarizes the key characteristics of teacher participants.

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<sup>14</sup> Two teacher participants were both parents and teachers of boys of color (Rashad and Lisa). They were interviewed as teachers for the purposes of the study.

Table 5.2 Profile of Teacher Participants

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Gender * <sup>15</sup>	Years Teaching	Years at Lakecrest
Ralph	White	36	M*	12	7
Rashad	Black Am.	39	M**	18	1
Susan	White	37	F*	16	7
Myra	Black Am.	40	F	8	8
Lisa	West Indian (Trinidad)	33	F**	11	2.5
Latisha	Black American	38	F*	15	3
Anaya	Black American	40	F	18	3

**Ralph.** Ralph is a 36-year-old case manager and special education teacher who identifies as White. Ralph has twelve years of classroom experience, seven of them spent at Lakecrest. At the time of the study, Ralph and his wife were expecting their first child. Ralph is involved in after school activities at Lakecrest, and is very invested in the school. He believes that his teaching experiences caused him to grow and evolve, and notes that his attitudes and perceptions have changed significantly over time. Ralph shared that when he started teaching he saw things “a lot differently”, he hopes to continue to grow and learn professionally.

**Rashad.** Rashad is a leader at Lakecrest in his dual role as a content specialist and coordinator of a college access program (AVID). In the AVID program that Rashad heads

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<sup>15</sup> \* Indicates that the participant is a parent. \*\* Indicates that the participant is a parent of a boy of color.



students learn organizational skills and other academic skills to assist in college readiness.

Rashad is also the teacher of the AVID classes at his school. He has taught for 18 years, and has been at Lakecrest for one of those years. Rashad is African American, and he and his wife are parents to two boys of color. Rashad often referred back to his own experience as a boy of color in the school system during his interview. He also stressed during both the interview and the focus group the importance of meeting parents where they are to create partnerships for their children. Rashad completed equity training as a leader in Berry County in the Fall and Spring of 2015.

**Susan.** Susan is a part of Lakecrest's leadership team in her role as content specialist in Mathematics. She is a 37-year-old mother of two who identifies as White. Susan has taught for 16 years, seven of which have been at Lakecrest. Susan believes that teachers not only present the curriculum but they help students form mindsets about their educational abilities. Susan is a teacher that is committed to equity in the classroom. She recommends that Berry County require teachers to go through the individual equity training she volunteered to complete five years ago in her 11<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. As a teacher leader she encourages the teachers in her department to look at students with an open mind and practice equity in the classroom, not equality.

**Myra.** Myra teaches part time at Lakecrest in the World Languages department. After teaching her courses in the morning, she teaches at another Berry county school for the remainder of the day. She is a 40-year-old African American who has taught for 8 years, one of which has been at Lakecrest. Myra describes teachers as the content experts who assist with misunderstandings; provide feedback, structure, and sometimes consequences. She likens the teacher role to a parent's role and showed interest in hearing what the parent perspectives were upon completion of this study.

**Lisa.** Lisa is an English teacher leadership team as a team leader at Lakecrest. She identifies as West Indian, specifically Trinidadian. She is a 33-year-old mother of two boys of color and has taught for eleven years. Lisa has been a teacher at Lakecrest for two and a half years, and is currently a part time student completing coursework in a doctoral program. Lisa has experienced sitting at both sides of the desk, a parent to a boy of color as well as a teacher, and shared her perspective on this when interviewed. Lisa reports that she has great relationships with parents and helped to recruit several of the parent participants for this study. She took great interest in this study as it mirrors her own work with boys of color and their overrepresentation in special education classes.

**Latisha.** Latisha has been a computer science teacher at Lakecrest for the past three years. She is a 38-year-old parent of two girls, who has taught for 15 years. She identifies as African American. She believes that “equitable, not equal,” should be the goal for teachers. Providing equity to students according to Latisha means giving students what they need, in contrast to equality which is defined as giving all students the same supports. She also stressed the importance of remembering that all boys of color don’t have the same story, and therefore teachers must form relationships to truly know how to reach them.

**Anaya.** As the content specialist for the Social Studies department, 40-year-old Anaya is a part of the school’s leadership team. Anaya’s mother is a black American and her father African. She has been at Lakecrest for three years, and a teacher for eighteen. Anaya is very committed to helping the students she teaches and spoke about challenging students in order to prepare them for higher education. She also realizes the importance of forming relationships with students as central to educating them.

## **Part 2-Parent Perspectives**

The following section presents seven themes that emerged from parent interviews and the focus group. These themes are relevant for understanding parent's perspectives and experiences. The parent participant's voices are included in this section in order to privilege their voices. The seven themes in response to the research question and sub questions outlined in this section are: 1) Parent role as supporter & advocate and its challenges 2) Teacher role as instructional and emotional support 3) Parent vision of the ideal teacher 4) Benefits and challenges of parent-teacher conferences/communication 5) Parent view of the role of race 6) Building trust and 7) Sharing power.

*What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?*

### **I. Parent role as supporter & advocate and its challenges**

***Parent as supporter and challenges.*** Parents understood that they had a valuable role to play in their son's educational process and described this role in several different ways. Parent as "supporter" was an often-stated response, and parents described multiple ways in which they offered their support. Working closely with teachers, holding high expectations, contacting teachers to address academic/behavior concerns, and checking grades were among the ways parents reported showing support. For instance, Amina's support involved making sure her son maintained a high GPA. One strategy she used was focusing explicitly on academic activities on weekdays; this included no television coupled her children's choice of reading that she asked follow up questions about. Cathy's support included checking grades and shadowing her child from class to class to get a clearer picture of what she needed to do to help him improve grades.

The parent participants also identified factors that impeded their ability to support their sons in the ways they thought were best or they thought were most appropriate. For example, Eileen explained:

I always try to support them...in the beginning I was actually doing a little more, at this point with my job it's pretty difficult for me to go over with them with every single day, asking them about their homework, how school has been going and once I get to talk with the teachers to find out where they are, sometimes they don't tell me the truth. Most of the times [sic]. So, I think that I should be more on top of them like checking. But I have 3 of them so it's really hard and by the time I get home.

Additionally, Cathy's illness was provided as an example of a factor that hindered support. Two parent participants also cited lack of familiarity with technology like Google chrome and the curriculum as obstacles that impeded parental support.

***Parent as advocate.*** On the whole, parents in this study were fairly involved in their son's schooling as measured by data from both interviews and the focus group. The parents reported being visible at the school site, meeting with teachers, and assisting their children with schoolwork. They reflected on their experiences and shared relatively intact memories of advocating for their sons when needed. Many of them shared instances when their son's grades prompted them to contact teachers and find solutions to poor performance. In some circumstances it was necessary to take extra steps such as hiring a tutor or involving administrators. The idea of "going above" a teacher's head to administration as a last resort was expressed by several parents such as Niara, Amina, and Nicole. While Niara saw the teacher as someone who you should befriend and work with as a unit, she also expressed the belief that she must advocate for her son no matter what the situation. Niara shared that teachers should be well

aware that, “I am watching you and I will take it to the highest level if I have to. I am aware I am knowledgeable. I will ask the tough questions.” Amina echoed her sentiment when she explained that she fought for her son to be given advanced opportunities:

I think some parents see the problems but they let it go because we can't change the problems. But some parents who are like me aren't just gonna let it go. I'm going to really push if my child has the potential, I would not let any teacher or any one discourage them.

Amina recounted several examples of advocating for her son, all of which involved him being placed in more rigorous classes or receiving opportunities for advancement.

Visibility, or being present at the school, emerged as another way the parent participants provided support and advocated for their sons. Parents shared several specific examples of how it affected their son's educational trajectory. Nicole stated that whenever possible she would travel to the bus stop and meet her child for lunch during the school day. In her words, “I am not sending them to school-I am going with them.” She shared one of several stories about how visibility and advocacy benefited her son.

It makes a difference because they know. Prime example when Alex was entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He had a course he signed up for and I didn't like it, I wanted something like Intro to engineering etc. so because he is timid and never turned in the paper to the right place. I didn't know about it and found it in the summer. When his dad took him to (local high school) to sort it out the counselor asked “Why aren't you in AVID, you are a prime candidate for AVID.” My husband called and we signed him up..that program gives him a leg up, he is now learning about what college life is like. Organizational skills, and can take more AP classes, honors English. A parent was involved and we were advocating and being passionate about our son.

The parents viewed the teachers role somewhat differently than they did their own, they functioned as supporters and advocates, while the viewed teachers role as providing instructional and emotional support.

## II. Teacher role as instructional and emotional support

All parents in the study spoke about the instructional role of a teacher, the participants all noted that teachers are responsible for instruction in their content. Additionally, parents used words like “encourager, surrogate mother, and second parent” when asked to describe the teacher’s role in the educational process. The parents perceived the teacher role as not just one of instructional support but also emotional support. Cathy recalled a time when a teacher bought her son something he needed for school and she attempted to thank her. She shared, “I went to go give her a thank you card and she was like you don't have to that's my baby.” This was one of several instances where parents recalled teachers acting as “second mother” to their sons. Cathy also added to this idea of *teacher as an emotional support* when she discussed the extra care that boys of color may need in schools. She tearfully explained:

I think teachers that probably deal with kids of color have to understand that it's a job, shameful to say, but it's the truth. You know, we see it every day on the news...we are not quite past the race issue, we are not past certain things so some of the kids are not getting ... especially if they are coming from a low income household or you know, or broken home...sometimes that does play a role...I think they do have to understand where these kids come from. Because a lot of them are on their own they need a strong support. They don't have what the other kids across the table has them has. That's the kids in the school looking down on the kids, and then you have the adults looking down on the kids. That's hard for a child to go to school in that type of environment. *(Crying/pause)*...I think with the teachers sometimes the kids just want someone that they can come and talk to and feel like that they are safe.

Parents acknowledged the integral role teachers play in student’s educational experiences, and were also cognizant of the challenge teachers face in supporting many students simultaneously in the classroom. Eileen offered, “Well, it's tough for them to get to know each student individually. Because they have so many of them.” She thought a fair expectation of

teachers was, “knowing the one student that is kind of not completing their assignments and getting things done, ...just encourage at the same time like letting them come for extra help and giving any advise to the parent that helps.” Eileen’s perspective displays the marriage of instructional and emotional support that was articulated by all of the parent participants.

### **III. Parent vision of the ideal teacher**

When asked about the ideal teacher for their son of color, all but one of the parent participants emphasized that they had no racial or gender preferences. Instead the parent participants offered values, personality traits, and even experiences that they would like this ideal teacher to possess. Parents used phrases and adjectives such as “well-traveled, caring, strict, understanding, open minded, not rigid” to expand on their vision of an ideal teacher.

Gemini was the only parent participant who added a physical description of an ideal teacher. He described the ideal teacher for his son as a strong African American male, “One that you know, that is successful and shows respect and doesn't take any BS, you know, they are straightforward but also calm and gentle as well.” His justification for his choice was the teacher’s ability to serve as a role model:

They will see an image of their own kind and look up to them and that's very important to me. It does matter because the child will see a reflection of himself, the child will see a reflection of the community that he comes from doing something positive, you know? Doing great things and that will give him the energy and show him that if this person of my background does this then I can do the same thing, and to be honest that's what's kind of going wrong for them, it’s not enough positive images being shown or being displayed in the African American community, You know?

Gemini, an African American male himself, saw the need for more role models for boys of color in schools, and expanded his vision of the ideal teacher to include gender and race because he believed it would make a difference in his son’s education experience and success.

*What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?*

#### **IV. Benefits and challenges of parent-teacher conferences/communication**

**Benefits.** Parents were almost entirely positive in their reflections of parent-teacher conferences and their own interactions with other teachers. They reported that teachers have been supportive, and for the most part, very pleasant when communicating with them. The parent participants also pointed out the role technology plays in their communication with teachers. Parents felt that technology aided in interactions with teachers, in Selena's words, "I think it is helping us be a little more inclusive of that (visibility) because we can be away and still be engaged...That helps a lot if you are not physically there to help at the school...You can even form relationships with teachers via email."

**Challenges.** All parents, with the exception of one, saw the need for parent-teacher conferences and described them as extremely beneficial. Nicole did not see the benefit of the current parent-teacher conference model and compared it to speed dating or a race, "out of the gate, down the lane, around the track" (Nicole). She, similar to the other parents, communicated a need for more time with teachers in face-to-face conferences. Parent participants felt this would allow for more time to discuss the individual needs of the student. This individual time was deemed as especially important when students matriculated into middle school because there was no longer one classroom teacher, but several. Several parents reported that this new distance they felt because of the number of teachers left them wanting more one on one face-to-face interaction with each teacher.



V. **Parent view of the role of race; Systematic bias, Shut out, lowered expectations, perceptions & parent reactions**

**Systematic Bias.** For some parent participants in individual interviews questions surrounding the role of race required more probing than others in individual interviews. The fact that it required probing indicated to the researcher that parents might not be privy to educational statistics and challenges faced by boys of color in schools. This prompted the researcher to begin the parent focus group with statistics about boys of color in education. The parents who attended the focus group were provided with a fact sheet from the Schott foundation at the beginning of the focus group with statistics about boys of color in the nations schools. These statistics included grade 8 NAEP proficiency rates, state suspension rates, AP course enrollment, and bachelor's degree attainment rates for black males (see Appendix I). Nicole and Selena reported that they had never seen those statistics before, but after analysis noted they pointed to a systemic bias or prejudice in our schools. After examining the data closely Selena offered:

If you look further into the problem and look at the suspension rates that is indicative of maybe some prejudice going on. I think school is all encompassing of many different things not just teaching subject matter and you are dealing also with the different social aspects of school. The way the teachers are dealing with the children, any perceptions that they may have. Different groups of kids. When you first interviewed me and mentioned stats I was just like oh..but looking at this its alarming, I did not know. This gives us a big clue into how teachers/admin are making decisions about suspensions. There is definitely some type of bias.

**Lowered Expectations.** During the initial interviews five of the parents in the study reported that their sons had not been treated unfairly in school because of race to their knowledge. However two others believed that their sons had been shut out of opportunities and had expectations of achievement lowered because of their race. Nicole explained that her son had been “given grades” and not challenged, and she believed race was at the core of the problem.

This problem was also addressed by an administrator who explained to the teacher, “A boy of color needs challenge not to be patted on the head” (Nicole).

**Shut Out.** Amina shared experiences describing how her son was shut out of opportunities. One of which involved him being placed in regular classes and not the advanced track he signed up for because those classes were “full,” while other students who were not minorities were placed in those classes. In another instance he was qualified for an award, but not chosen because of his race, according to Amina. These experiences were enlightening to Amina who explained that, “I came to this country not thinking about race, but when you didn’t get things because you were black-now I realize and experienced it myself so now I really know that people weren’t over reacting.”

#### **Parent strategies to prepare & protect sons**

**Higher Expectations.** This realization led Amina to form the conclusion that several other parents echoed, “Being a boy of color you have to work twice as hard” or “Boys of color must go above and beyond.” Amina, Niara, and Gemini all reported teaching their sons this to ensure they will be successful. During the focus group this idea of “going above and beyond” was challenged by one parent who was hesitant to make their sons feel different than other students. Nicole reported that:

No, we just tell them how they are judged in this society. Do you have to be better? No I never tell them that because I never heard that growing up. I think I was raised with a standard that says you are just as good and don’t let them think that you are any different or that their experiences are better than yours. So no, I never-ever tell them that. I tell my boys just as much as the experiences of the kids that go to Brightwood<sup>16</sup> does Lacrosse-you have different experiences as well. Your lifestyle may be different but your experiences are just as good.

Nicole’s stance was opposite of parents like Gemini who explained that:

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<sup>16</sup> An exclusive all boys private school in the area.

I know how this world looks at young black men and I know the statistics and how the media displays them, so I make it a point to point out instances to my son and let him know that you have to go above and beyond in everything that you do. Especially in your education because your education is very important, knowledge will determine how far you get in life, how people look at you in life, and where you want to go, and how far you want to go. So I let him know from the jump this is something that you can't play around with, your education. Yeah, I use, you know statistics, to encourage him to keep him more focused and let him know this is what's happening and this is what will not happen with you.

There was divergent thinking on exactly whether boys of color should be told that they “have to be better.” However, after a series of probing questions, all parents with the exception of Eileen eventually acknowledged in some way that race was a factor that was important in educating this group.

**Candid Discussions.** The way minority parents and students themselves were perceived is a theme that emerged in both the interviews and focus groups. Selena discussed the stigma associated with being a single minority parent; Nicole noted that she was asked if a man was present in her son’s life when her husband was absent from a meeting. Parents also provided examples of how race and the perceptions associated with one’s race affected their sons. Selena, a now divorced parent of two boys, recounts one experience where his “white privilege” separated him from his minority friends:

For example I have two sons and their father is Caucasian and I am Mexican. The youngest one looks like me, Mexican. The older like his father, White. We live here and the majority of his friends are African American, African or Hispanic and they flat out told him. They are teenagers they are always walking everywhere, and sometimes they cross the street illegally and the police stopped them to say that they can’t jaywalk and the next time they are going to get a ticket. Another instance my son was with them and they weren’t bothered. It was the exact same day-so my son’s friends said to him “Thanks for your white privilege” so the kids know. I was shocked and then I was hurt. I thought “Why do these kids now a days have to experience this? Like they know.”

This led her to have explicit conversations with her son about race. Several other parents like Niara, Nicole, Selena and Gemini reported that they did have explicit conversations with their sons of color about race. These discussions often involved how one should conduct themselves as boys of color. Niara offered that these conversations are important for black boys especially “with the things that are going on.” She sends her son the message that he is a black boy and he should be proud of it:

“He is not just a black boy, he is an African boy-that’s what I am trying to instill in him.” I want you to be proud of who you are. I want him to educate them with his life, set himself apart-have a spirit of excellence which I pray over his life everyday to manifest.”

Several parents mentioned that the country’s climate prompted these discussions. Gemini further addresses this when he said:

The black lives matter movement, the constant things, the shootings, the constant racism, the educational gap, you know, the financial gap, you know it all has an effect on their minds, on their thinking how they may look at themselves and how other people may look at them. So many dialogues just need to be constantly open. I mean it's like really, that needs to maybe even be a separate class or separate teaching or something to deal with your emotions how you are feeling, how you think this is going to affect you. To see how you are going to advance in this world.

Gemini was candid about arming his son with tools and information to help him function in our society. He saw addressing society’s perceptions of boys of color with his son as his parental responsibility.

*What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?*

## **VI. Building trust**

Parent participants emphasized the role that communication, empathy, and care played in

building trust. The exchange of information and positive, honest, interactions were all offered as communication that built trust. Cathy explained that she has had two teachers cry when she cried out of concern for her son, those instances of empathy were trust builders for her. Similarly, several parents noted that trust is also built when teachers go the “extra mile” for their child. Parents gave examples of this kind of caring, for example giving a parent an extra book to help a student at home (Cathy), or a call to them if their child started “hanging with the wrong crowd” (Amina). Those instances when teachers went well beyond the scope of their duties were trust building for parents. Parents also noted that trust was fragile, they shared that once trust is violated then it is rethought. Additionally a lack of care on a teacher’s part would equate to a lack of trust on the parents part.

## **VII. Sharing Power in parent-teacher relationships**

During the interviews parent’s views of power were probed. For most of the participants it was not an idea they had considered in the context of parent-teacher relationships. Five of the parents reported that in parent-teacher relationships the power should be shared between both parties. Almost all of the parents noted that teachers are in a place of power in the classroom, while parents hold power in the home environment. Two of the parents reported that parents were most powerful because of their responsibility to their children. One mother explained, “This is my child and God has handed him to me. I have this child for the rest of my life. So you can’t hand me something that’s somewhat destroyed. Power is on my side” (Naira). While most parents did acknowledge that ideally power between the two parties should be shared, there was some divergent thinking in this area.

### **Part 3-Teacher Perspectives**

Nine themes that are important for understanding teacher's perspectives and experiences are presented here. Similar to part two, teacher's voices are included in this discussion. The nine themes are organized in response to the research question and sub questions. The themes that emerged from the teacher data are: 1) Teacher as instructional and emotional supporter 2) Parent role as supporter and advocate 3) The ideal teacher for boys of color 4) Challenges faced by boys of color in schools 4) Teacher training and parent-teacher communication 5) Challenges and opportunities in parent-teacher interactions 6) The effects of race & teacher history 8) Challenges in building trust, and 9) Shared power between teachers and parents.

*What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?*

#### **I. Teacher role as instructional & emotional support**

**Instructional & Challenges.** The teacher participants understood that they had a valuable role to play in student's educational process. All seven teacher participants discussed the instructional role teachers play. Latisha stressed the instructional piece of the teacher's role when she offered that a teacher "makes sure the child can meet the goals/expectations of the curriculum." While teachers were very positive when describing teacher role in the educational process they also acknowledged the challenges they faced in instructing students. When discussing the data from the focus group Lisa noted that teachers are tasked with filling in educational gaps:

A lot of these students haven't had the necessary fundamental skills when it comes to Reading taught to them before entering school so once they get into schools-we as educators are expected

to take them expecting that they come with a certain foundation. Which creates a gap before we even start teaching, because a lot of them are coming without the foundation. So as educators we are starting behind the eight ball and then we have to play catch up but then there isn't enough time-from year to year to teach those fundamental skills although we are teachers. We aren't required to go backward and we can't always go back (for example if you are on a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level but in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade). How can I go backwards and get you ready for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade at the same time? We loose on both sides as educators because we can't hold parents accountable-and we have to be held accountable to move them forward.

**Emotional.** Both Myra and Lisa likened the teacher's role to that of the parent. Lisa explained the teacher role as, "parent away from home, showing them what education can be, giving desire sometimes, giving hope. We do everything not just teaching." Similarly, Rashad described the varied role of a teacher as not only a teacher, "but also sometimes counselor and even an advocate." Susan addressed the role a teacher plays in the classroom and lifelong learning.

"Tremendous. As a Resource Teacher I teach my teachers to look at children with an open mind. Not just data but talking to the kids. Do they have a fixed mindset? How can I change that to growth? Teacher's helps determine mindset and how we affect that carries over. The earlier we get to that the better."

From the teacher participant's perspective much like parents, they also should be an emotional source of support of boys of color.

## **II. Parent role as supporter and advocate**

**Support.** When asked to share their perspective on a parent's role in the educational process teachers listed everyday tasks that they thought parents should engage in as well as the

type of mindset they should try to help their sons form. Parent as communicator, first educator, encourager, and foundation builder were all offered as examples of support teachers thought parents should play. For example Latisha stated that a parent's role was to, "effectively communicate about their student to make sure they are doing ok." Both Myra and Lisa offered that parents should provide structure, and teachers should enhance and build on what the parents start. Myra emphasized that because parent background influences how much academic support they can offer-the main responsibility is to provide structure.

Similarly Susan and Ralph's description of the parent role included the mindset and values that parents can help form in their children in order to support them in the educational process. Susan offered, "I would say support at home letting them know its okay to fail if you get back up. That mindset...Modeling good learning behaviors." Ralph described the parent role as one that gives students the foundation and values that support what educators do. Specifically teaching students the importance of education, meeting deadlines, and respecting adults. Teachers shared that by providing structure and helping students form the mindset conducive to academic success parents were supporting the work of the teacher.

**Advocate.** Parent as advocate was a recurring theme that emerged from teacher participant data. Lisa, Rashad, and Anaya all stressed the importance of parents advocating for their sons. Lisa, both a teacher and a mother of boys of color, offered that, "Parents of boys of color have to become better advocates and learn the system. They have to learn to speak up for their young men, also arming them." She provided the specific example of code switching, "for example double speech-I have to have two languages in two different worlds. Parents have to bring that back." Anaya agreed with the role of parent as advocate and provided this explanation of why advocacy is important:



They (parents) need to advocate more for their son, I think trust the school but not blindly trust the school. To not be afraid to ask those questions. Parents need to be present. We need to have a course for parents. You are your child's advocate. If you aren't there to speak up for your child who is going to? A lot of time there is this blind trust in the school system and when parents finally want to do something it may be too late. By the time the child is not going to graduate then it's too late. At that point it can be intimidating to pose those questions when you really haven't posed them before. So it is important to start early as your child's advocate. And also teach your child to advocate for themselves, and not to be afraid to come home and tell you what happened.

### **III. The ideal teacher for boys of color**

**Builds Relationship.** Teacher participants, like parents, listed teacher practices, ideology and personality traits that would be ideal for a teacher of a boy of color. The importance of building relationships with boys of color and their parents emerged from both the interviews and focus groups as integral to teaching boys of color. Rashad shared that research shows that for boys of color relationship and cultural proficiency is important, but in a system that he describes as rigid, those things are often missing. Rashad adds that the presence of a relationship leads to trust and that is necessary to effectively reach the student:

I think one of the things we as teachers need to do is to make connections. It's always a great idea to have a relationship with the student first. Often times there are some students of color that may not have the best home life and at times they may not necessarily have...they may be in survival mode, so their mindset may be ...they may not think education as important. It may not be a top priority because of different reasons. Of course for teachers, we are educated, we have extensive knowledge, so just building the connection. Just taking time finding out what their interests may be –really showing interest outside the academics first and then leading them with breadcrumbs (if you will) ...encouraging them to be successful. Being open and transparent about any struggles we have had, its good for us to show our flaws. The kids think we are perfect and put together. But we can let them know the academic journey is going to be a struggle. With the effort they put you will be the

person that is supporting them and that all goes back to relationship.

Latisha, Anaya, Lisa and Troy noted that ideally teachers should build relationships with students and learn their individual stories, instead of allowing a narrative about boys of color on a whole to affect how they deal with students. Latisha thought it was important for a teacher to remember that just because a boy is black, it doesn't mean he shares the same story with other black boys. Anaya too thought this was important, in her words:

That is the part I was saying about the importance of digging deeper. That other layer. That student may be there but it doesn't mean that the parent is there. So to find out and make sure there is constant communication with parents to create a partnership in educating the boys. To make sure that we don't have an assumption that the parent doesn't care and the kid doesn't care. Sometimes the kid is acting out and it may not be indicative of the home they live in. It is important to really keep our opinions open to learning more about their individual experiences.

Susan provided a specific example of why relationship building is important in teaching boys of color:

I've seen it like immediate judgments made about a child before knowing them. I try to put myself in the person shoes. And it happened more than one time in a week, let alone a day...I think I would start feeling like the 'world was against me....they can buy into it and prove to others that they aren't like that or they can turn their back and not try. And come off angry. I get that, because I can see me doing the same thing if I was judged in the same way.

Susan shared the belief that by getting to know students, teachers would be less likely to interact with them based on judgments. Lisa echoed the idea of building relationships to understand who students are in order to judge them independently. Ralph agreed as Lisa shared that even though it may sound sexist to some it is extremely important to remember that they are boys. She explains that:

Sometimes we have preconceived notions of a black boy and we put that on them. Versus just seeing that they are boys. They are not made to do some of the things we expect them to do.

Also, not taking society's stories and making it part of this specific boy's life if we don't know who that boy is. Judge them independently. Yes they may have made wrong choices or not the best choices but we have to identify and note that this a boy and they are going to do boy things. They are going to jump, move, avoid doing work as much as possible because that is not what they wanna do-not because it is a black boy-that connection and understanding is probably key

Ralph cited community presence as an ideal teacher practice; this too builds relationship with students and parents. He said that, "Some of the most effective teachers I have seen both of color and white are teachers that have a presence in that community. So when the parent comes to deal with the teacher they either know them personally or they know of them."

**Providing Rigor & Support.** Four of the teacher participants identified providing rigor as essential for the ideal teacher for boys of color. In Anaya's opinion teachers should make sure they are challenging boys of color instructionally. Challenge and accountability was central in her description of the ideal teacher. She compared school to a journey and emphasized the teacher's role in making sure they are prepared for the journey ahead. She explained that:

This is middle school, just a part of it, making sure as teachers not to lower our standards for the students and have high expectations can provide them those skills that are missing. Trying to fill the learning gaps that are there as opposed to filling it with a good grade, filling it with the skills that they will need for the journey.

Rashad provided specific teacher practices that he thought would be beneficial to a boy of color. His description including 1) holding boys accountable, 2) setting high expectations, 3) providing support, 4) understanding the challenges they faced, and 5) being realistic. He also referenced his own experience as a boy of color in schools:

I think that parents of colors (especially boys) they really want them to be held accountable so really setting high expectations and not letting them go. That means when they feel like the work

is too challenging they have a teacher ready to go the extra mile and be there and just really be supportive. That is a good teacher anyway, more specifically there may be days...its challenging to be a black male in this society..to navigate this system like I have...and you are also told to you have to be the best, work twice as hard. Sometimes those pressures become so overwhelming in that it's kinda hard to really live up to that. You are constantly reflecting, analyzing, and trying to think what is it that I need to do. Am I doing my best? Having a teacher know that everyday may look different and being realistic about the level of support.

Anaya, much like Rashad, saw the need for challenging as a characteristic of the ideal teacher for a boy of color. In her mind the ideal teacher would, “teach the child you are teaching like it is your child. Not change expectations based on the school, not assume SES, keep the expectations high, like you would want for you child in a classroom.”

#### **IV. Challenges faced by boys of color in schools**

All seven teacher participants in the study were very aware of the challenges faced by boys of color in schools. Myra as a teacher of color explained she has, “acuity to what they are facing. I am aware-not oblivious.” After listening to teacher responses, it became clear they all shared this acuity to the challenges boys of color faced, irrespective of their own racial background. Another observation made by Myra was that the challenges are multifactorial, the other teacher participants agreed and outlined several challenges; the two that they spoke of at length were role models and the role of stereotypes.

**Lack of role models.** Several of the teachers touched on the importance of role models; Anaya explains that boys of color have a need to see that education is an arena in which they can find success:

I would say provide them with opportunities to see the other side. When you see the percentage of students who may not have had someone in their family graduate from college I think it is important for them to see that access to education is for them and to provide real life examples beyond us as

teachers and have different people from the community come in and see this person who has had a similar path as Rashad was saying and was able to persevere, overcome, and be successful. I think they need to see that reality is for them too...not just somebody else.

Latisha suggested more programs like “Men of tomorrow” a school mentoring group that she has seen assisting with keeping boys of color on track at Lakecrest. She believed that many boys of color are angry at the lack of male figures in their lives, and mentoring can help to assuage that anger. Myra too mentioned the need to see more role models; she cites her own experience as she did not have a black male teacher until she was a graduate student. She also shared that there is evidence to support her opinion. She cited research on charter schools that put in place mentoring and other research proven methods for improving the achievement of boys of color that lead to 100% graduation rates.

**Stereotypes.** In the teacher focus group, Ralph recalled a story that he heard on National Public Radio (NPR) about two years ago that addressed motivation in urban students:

I might butcher it but the resounding theme was along those lines. They were talking about urban students and why is there this performance gap and one of the things was that it wasn't that the students didn't have the intrinsic belief that they could do well. It was why should I place that value that much time, that much investment in education when I am not going to live past my early 30s. That floored me! I was like oh my gosh I never thought about it that way. To them it was I am going to live hard because I am going to die hard. They thought they had to make the most out of this life while they are here. That really opened up my eyes, I was not coming to this fully aware of some of the things these kids...in regards to this is some of the things they were exposed to in their neighborhood. In their families, what they have been around. The question to me is one of motivation, what reasons can I give students to do better? Not a belief of can I do better it is where is the motivation to do better.

Lisa and several other teachers added that for the population of students they teach those kinds of life experiences would not be accurate. In her words, “that is only 1% of this population that may be living in a world that requires them to see it like that. The other 99% are living in a

normal world.” She also pointed out that those stories fuel the narrative that these boys can’t achieve because they “have no one.”

The teacher participants all agreed this stereotype was not accurate in describing the population they teach, but that motivation and the portrayal of black boys in the media is a challenge they face. Rashad addresses this when he explains that:

I agree with Ralph because in many regards there is a perception about Black males that they want to portray what they see in the media and I think for us to compete with that it is a huge beast. No matter what the location for black males there is a greater need for them to have the desire to emulate some of these negative images or people who are not necessarily in alignment with what we see as the great vision for them to see. It is unfortunate, but I think it has become a greater deficit where a lot of our black males are not seeing a lot of positive role models on television. As a result, it is one thing that they are not seeing education as being cool, they are seeing aspirations that are not academic, but athletic etc. In some cases they are now trying to take the easy route. We know that you have to put that work in. We need to have the conversation with them that these are habits that if you don’t get it together now, there will be consequences.

Lisa offered that the stereotypes faced by boys of color in school create a challenge for them:

I don’t consider them as challenges because I see them as boys being boys. But those are the challenges they face because people do not see them as boys being boys. Fortunately, African American boys are very confident, and people want to silence them and consider it a very negative thing. Because parents are instilling that self-confidence. Even if they don’t speak the queen’s English. We just have to respect them.

According to the teachers stereotypes are one challenge that boys of color face in schools, these stereotypes affect the way teachers see them, and the way they see themselves.

*What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?*

## **V. Teacher training and parent-teacher communication**

On the whole, teacher participants had not received any training in parent-teacher communication in their graduate programs or professional development. Ralph was the only participant who had been involved in training that addressed working with parents during his special education teacher education program. Latisha shared that she received some informal direction from her content specialist. She also explained that she used the sandwich method when dealing with parents, where she highlighted a positive, stated a challenge, and ended with a positive. Myra, like Latisha, received no formal training, but explained, “I got on the job training. I would listen to senior teachers during my first year.”

Lisa and Ralph both expressed that there is no curriculum that could have prepared them for negative parent-teacher communication. Ralph recounted his first experience with a parent that left him shaken:

I don't think that class prepared me for that nasty email, phone call, nasty parent standing outside my class banging on the door and yelling at you in front of the child. I was totally lost when that happened, I had no idea what to do. I think I came in (I know differently) I came in thinking that parents know teachers have the students best interest in mind, so they wouldn't take the side of an 11 year old over a teacher. Intellectually, I know that's not the case but it was shocking when it happened.

Lisa shared his belief that a curriculum can't prepare teachers for some encounters, but she did offer how she has learned to process those experiences and see the parent's point of view:

I don't know how to build a curriculum to prepare teachers because you never know what you are going to get. What I have learned over time is that when you have an irate parent its because that is their prized possession. And all they are trying to do is protect their prized possession. So at this point in time it's like the lion is out and he/she is ready to pounce because you did something to their baby. But how to prepare you to handle that, I don't think there is a course to prepare you because it depends on how the parent comes to you, the support system in the building to help

you through that, how the incident plays out (laughing). So I don't think there is a course for that. The only thing that has helped me is knowing that this is their pride and joy. I worry about the other 32 but this is the only one that you care about. So that is important to you that is why you are acting like this. Now that I have children I understand it.

Rashad suggested the counseling department help to train teachers on strategies on how to reach parents. His belief is that is especially important for teachers who are not minorities. Rashad also offered that this training could address misconceptions including the idea that parents of color who don't attend, don't care. He added that some parents are working multiple jobs or in survival mode and that is the reason they are absent. Susan noted that after thinking about the lack of preparation for teachers she now realized that it is essential, and would love a mock parent-teacher conference as a part of that preparation.

## **VI. Challenges & opportunities in parent-teacher interactions**

Teacher participants emphasized that the importance of parent-teacher conferences and interaction. They cited evaluation of the child's progress, creating solutions for student progress, and getting on the same page, as benefits to conferences and interaction with parents. Rashad offered that the conferences are a way to, "establish and build relationships. Parents showing teacher that they are invested." In terms of challenges, teachers listed maintaining contact, parents not holding students accountable, and the brevity of conferences.

**Challenges.** Susan, like most teachers, noted that the parent-teacher interactions she had were largely positive, and the few times that they were not she did the following, "I acknowledge if they are negative and then tried to remember that I was teacher. The only time it's stayed negative is if the parent doesn't hold similar values as the school and that is rare." When explaining challenges, Lisa and Latisha shared that some parents did not contact them



back, Latisha added that they were accusatory when they did. “Some parents are defensive/enabling and put most of the problem on the teacher vs. letting the child advocate for themselves” (Latisha). Rashad echoed this sentiment when he described the kind of interactions with parents that are the least productive-when the teacher is held more accountable than the student. He and Myra also listed the brief time span of the conferences as a challenge. “Often there are missed opportunities there is a challenge to get everything in that needs to be said.” Lisa added that parent follow through once contact is made is an obstacle that she has faced.

**Extra support for parents of boys of color.** Both Susan and Lisa reported that they offered parents of boys of color “extra help” when they interacted with them. For example Lisa said that, “I think about the parent and then I cater how I respond. For parents of color I am more friendly and I tell them about opportunities.” Susan, like Lisa, offered the parents of boys of color extra. She explained that, “with parents of color I make sure they know the pathways for advanced courses. I do it for white students too..but I really make sure I do it with African American parents. I am afraid that teachers before me may not have shared that info.”

**Building Partnerships.** All seven of the teacher participants reported that building parent partnerships was integral to student success. In the focus group, Ralph also explained the importance of working directly with parents of color to improve their sons’ school experiences. He reported that the creation of a dialogue or communication system “where we are all on the same page, “we are in this for your child”, we might have different ways on how to best meet your child so lets have the discussion” was needed. He suggested meet and greets, or asking parents to come in and shadow their son for a day, as things that can foster great relationships and the idea that “we are all on the same page.” Rashad agreed with Ralph and added that teachers should attempt to pull the parents in schools more often:

“Go into the community (like someone said) not just when kids are trouble. Also providing parent

classes that might be helpful with their child's age. Using the school as a positive place where we bring in resources from the community that the parents might need that can help their boys at that time. Possibly using that opportunity to have teachers there as well. It's not about the work, it's about the child and what they need.

Lisa suggested that maybe teachers should attend school activities to reach students and parents even though they have personal lives and other requirements. "Maybe that could be a requirement outside of our duties...I know we have other requirements (teachers laugh)...Because they don't see us as humans. If they see us at the grocery store they are like "You eat?" Rashad agreed with these statements and suggested polling parents about forming relationships. "Sometimes we may think we know what is best in terms of relationships but we are spinning in circles. We can poll them and see what parents want and then determine our next step" (Rashad). He also added that in order to build those partnerships teachers would have to hold themselves accountable for doing what parents suggested. Rashad also connected this to trust, "that relates to what we said about trust and it takes time." Similarly in the focus group he added that parent outreach should be innovative and not rely on ideas that worked years ago. Instead outreach should adapt and the schools should make a conscious effort to do better and meeting parents where they are.

### **Building stronger parent-teacher relationships**

*Parent awareness of teacher belief in student success.* During interviews teacher participants were asked what they would like the parent of a boy of color to know about them. They were also asked to consider how that might enhance parent-teacher communication and build strong partnerships. Myra and Ralph both stated their belief in the student's success as information that would be important for parents to have. Myra stated that, "I believe their son is capable of earning an A in this class. It's important for all parents. If there was ever a time in

their history when they have not had that communicated to them.” Similarly Ralph added that, “I want to help your child be the best they can so they can have a fair shot at life.” These responses allude to the fact that the teachers believed the parents of boys of color needed “extra”. Susan’s focus on student success, reflection, and its importance in her practice was evident in her response, I am reflective and I want them to tell me if I drop the ball. I’m open. I love kudos but concerns are good too. I want to know what I can do better for your child.”

***“I’m Empathetic.”*** Lisa, Rashad, and Susan all acknowledged that as parents themselves, they empathize with parents of the boys they teach. Lisa thought it would be beneficial if parents knew that she understood and could empathize with their concerns, as she too is raising boys of color:

I understand the internal concerns. I live the internal concerns and it is a scary world to be. Especially when you know you are doing your best and everyone has already set up guards against you because they have preconceived notions because of your race. Are you married? Are you not married? Is your son educated? Is he low income? Does he have food?

Rashad offered this for parents, “I am a hard worker and an agent of change. I want to impact the student’s lives. I have two boys who aren’t in AVID that I mentor. I only had one black teacher so I make myself visible. Rashad also shared his own memory of navigating the educational system, and discussed how that made him more empathetic to boys of color. Susan shared a personal experience with her three year old that she describes as “rowdy.” She was told that her child probably has ADHD and felt as though she had failed as a parent. She explains that this affects how she addresses parents because she can empathize with how they may feel when they sit across from her.

## VII. Effects of teacher history & race

**Teacher History.** Both teacher history and background, coupled with race, emerged as an important subject in educating boys of color and dealing with their parents. Teacher history shaped the participants' outlook, teacher persona, and their relationships with students. Many of the teacher participants recalled details surrounding their own experience with teachers. The following memory was shared by Rashad:

I was a struggling student, but I was determined. Blue collar parents that worked hard and had high expectations. That was instilled in me. Teachers couldn't scaffold for me and some teachers didn't provide opportunities to come in for lunch etc. So, I dipstick a lot.

Rashad's experience as a student who needed more scaffolds led him to "dipstick" or check for understanding regularly during his own instruction. Lisa's personal experience with positive teachers led to her teacher persona. Her favorite teacher was strict and warm and she emulates this in her own classroom.

**Race as ever present.** For Susan and Ralph, both White teachers, they shared that race was ever present in their daily interactions with students and parents. Susan's experience in attending an equity initiative offered in Berry county led to an epiphany for her. She describes going through her career thinking that she was a very good teacher, then she learned about white privilege and she rethought her approach to teaching:

I realized that I never experienced things that some of my students had. I had different opportunities. It changed my teaching because I wanted now to make that white privilege less if not eliminated in my classroom because I control that. Just little things like comment...this is easy. You don't realize how that can send the wrong message ...for example she thinks I can do it because it is easy. Before, I thought that was helping. My history was one of not knowing. The more educated I am the better teacher I become.

When asked how that impacted her parent relationships, she explains that:

I realize now that when I think or say “How could your mom not sit down with you and do homework?” I have to realize not everyone had a stay at home mom like me. Some moms work and even two jobs. Or your mom might be in school now going to college cause she went later. I’m more open to the idea that people had a different journey and that is good.

Susan explained that race changes how she thinks about everything she does. For example as a leader and a department head, she opens the door to minorities for advanced courses. She shared one incidence when she began to let in a number of minority students in an advanced Math class, and the school average on the test declined. She describes the courage it took at a leadership meeting to defend her actions. Susan defended her actions by explaining that more student’s mindsets were changed, even if scores are lowered. Her concern was that more minority students should be exposed to rigor. She believes she has changed the way her department gives access to advanced courses, and has positively affected gatekeeping.

Ralph, like Susan, noted that race is always on his radar. “I always remember that I am a white male and how might they perceive that. I check myself all day.” Ralph’s race affects his classroom in several ways, one of which is the way students view him. He reported:

One student said “You are just a stupid white man” and the other kids defended me. And said “He isn’t white just light skinned.” They had preconceived notions that a white man couldn’t care about them. And I had my preconceived notions that race at that age wasn’t an issue for kids. (16 years ago). There is a lot I bring to the table without being aware.

Ralph’s acute awareness of his race affects how he engages with students in conversations about race:

As a white man I can tell you I at times I find that I really have to be thoughtful and planned out before I have that kind of conversation. I think because of my own fears of saying the wrong thing or if I think ...When I have had those conversations with students I feel like I grow tremendously professionally from those conversations. The students benefit from it too. It is a great thing. I know last year I sat the students down one day during the Baltimore riots...I do

think there are some preconceived notions that these kids have almost accepted and have a self fulfilling prophecy by the time they are in middle school. That's concerning to me.

Ralph also shared that he wonders if his students knew his family struggled growing up –if that would change how they saw him. Not just as a privileged white man, but one who can relate to them in terms of socio-economics and class.

**The effect of race on teacher interaction.** Lisa, Myra, and Rashad all believed that their own experience with race gave them insight into dealing with the boys of color in their classrooms. For example, Rashad stated that his personal experiences can help boys of color, he often pulls them aside and motivates them. In his own practice he describes himself as caring and committed with boys of color. He reports showing this investment in a number of ways, one of which is talking to a student rather than writing a referral for misbehavior, remembering that something could have happened before class to upset the student. His belief is that the relationship these boys have with a teacher who is not a minority is different but can be just as good if the teacher is committed to building the positive relationship.

Lisa provided a specific personal example how her experiences as a parent and teacher affect her interaction with her students who are boys of color and her own son:

As a teacher I make sure I give boys of color an extra step. They have chances, explanations, and opportunities because I know they don't get that. I try to frame consequences in a way so they know I am giving them an opportunity. As a parent I am very very hard on my little one because I know he doesn't have teachers that will give him that extra step. He is not in a diverse setting at school (most teachers are white women). I make sure he understands what he is supposed to do and I expose him so he knows he isn't limited.

Lisa makes the point that some teachers don't understand the damage their perspectives can do on building relationships with boys of color, educating them, and ultimately building

partnerships with their parents. She explains that, “you expect certain things but you don’t know that your expectations are based on your biases. Race plays a big role in that. Even if you are smiling.”

*What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?*

### **VIII. Challenges in building trust**

Teachers used phrases like “huge” and “key factor” to emphasize how important trust was in parent-teacher relationships. Latisha noted that for the parents of minority boys, trust was especially important. “Parents want to know they can trust you. Especially with what is going on in the world today.” Susan describes why building trust might be different for her as a White teacher with the parent of minority boys.

I have had parents say to me “You are different”...I feel like there is a wall between us without us even knowing each other so I do everything in my power to **break down that wall**. I think how can I let them know I am here to help? Support, give opportunities, and not hold their child back and be a gatekeeper? I want them to learn and to prosper. I want them to be really successful-happy people. The wall equals generations and generations of distrust. Things haven’t been equitable...it’s ingrained (*she offers GI bill example of inequity*)...Any little bit I can do to break down and change that-I do it.

Rashad addressed how the teacher relationship with the boy of color affects parent trust. He explained that parents need to trust that a teacher is giving a high quality education and if their child is being treated fairly. He also pointed out that, “and if the child doesn’t trust you the walls build up...And parents might not be willing to receive what you say.”

## **IX. Shared power between teacher and parent**

The questions that addressed power required some probing which may indicate that many of the teachers had not thought about power in parent-teacher communication before this study. Teachers grappled with the question and ultimately six of them offered that the power should be shared between the teacher and parent. In Lisa's words, "teachers are in a unique position because we are perceived as having the power but if something doesn't go right, the parent is perceived as having all the power. Shared power." Susan infused her own experience as a parent as she described the balance of power between teacher and parent:

I would hope it would be shared. I have a rowdy 3.5 year old and was told that she probably has ADHD. I felt like I had failed. I don't want parents to feel like that. I start with strengths. Every student has something that shines. I sit and share that I am providing a service. So they have the power. I am empowered in helping the student move along. I like empowered.

Susan's response was different in that she did agree that there is some balance in power, and ultimately it would be shared, but she would prefer the use of the word empower instead of the idea that one party holds power.

### **Part 4- How do the perspectives of parents and teachers of boys of color regarding shared knowledge differ? In what ways do they agree?**

The data from parent and teacher interviews revealed three categories of difference in perspectives, and five where they converged. The ideal teacher, trust, and the role of race were three categories in which the perspectives of parents and teachers of boys of color somewhat differed.

**The Ideal Teacher.** Parents and teachers had a different view of the ideal teacher for



boys of color. All but one parent had no racial or gender preferences, but instead qualities and experiences that included: well-traveled, caring, strict, understanding, open-minded, respectful, and not rigid. On the other hand, teachers described both the emotional and instructional support the ideal teacher of a boy of color would give in great detail. Teacher participants saw this teacher as one who would build relationships and “dig deeper,” forming positive relationships that would lay the groundwork for instruction. In addition to relationship building, teachers identified providing rigor and academic support to boys of color as characteristics of the ideal teacher. Teachers, much like parents, didn’t focus on the race or gender of the ideal teacher, but they did paint a more distinct picture of what that teacher might do to support a boy of color academically.

**Trust.** Both parent and teacher participants noted that trust was important in their communication and interaction. However, parents offered more trust building factors whereas teacher responses focused on why trust was important for parent of boys of color. Parents shared that communication, empathy, and care helped to build trust. On the other hand, teachers Latisha, Rashad, and Susan all explained why trust might look different to the parents of boys of color. Susan and Rashad both described a wall between parents and teachers and the role that trust plays in building or tearing down that wall. Rashad explained that the teacher’s treatment of the student affects the wall. Susan pointed out that the wall is also affected by societal factors beyond the teacher and parent.

**Role of Race.** Most of the parents, and all of the teacher participants, acknowledged that there is cause for concern with “what’s going on in the world today,” as it relates to boys of color. Upon examination of the data for categories and themes, two themes became apparent as parents and teachers communicated their concerns regarding race. One was the role race played

in the schooling of boys of color and parent-teacher communication, and the other was the strategies employed by parents and teachers based on this.

Parents discussed perceptions of lowered expectations and their sons being shut out of opportunity due to race. They employed strategies such as teaching their sons to work harder, and having candid discussions about race. Knowing what “was going on the world today,” affected teachers as well, but in a slightly different way. Teachers differed in that they focused more on challenges such as role models and stereotypes that boys of color faced in schools. Teacher awareness of the challenges due to race led to different strategies. For example, Susan and Lisa offering parents extra help/information because they didn’t know if others had shared with them valuable information. Race also affected the teachers in the way they supported boys of color. For example, Rashad decided to talk to boys of color, instead of referring them for most offenses. Teachers and parents differed in their focus in terms of race, but both employed strategies to prepare boys of color for contemporary society. Teachers also reported using strategies with race in mind as they built relationships with the parents of boys of color.

Although there were areas where parent and teacher perspectives diverged, there were also some areas where their perspectives converged. The parent and teacher participants agreed in the role of teacher and parent, parent-teacher challenges, and interaction, and power.

**Role of Teacher and Parent.** Parents and teachers were in complete agreement that the teacher’s role was instructional and emotional. Teachers saw their role as one of helping students attain foundational skills and also inspiring them. Two teachers likened their role to that of the parent. Similarly, parents viewed teachers as instructors of content, and one that provided extra care to students. Another commonality was the acknowledgement of both parties that the

teacher role was one that was indeed challenging.

The parent role was described as one of supporter and advocate by parents themselves. Teachers saw the parent role in the same way and described parents as the party that is responsible for setting the foundation that teachers build on. This foundation includes providing structure, and helping form values conducive to academic success. Similarly, parents offered that their role was to work with teachers, address academic and behavior concerns, and set a good academic foundation.

**Parent-teacher Challenges and Interaction.** Teacher and parent participants both report mostly positive interaction with each other. Another similarity was the value of these interactions and relationships as stated by the participants. Teachers and parents stated that “getting on the same page” was necessary and interaction allowed for this. Both parties acknowledge the need for more face-to-face interaction in order to build relationships. A challenge stated by teachers and parents is the time constraint of current parent-teacher conferences. Both parties stated that the limited time was a challenge in building partnerships.

**Power.** Both parent and teacher participants were hesitant to answer this general question when initially presented. Most parents in the study and all teachers in the study eventually agreed that ideally, power between teacher and parent is shared. For the most part, parents and teachers agreed that each has more power in one domain (home or school), but ultimately in the parent-teacher relationship there should be a balance between both parties.



## Chapter 6: Analysis

Parent-teacher relationships support student learning and these relationships are a crucial component in educating children. When the two parties work together, students benefit as it is reflected in their strengthened performance and academic persistence (DecCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Kim, 2009; Angell et al., 2009). This study examined parents' and teachers' shared knowledge regarding middle school boys of color. Additionally, parents and teachers perceptions regarding the creation and maintenance of their relationships, and the challenges and opportunities for shared knowledge they experienced were also explored. Examining perceptions of parents and teachers may uncover how to better support boys of color in educational settings, which represents potential contributions to the field of education, policy, family studies, sociology, and immigrant integration.

In this chapter, I revisit the results of this study and analyze three key findings that emerged from participants' perspectives on shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. While the research questions guiding this study served as a framework for organizing the findings, there were several themes that emerged during the data collection process that were significant. Although these findings were not explicitly stated in the research questions, they are still relevant to the experiences and perspectives of the teacher and parent participants; therefore, they are presented in this section. Findings include: (1) Participants' views of each other as intentional allies; (2) the need for support, preparation, and protection of boys of color; and (3) the lack of formal teacher training in interactions. Second, I connect these to the research questions that guided this study:

1. What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school

son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?

- a. What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?
- b. What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?

Third, I evaluate this study's findings in terms of the research literature in chapter two and other pertinent studies. Fourth, I discuss the significance of these findings. I conclude by providing a revision of the conceptual framework that guided this study.

### ***Intentional Allies, not Natural Enemies***

The first salient finding suggests that parents and teachers hold positive views of each other and the role they both play in educating boys of color. Both parents and teachers wanted to build stronger partnerships, which suggests that they saw each other as allies who shared power and not natural enemies or potential threats. This was reflected in both the interview and focus group data that showed a set of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes in the teachers and parents. Initially, I believed that the parents and teachers would describe a more adversarial relationship, thus, this finding surprised me. I further believed that the middle class capital possessed by the parent participants played a role in the facilitation of these shared norms and ultimately the view of each other as allies. Sampson (2002) and Lareau's (2003) research, argues that middle class parents tend to prepare their children in alignment with public schools for educational experiences, because they share the same values as the schools and appears to underlie this finding. Perna (2000) further defined social capital as information-sharing channels and networks as well as social norms, values, and expected behaviors. The convergence in the participants' descriptions of the teacher and parent role displays a shared set of norms, values,

and expected behaviors or social capital that facilitated an allied relationship.

In the focus group, teachers and parents were given Waller's (1932) description of parent-teacher relationships and an explanation of the term "natural enemies" (see Appendix J). The parent responses indicated that they had never considered teachers as "natural enemies." For example, Selena, a parent, notes, "When you set a standard for your child and you are on the same page with the teacher that gets everybody on the same page. That reduces your chances of conflict dramatically. That 'mutual distrust' won't be there." She referred to the shared norms and values between parent and teacher that were evident in the study. Both parties saw the other as sources of emotional and instructional support, and parents acknowledged the difficult role of a classroom teacher. Parent participant Naira offered, "the teacher is your friend," a sentiment echoed by all the parent participants. This finding contradicts previous research on the adversarial relationship between teachers and parents (Waller 1935, Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003).

The participants' views of each other as intentional allies also contradicts a recurrent theme in the parent perception literature that less educated and minority parents do not want to become or cannot become involved in their children's education (Huss-Keeler 1997, DecCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho 2005, Lopez 2002, Kim 2009, Torez 2004). The parents in this study demonstrated interest in their children's education irrespective of their race, ethnicity, educational status, or income. In their own words, teachers and parents valued "getting on the same page." Additionally, both parties desired more time to build relationships with each other to better serve their son/student of color. Teacher participants addressed the myth of minority parents and the misconception that some parents do not want to become or cannot become involved in their children's education. Particularly, Rashad and Susan explained that while some parents may not be able to assist with homework and volunteer in class, it should not translate to

a negative perception. Negative perceptions of parents who were unable to assist their children with homework or volunteer in school pervades the literature, but was rejected by the teachers who participated in this study (DecCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho 2005, Lasky 2000, Lawrence-Lightfoot 1978).

Parents and teachers saw the value in building partnerships and wanted more time to develop rapport, thus corroborating prior research on families and schools. Hidalgo, Sau-Fong & Epstein (2004) explained that parents want more specific and useful information regarding how they can instruct their children. The participants in this study saw the need for more opportunities to share their expectations and best practices about their sons/students of color. Hidalgo, Sau-Fong & Epstein offered that particularly for minority parents, successful communication requires personal outreach, non-judgmental communication, and respect for parents' cultures. Rashad, Susan, and Lisa were among the teacher participants who expressed the need for the kind of outreach these researchers outlined.

The participants in this study agreed that power should ultimately be shared between both parties, which is important when considering prior research that finds teachers are often the authority in the relationship. Lasky (2000) found that parent-teacher communication is bound by silent rules of discourse, and often the teacher is viewed as an authority. Other scholars have also discussed the power inherent in parent-teacher relationships and interactions, noting that the teacher is often in control, choosing the topics and dominating interaction by talking about students from their perspective (Epstein 2010, Lasky 2000, Bernhard & Freire 1999). Strain in parent-teacher relationships can often occur as a result of this unequal balance. Parents and teachers of boys of color benefit from interactions where there is empathy and respect. Moreover, they also benefit when each party is seen as a valued contributor. The participants



described those characters as ones leading to an allied relationship. It is important to note that the participants who volunteered for this study were all invested in the education of boys of color, and this certainly contributes to the likelihood parents and teachers either desired or believed in creating these positive relationships. While a limitation of the study, it also permitted depth in uncovering perspectives parents and teachers may often find difficult to discuss.

Parents' and teachers' views of each other as intentional allies relates directly to the research questions that guided this study. Concerning knowledge on academics, engagement, and behavior, the two groups in this study saw each other as allies, wanted to build partnerships, and exchange information in order to achieve shared knowledge. Teacher and parent participants held the belief that their relationship was important and saw it as beneficial to spend time building and maintaining it. Additionally, an opportunity in creating productive communication between the two groups is the willingness to do what it takes to build rapport and partnerships to better serve boys of color. A major challenge in fostering productive communication between the two groups was the current structure of Berry County's parent-teacher conferences. The structure does not allow for enough time to build relationships and share knowledge. The lack of time for parents and teachers to share best practices in order to better serve boys of color should be viewed as a missed opportunity. Power also plays a role in the creation of this allied relationship because the parties held the belief that shared power led to more successful relationships between teacher and parent.

Findings in this study suggest that there were school factors at Lakecrest that encouraged and laid the foundation for an allied relationship between teachers and parents. For example, teacher participants espoused beliefs that were conducive to building parent-teacher partnerships. Such as the belief that there was a shared responsibility between teacher and parent for student

success, and that different students and parent need different supports. Teacher participant Susan lauded the equity training at Lakecrest, a significant factor that contributed to those beliefs. Berry County's Equity Team, based in the central office, conducted a series of equity trainings at Lakecrest. Additionally, two Lakecrest employees trained by the equity team provided professional development to the entire staff in monthly sessions. Equity training began at Lakecrest in the 2012-2013 school year and continued until 2014-2015. The training began and continued under two principals, the first a Black female and next a Black male. Both principal's commitment to the training seemed to have yielded positive results with the teacher participants with regard to their beliefs about equity and culturally responsive teaching. All teacher participants, with the exception of Rashad, were employed at Lakecrest and in the training. However, Rashad reported that he received equity training through Berry County prior to his position at Lakecrest.

A strong Parent-Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) and the community outreach teacher committee may also have contributed to the strong family school connections evidenced at Lakecrest. Teacher participants reported the presence of an influential PTSO, observed on my recruiting visits to Lakecrest. Additionally, the community outreach committee targets students that are underperforming academically and makes home visits. During the home visits, teachers attempt to form trusting relationships with the families and students in order to positively affect school performance. Lakecrest also boasts two mentoring programs for boys of color. One focuses on academic support, and the other titled, "Men of Tomorrow," that was started by the current principal during the year of the study. Selena described the positive effect "Men of tomorrow" had on her son during both her interviews and focus group. For instance she said, "They taught them how to make a budget and how to save money for the future. They also went

to a local High School basketball game; soon they will go to a Wizards game-just to give them male role models. He loves it!” Equity training, a strong PTSO presence, mentoring for boys of color, and community outreach were all a part of the groundwork that enabled parent and teachers to view each other as allies at Lakecrest.

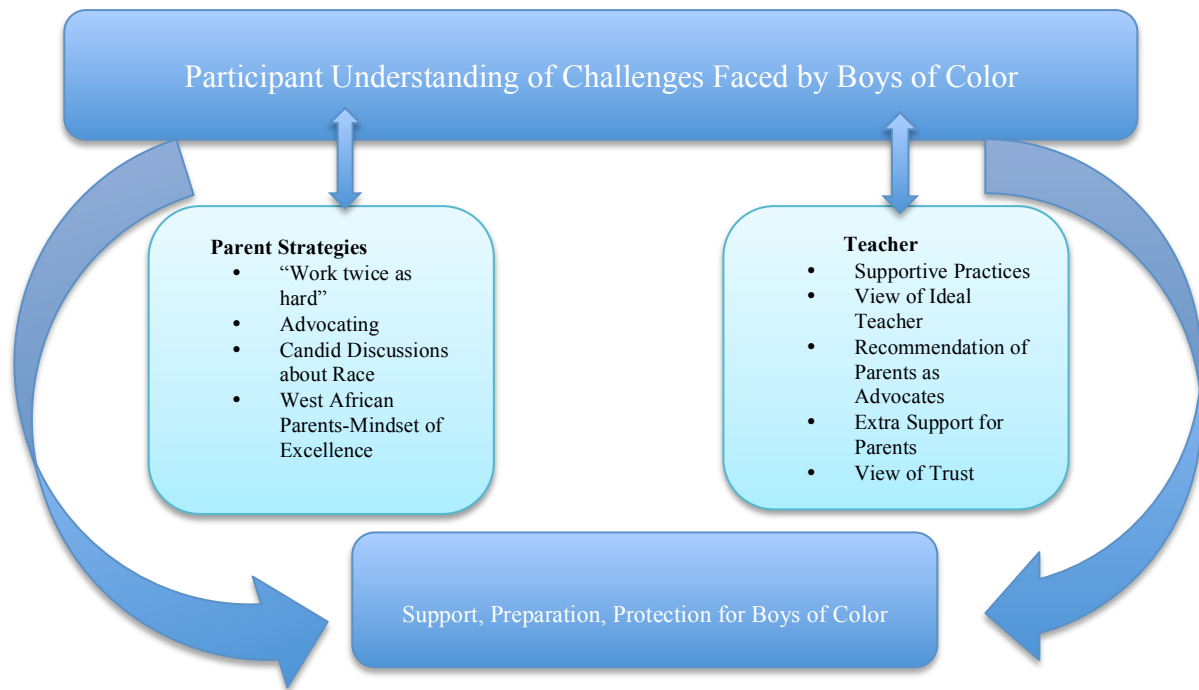
### ***Need for support, preparation, and protection of Boys of Color***

Race accompanies this research, either explicitly or implicitly throughout. Parents and teachers of boys of color both understood that societal forces produce challenges for their sons, or student, in or out of the school setting. The idea that they were vulnerable and needed support, preparation, even and protection because of “what is going on in the world today” was salient in the data. Parents expressed concerns outside of school such as violence at the hands of police, and within school challenges, such as lowered expectations, and the shutting out of their sons from advanced opportunities. As a result, parents employed strategies to support, prepare, and protect their sons. These strategies varied by parent and included holding them to higher expectations, having candid discussions about race, and advocating for them in schools. Additionally, the West African parents described a mindset that focused on excellence for their boys of color as a means to prepare them for race based inequities and lifelong success.

Teachers also possessed an acute awareness of the challenges boys of color faced in and out of schools. Teacher strategies such as extra instructional and emotional support for the students, and extra support for their parents were employed. Teachers also held a different view of the ideal teacher for boys of color than parents, and the formation of trust, based on the support, preparation, and protection the group needed. The extant literature on parent-teacher communication or the education of boys of color has not included these findings. Thus, it offers significant contributions to educational researchers and practitioners alike. For instance, this

finding also lends itself to an application of Critical Race and LatCrit theory as race was central to the parents and teachers perspectives on the need for support, preparation, and protection of boys of color (Fernandez 2002). The factors salient to this finding are presented in Figure 6.1.

*Figure 6.1 Finding: Need for support, preparation, and protection of Boys of Color*



### **Societal forces and challenges in education for boys of color**

Research has documented the challenges that boys of color face in and out of education. Trends in research during the last two decades support the perspective of both teacher and parent participants that boys of color are a vulnerable population. Participants described these societal factors and statistics as a "sad" and "unfair" reality. Parents in particular, discussed overall societal factors such as violence and stereotypes, while teachers focused on societal issues and

the gaps in the educational pipeline between boys of color and their counterparts. The College Board Advocacy Report (2010) and Schott Foundation (2015) are two organizations, which have issued significant research reports on the status and needs of boys of color.

Teachers discussed the lack of positive role models for boys of color as both an *in* and *out* of school societal factor. Amina reported that her son was “locked out” of opportunity for advanced placement opportunities, corroborating research indicating lack of access to critical resources for college preparation and other skills (Schott Foundation, 2012). Nicole’s experience with lowered expectations for her son at the hands of a teacher aligns with Boutte’s (1999) work on teacher expectations. Researchers have found that teachers frequently hold lower expectations for children of color, which can be attributed to deficit societal attitudes teachers have learned, often erroneously, about students’ ethnic groups (Boutte 1999, Hargrove & Seay 2011). The findings of this study align with the broader literature about the challenges faced by minority students in schools, but distinct in that the schools’ teachers are attuned and prepared to confront bias.

## **Parent support, preparation, and protection of Boys of Color**

**Work Twice as Hard.** Parents and teachers communicated that they understood boys of color were held to a different standard in society, and not necessarily a higher one. This understanding yielded a strategy that some of the parents employed, teaching sons that they “had to work twice as hard.” Even when sons had not directly experienced unfair treatment based on their race, parents were already preparing them for this double standard. For example, Naira and Gemini both reported that their sons had not been the victims of unfair treatment in school as a result of race, yet they had already started to teach them that they had to work twice as hard in society.

**Advocate.** All the parents in the study advocated for their sons, the strategies used to advocate varied, but included visibility in the school and involving administration to solve problems. This strategy was used as both a form of support and protection. In Amina’s case when she believed her son was “locked out” of an opportunity she supported him emotionally by expressing her continued belief in his ability, and addressed her concerns with his counselor. Amina explained one such incidence where she advocated for her now college age son:

He wanted to go into a medical career and one day he said he didn’t want to do it. I asked him why and he said, “Because my teacher says it might be difficult for colored people because its expensive. My teacher doesn’t think I can do it.” I said, “What do you think?” he said “Yes I could” so I said “Voilà-then you can and will do it.” The teacher tried to discourage him because he was the only Black one. I asked who she said it to, and he said “No she just said it to me.” I corrected it right then and he continued.

Similarly, Nicole and her husband ensured that her son was exposed to a college preparatory curriculum in the AVID program was also a means of support for his academic foundation and

advocacy for opportunity.

**Candid Discussions.** Parents in the study prepared their boys of color by addressing with them how others may view them, their image, expectations, and behavior. Selena's conversations with her son about his perceived white privilege and Gemini's conversations with his son about society and how he should navigate it are all examples of parents of boys of color preparing them. Parents are also giving their son's tools to assist and protect them as they traverse the tumultuous terrain of U.S. society. Nicole did not advise her son that he had to "work twice as hard," but she addressed the idea of his image and how he might manage it. In her home she described dinner conversations at a "colorblind dinner table" where she discussed with her son, "What is going on in the world today." She and her husband also asked him "What do you think happened?" "Why did it happen?" and addressed how he might react in a situation that is dangerous because of how others might view him. While challenging the standard of teaching her son to "work twice as hard" because he was a boy of color, Nicole paradoxically adhered to the same form of preparation the other parents employed. She, like the other parents, used these discussions to prepare their sons for an environment in which stereotypes could have negative consequences for boys of color.

**Mindset that focused on excellence.** Naira and Amina, both college educated West Africans preparation for their sons was different in that they stressed excellence in academics and behavior. The results highlighted that both women worked to cultivate a mindset in their sons that was noticeably different than the other parents. Both married, upper middle class, and West African, Naira and Amina shared a number of similarities. Of the boys of color whose parents participated in the study, their sons also had the highest GPAs. Naira's son maintained a 3.5 GPA at Lakecrest while Amina's boasted a 3.7. Amina reported getting a teacher phone call

to alert her that her son had dropped below a 90% on an assignment. Both parents expressed that they expected them to work twice as hard, and have what Naira dubbed, “a spirit of excellence.” She believed, “It’s important especially for a black boy, with the things that are going on.” This “spirit of excellence” would allow him to “set himself apart” from others. Similarly Amina, explained:

Being a boy of color you have to work twice as hard. If you know what I am saying? You can’t keep striving for B or C you won’t get to where you want to get. Somebody might get a B+ and you got the minus and then he will get in and not you. But if you had A, you would be chosen.

This mindset included not only educational excellence, but also fostered a competitive mindset in order to be selected when opportunities arose. Amina and Naira also emphasized their country origins and reminded their sons that they were “African,” and should be proud of it. Amina and Naira’s focus on educational excellence and the possibility of an Ivy League education was evident in their sons’ academic achievement and behavior. The positive academic results showed that the mindset they were cultivating in their sons was indeed preparing them to not only compete, but excel. This finding corroborates past studies that have found that immigrants, especially Black immigrants have a strong desire for upward mobility, and high educational aspirations for their children (Raleigh & Kao 2010, Roubeni et al. 2015).

The literature also espouses that Black immigrant parents emphasize the importance of schooling despite evidence of structural disadvantages for Black minorities in the United States (Roubeni et al. 2015). This was certainly true of Amina and Naira who coupled working twice as hard with a mindset that focused on high standards to prepare their boys of color. The parent strategies highlighted in this study deepen the understanding of how parents support, prepare and attempt to protect their boys of color, and extends previous research on the education of the



group. This study also calls attention to the within group differences for Blacks in the U.S and calls for more study in this area.

### **Teacher support, preparation, protection of Boys of Color & their parents**

During individual interviews, teachers were asked what they would like a parent of a boy of color to know about them and how that information might help to build strong partnerships. Teacher responses showed that they had awareness of the challenges faced by boys of colors. The results also suggested that an awareness of the challenges colored their teaching practices, view of the ideal teacher, recommendations for parents, parent support, and view of trust. For example, Ralph thought parents should know he wanted their sons to have a “fair shot at life,” while Rashad thought parents would benefit from knowing his commitment to helping boys of color. Lisa offered that she empathizes with parents of boys of color as she too is raising Black boys. The findings in this study suggest parents and teachers are both heavily invested in the academic success of boys of color, and challenge existing positions that suggest otherwise. Additionally, this finding underscores a feature of CRT and LatCrit as the teachers in this study do not adhere to the belief that education for boys of color at Lakecrest as “meritocratic, unbiased, or a fair process” (Bernal, 2002, p. 10). On the contrary the teachers challenged this notion and worked to support boys of color and their parents, because they knew there were challenges for boys of color, some of which centered around race.

**Supportive Practices.** The literature often asserts that teachers react to boys of color with an emotionally distant or overly punitive approach, which exacerbates the “push out” crisis (Ray 2011). Teachers such as Rashad and Lisa employed strategies that were counter to what Ray (2011) describes as a problematic practice. Rashad reported talking to the boys instead of

referring them to their administrator. His rationale for this strategy was the deep and personal understanding of what they face daily as a Black male himself. This belief, coupled with his knowledge that something might have triggered inappropriate behavior, led to his use of this strategy. Lisa also explained that she gives boys of color “extra steps.” These extra steps are chances, explanations, and opportunities that she doesn’t believe they get from others. She framed consequences in a way that teaches them they are getting an *opportunity* for improvement. The supportive practices employed drew from both the teacher’s knowledge of the challenges boys of color faced, and counter to existing research that points to teacher practices exacerbating the challenges boys of color face in schools.

**View of the ideal teacher.** In chapter two, after reviewing the literature on the challenges boys of color face such as the “push out” and “lock out” crisis, lack of role models in schools, and teacher expectations, I concluded that the literature pointed to teachers that are not only highly qualified but also hold high expectations, as ideal for boys of color. The findings suggest that teacher participants’ views of the ideal teacher for boys of color aligned with this assertion. Teacher portrayals were directly affected by their knowledge of challenges. The participants described teachers who challenged the academic capabilities of boys of color and held them accountable as ideal. In addition, providing rigor, building relationships with students, and learning individual stories were practices of the ideal teacher, according to the participants.

**Recommendations of parents as advocate.** Teachers were adamant that parents of boys of color act as advocates to help their sons through the education pipeline. Lisa’s advice for parents captures the sentiment that teachers held in terms of advocacy and its impact:

Culturally some parents-I know we are talking about black but under the black umbrella there could be other cultures. But teaching them that they are in a different environment here so they

can't blindly trust. Everyone is not-well not that they aren't thinking the best for your child-but you have to understand the system. If they don't understand the system, the system will then take them over and push them aside. Teaching parents how to ask questions when they don't know just as we teach the kids. But it is giving them the confidence and the voice to ask things especially things...when stereotypically African American parents are only perceived, as being a mother and that there is another stereotype that comes with the black mother. Teaching them the ropes of the system to truly help their child.

Lisa addressed the perception of minority parents that several scholars have explored. Studies found that teachers were more comfortable with parents who filled a related set of expectations and who shared their value systems. Lasky (2000) noted that teachers had a tendency to “other” parents, to judge and classify them according to a range of “normality.” Teachers applied these norms to all parents, regardless of socioeconomic and marital status. For example, single parents were often seen as not caring for their children (Lasky 2000). Teacher participants recommended that parents become aware of their own agency and realized the need to serve as advocates for their boys in a system that would otherwise marginalize them or push them to the fringes. This is also a finding that is counter to the literature that lists teachers as a factor that further inhibit the success of boys of colors in school. On the contrary, these teachers saw the need for parent advocacy, and encouraged it.

**Parent Support.** The Schott Foundation (2012) describes the “lock out” crisis as lack of access to the resources and supports needed to have a “substantive” opportunity to learn.

Research shows that Black and Latino males are locked out of several resources, such as gifted/talented (Schott Foundation, 2012). Susan and Lisa reported offering parents of boys of color “extra help.” This extra help took the form of information about opportunities and pathways to advanced courses. They did this to counter the “lock out” crisis, and both teachers explained that they offered extra help because they felt teachers before them had not. Susan

explains:

I make sure that they know the pathways for advancement opportunities. I'm not saying that I don't that for white students but I'm saying that I make sure that I definitely share that information and what the child have to do in order to get into that. Because I'm afraid that teachers before me may not have shared that information.

Teachers extended the extra support they described giving boys of color to their parents as well. This idea of being equitable with parents, and giving them what they need to be on an equal playing field with other parents, was a way teachers showed support to boys of color and their parents.

**Views of Trust.** Teachers explained why building trust might be different for parents of boys of color. Susan and Rashad both used a metaphor of a wall to describe trust between teachers and parents. The teacher's treatment of the student affected this wall as well as societal forces beyond the teacher and student. Susan unpacks the wall metaphor when she explains:

I think its (the wall) so many different things. I mean I think its generations and generations of distrust. I mean some of the history that I have learned about how unequal things have been and how inequitable. I mean going back to end of World War II and the GI Bill -it was awarded to all White soldiers and not Black soldiers. That was such deep history, what message is it telling you? You risk your life and so did you but your life is more worthy? I mean that's horrible-so right there that's ingrained, that's government, that's society and then also that's equity. The whites had all these opportunities for savings, to send their children to college, and for more opportunity. Yes, money doesn't necessarily make us happy but it does provide more opportunity in the world. And then there are these Black families who didn't have that. But they didn't love their children any less, they didn't want anything less for their children. So I think that is generations and generations of this society. So any little good that we can do or I can do to help break down some of that and change it, I have to do it.

Ralph and Susan, both White teachers discussed “the wall” and how their race affected

not only their classroom practices, but also their relationships with parents and trust. Ralph had an awareness of his racial identity, and explained that because he is a White male students and parents might have preconceived notions about him. Ralph also expressed the belief that parents of color may not necessarily trust him less than any other teacher, but when there is a negative interaction with a parent he always considers how his race affected their ability to trust him:

But to me the first place I can go, in my mind, they are probably going after me because they think that I'm prejudiced or I'm just a White man, which I don't think that's the case. It's constantly in the front of my mind, it's not something that I want to be aware of, I'd love to see this world get to a place where people don't think about that anymore. I don't think that's going to happen in my lifetime but maybe my kids. And I hope that I can raise my kids in that society.

Ralph's fears echoed those of other White teachers in DecCastro-Ambrosetti & Ambrosetti (2005) study. The researchers found that teachers stated a fear of being rejected, due to ethnic differences by minority students and their parents.

Susan acknowledged that her equity training helped to transform her teaching and relationship with parents. She also shared that in every parent meeting she treats everybody with the utmost respect, and in the instances where she feels that there is a wall between them, she attempts to break down the wall. This was done by assuring the parents that she was there to support, build their child up, give them opportunity so they can learn, prosper, and become successful. Parents have had a positive response to this trust building, and have told Susan she was different from other teachers.

Adams & Christenson 1999 & 2000 studies explored the role of trust in parent-teacher relationships. The researchers focused on levels of trust between parents and teachers and how income and ethnicity affect those levels of trust. Ralph and Susan believed their Whiteness in

some instances made it more difficult for them to establish trust with parents of boys of color; this aligns with findings on the interplay between ethnicity and trust levels. All teacher participants expressed that trust may be harder for parents of boys of color given the challenges their sons face in society and schools. But for the White teacher participants, building trust became even more fragile. Literature on culturally relevant teacher education argues that it is essential for White teachers to develop awareness around issues of race, privilege, power, and oppression in order to be successful with students from diverse settings (Picower 2009). An awareness of these elements was important in building trust and partnerships with parents of boys of color for Susan and Ralph especially. However, they had an awareness of how their White identity, coupled with the challenges faced by boys of color, could possibly affect trust. This led to constant reflection on their parts and supportive practices when they interacted with parents. Ralph and Susan's awareness of race and its role is an important finding because it corroborates studies on White teacher identity and the role of reflection in order to be successful with students of color (Picower 2009).

When taken together, the strategies employed by teachers address the guiding questions of the research study in that they illuminate the teachers' and parents' awareness of the societal and in school forces that serve as challenges for boys of color. In addition, they highlight the way parents and teachers attempt to support, prepare, and protect boys of color. Both parties are engaging in labor to enhance the quality of life of boys of color, this work is done separately and sometimes-in tandem. Though participants did not report explicit conversations with each other about these forces and the work they do to mitigate them, they were engaging in the work. This presents an opportunity in creating productive communication between the two groups; explicit conversations about these strategies to support, prepare and protect boys of color could help to

forge stronger partnerships and possible solutions to problems the group faces. Parent and teacher participants both had knowledge about educating boys of color, but the lack of shared knowledge was a missed opportunity. A challenge in creating productive communication that this finding highlights is the building of trust. Parents reported trusting teachers, while teachers realize that building trust can be a challenge because of race. The realization of the role of race in building trust was especially true for White teacher participants. One surprising finding was that parents did not articulate the role race played in building trust with teachers. Much like the teacher participants, I believed the race of the teacher might affect the formation of trust; this was not expressed by parents.

### **Lack of formal training in parent-teacher interactions**

Teachers in this study had not been trained formally in developing parent-teacher relationships, but developed from experience a rich understanding of what it takes to form relationships with parents of boys of color. The teachers' lack of training converges with the research of various scholars, who report that teachers did not feel adequately prepared by their teacher education programs to communicate effectively with parents (DecCastro-Ambrosetti & Ambrosetti 2005, Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003). Additionally, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) found that teachers describe training in which there was no central value put on the importance and complexity of building productive parent-teacher relationships. As a result, teachers felt ill equipped to face what she calls the "most vulnerable" part of their work, building relationships with parents.

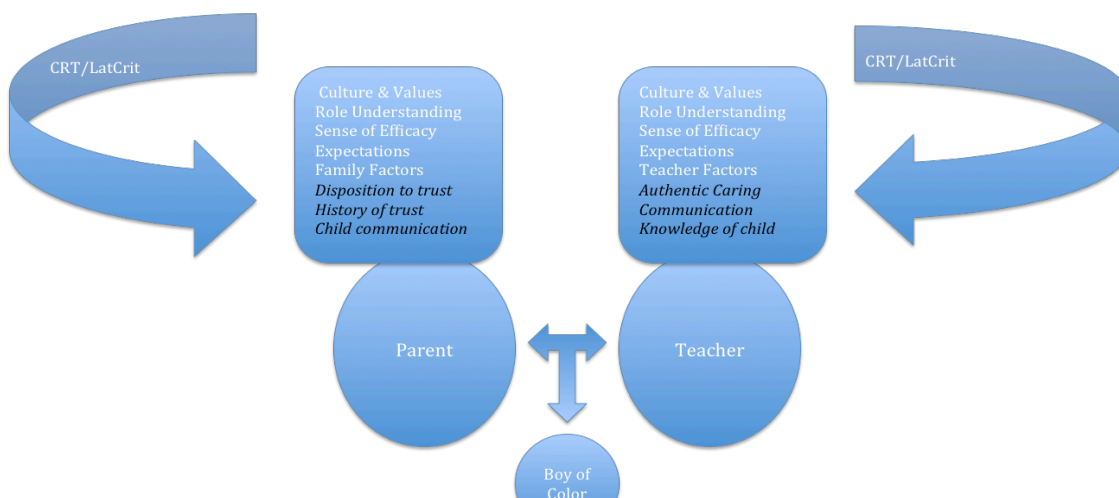
The teachers in this study reported no formal training, but gathered on the job training and shared best practices. These practices included Susan's explanation of attempting to minimize distrust by stating positive intent for the student. Similarly, Lisa suggested that

teachers consider that parents were reacting from a place of protection for their child. Additionally, sharing information about advancement opportunities, meeting parents “where they are,” having a community presence, using the sandwich method, and soliciting advice from senior teachers all emerged as means to enhance parent-teacher interactions. These findings highlight both a challenge and opportunity in creating productive communication between teacher and parents of boys of color. They represent a challenge in that teachers are not being formally trained to create the kind of partnerships that could enhance the educational process of boys of color. This also presents an opportunity because teachers could benefit from formal or in school professional development on building partnerships. Teachers could also benefit from a chance to share best practices from other practitioners.

### Conceptual Framework

Based on the findings and analysis above, I revisited the original conceptual framework, represented in Figure 6.2, which attempted to provide insight into the communication between parents and teachers in this study. Figure 6.3 provides the revised conceptual framework, informed by the results and data analysis. The original conceptual model did not adequately reflect the participant’s perspectives. Thus, a revised model (Figure 6.3) was created using the same theoretical underpinnings and many of the same variables from the original.

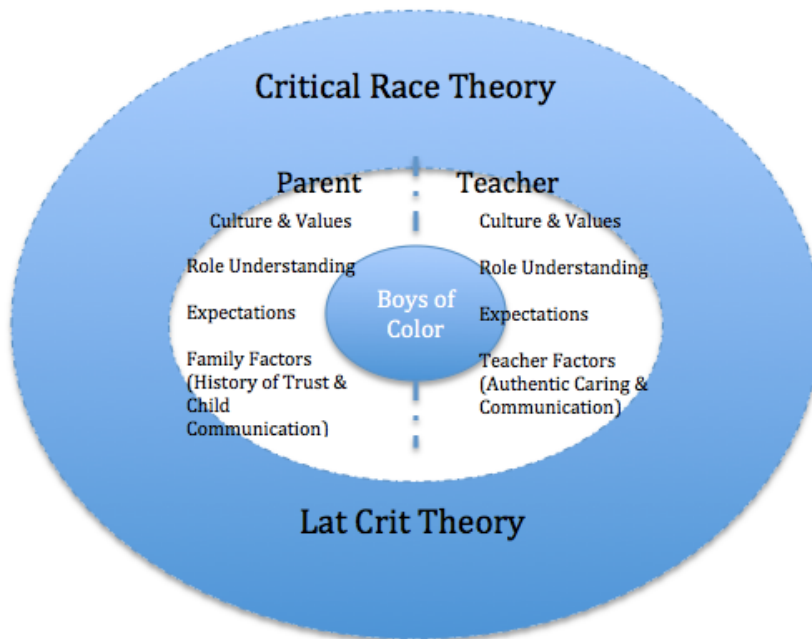
#### 6.2 Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model





The Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model integrated the work of Keyes (2000), Angell, Shelden, & Stoner (2009), CRT and LatCrit. The model was used in this study as a lens to (1) consider the role race plays in parent-teacher communication for participants; (2) think about and visualize the interplay between variables that affect the nature of the communication between the participants; and, (3) highlight the challenges and opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups. As with the original visual representation, Figure 6.3 illustrates that a number of background factors affect the interactions between parents and teachers of boys of color, such as class, expectations, and beliefs. The presence of CRT and LatCrit in this model show that race is a powerful factor in structuring the realities of parents and teachers of boys of color, and undergirds their interactions.

*6.3 Shared Knowledge in Parent-teacher Partnerships Model-Revised*



What I found was that the conceptual model originally conceived was inconsistent with the ways different variables affect the nature of the communication between the participants. A more accurate depiction of the conceptual model is represented and explained in figure 6.3.

Noticeably absent from the revised model are the variables: sense of efficacy, knowledge of child, and disposition to trust. Sense of efficacy as defined by Keyes (2000) is parents and teachers belief that their efforts were worthwhile because they have had successful interactions with each other, observed, or heard about others successes. Knowledge of the child or lack thereof was also a variable borrowed from the Keyes model. Disposition to trust is defined by Angell et al. (2009) as parents view of themselves as willing to trust in most relationships. These three factors did not emerge as salient to the communication between teachers and parents of boy of color in the findings. It could be that these variables were present and did affect the nature of communication between teacher and parents, but were not central.

Figure 6.3 reflects the ways in which the remaining salient variables operate independently and collectively when the parties engage in communication. The revised model shows the “teacher-as-person” and the “parent as person” and elements that play a role in their communication, the dotted line represents the interplay between the parent and teacher. Variables that were found to be integral remained in the model such as: culture and values, role understanding, expectations and family. Teacher factors that affect trust such as history of trust and child communication for parents and caring and communication for teachers were also included in the revised model. The study’s data revealed that the cultures and values, role understanding, expectations of the parents and teachers were shared to a certain extent, thus making an allied and not an adversarial relationship possible. The findings suggest that the teachers and parents had matched values in terms of education and were both partnership focused in their role understanding. This is showed through both party’s agreement that they were working together and responsible for the educational outcome of the boys of color. Furthermore,

the expectations both parties held were similar and this led to synergy and the formation of the allied parent-teacher view.

Regarding trust, parents expressed they had a history of trusting teachers and that communication helped to build trust. The actions of teachers could display “authentic caring” and positively affect trust. Angell et al.’s (2009) model did not account for the ways that race influenced the process of establishing and maintaining trust, but the presence of Critical Race Theory and Latino (a) Critical Theory present in the revised model offer a lens with which to view the interplay between race and trust.

In the figure 6.3, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) still intentionally encapsulate the model, as race was integral to the communication between the parents and teachers. Teachers and parents were race conscious, and there was an explicit acknowledgment of the workings of race and racism in social contexts and in the lives of the boys of color (Bernal 2002, Fernandez 2002). Race consciousness was evidenced in the data and affected parents and teachers in that it prompted them to support, prepare, and protect boys of color through various strategies. White teacher participants also showed an ability to acknowledge their own privilege and consider how it affected their relationships with students and parents. This study offers a new conceptual model for how to view parent-teacher communication through the lens of race.



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion, Implications for Research & Practice**

Although the subtext of the parent-teacher conference tends to be hidden from view, it does not take much prodding to make it visible, to unleash the emotions, to start the storytelling. I believe that communication between parents and teachers is enhanced when there is an awareness of this subterranean content, when the adults begin to understand the forces within them and around them that shape their views of one another, their perceptions of the child and the values they attach to education. This subtext should be seen as a legitimate and critical piece of the parent-teacher dialogue.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003)

When I began this study, I anticipated discovering simple straightforward responses and insight into how parents and teachers of boys of color communicate, and how that could be enhanced. I found that there was no simple answer to these questions, however the findings of this study suggest that the first step is to engage in the “essential conversation,” as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot. Lawrence-Lightfoot also suggests awareness on the part of both the teacher and parent of the forces that shape their views of each other, their perceptions of the child, and the values they attach to education. Taken together these factors form a “subtext” and are an integral piece of the conversation. She contends that this awareness of “subtext” can lead to improved parent-teacher communication. The findings in this study suggest that this kind of relationship enhancing communication is possible. While teachers and parents at Lakecrest had not addressed this “subtext” it was clear that they were aware of the challenges boys of color faced and labored to mitigate those challenges. Their view of each other as allies also further point to the possibility of forging strong relationships. What was missing from the parent-teacher relationships in the study was an explicit dialogue about the “subtext,” and a sharing of best practices to enhance the education of boys of color.

To summarize the data gathered in this study, parents and teachers of boys of color viewed each other as intentional allies. Parents and teachers were aware of the challenges faced

by boys of color in and out of school, their awareness yielded strategies that they employed to support, prepare, and protect them. Teachers received no formal training on building partnerships, but instead gathered experiential knowledge on how to form relationships with parents. The majority of studies on boys of color do not focus on their relationships with teachers. Additionally, few studies have addressed parent-teacher relationships on boys of color as a population. The findings in this study confirm, challenge, and extend the body of literature on parent-teacher communication and boys of color. This concluding section of the paper outlines recommendations for future research and practice based on the findings described in chapters five and six. The research implications provide directions for future research on communication between teachers and parents of boys of color. Implications for practice describe how the findings can be applied to support building parent-teacher partnerships and ultimately academic achievement for boys of color.

### **Future Research**

This study examined parents' and teachers' shared knowledge regarding middle school boys of color in Berry County, located in a mid-Atlantic state. However, using a smaller sample size limits the ability to generalize the findings of this study. Thus, future research would benefit from a repeat of this study using a larger sample size. The larger sample size can (1) confirm this study's findings, and (2) allow for potential generalizability. Furthermore, it would be helpful to expand the scope of this research to include parents across the educational pipeline. In this way a comparison can be made between this research on parent-teacher perspectives to that of those in a high school setting. Torez (2004) found that negative experiences and lack of connectedness to school administrators, faculty, and staff were more pronounced at higher-grade levels than lower grade levels. Middle school boys in this study had not reported being treated

unfairly by teachers and this could have contributed to the positive view parents had of teachers and the school. Comparing this study's findings with the perspectives of high school teachers would be another step toward determining how parent-teacher partnerships can be maximized to increase the success of boys of color. Additionally, the parents in this study had sons whose G.P.A ranged from 2.5 to 3.7; it would also be interesting to compare this study's findings with the perspectives of parents of boys who are not faring well academically.

Latino (a) parents'-teacher perspectives and beliefs about creating and maintaining a relationship is yet another area in need of further exploration. Though two Latina parents were included in this study, a great deal of the discourse centered around Black boys, as they were the in the majority at Lakecrest. Additionally, exploring the variable of teacher race and its impact on shared knowledge and building parent-teacher partnerships would further develop understanding of the complexity of establishing relationships. Though the teacher population at Lakecrest was largely of white female teachers, only one teacher participant was a white female. The imbalance between the growing number of students of color and the overwhelming majority of White teachers in American schools points to the need for research in this area (Philip & Benin 2013). Also, the voice of Latino/a teachers were missing from this study, replicating this study with Latino/a participants may yield interesting results. Lastly, the parent sample was predominantly female in my study, limiting the voices of fathers of boys of color in my data. Research that focuses on this male perspective would add a different dimension to the conversation on relationships of parents and teachers of boys of color.

Marital status and income are two other factors needing to be explored in relation to parent-teacher perspectives. The majority of the parents in this study were married; further study with a heterogeneous and single parent population could provide important data. Similarly, a

study on low-income parents of boys of color may yield findings that can be used to understand the creating and maintaining of parent-teacher relationships. The middle class status of the parent participants in this study did not shield their sons from the challenges boys of color face in and out of school, but it did help facilitate better relationships with teachers because of shared norms. It would be interesting to see how class affects the relationships between the parent and teachers of boys of color from low-income homes. An exploration of parenting stress that arises from the advocacy, preparation, and protection that the parent participants outlined could also provide needed insights.

### **Teacher Education Programs**

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) outlined three main themes that emerged from her work with respect to teacher preparation for communication with families. One, teachers noted that their education did not provide, “A conceptual framework for envisioning the crucial role of families in the successful schooling of children.” Secondly, they describe training in which there was no, “central value put on the crucial importance and complexity of building productive parent-teacher relationships.” Lastly, “teachers claim that their training never gave them tools and techniques, the practical guidance that is helpful in communicating and working with parents.” Teachers in this study echoed Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2003) findings. A lack of tools led to teachers developing best practices on their own. This is a critique of a deficit in teacher education programs, it is worthwhile to consider how this gap can be filled. Teacher education programs would better prepare teachers if an integral piece of their program focused on examining how teachers view children and parents from diverse cultural groups. An exploration of this coupled with training in equity would prepare teachers to better serve boys of color and build relationships with their parents.



## **Schools**

The parent and teacher participants participated in focus groups that provided a non-threatening opportunity for parents and teachers to share their perspectives and their ideas for improving parent-teacher partnerships. The opportunity provided a starting point for parents and teachers to be change agents within their learning communities and improve the ways in which they partner together. The opportunity to share perspectives and experiences regarding parent-teacher relationships was a new experience, especially for parents. Both groups displayed a strong desire to be understood, and felt empowered by the experience. Providing regular opportunities for teachers and parents to share their perspectives about the educational process, and even the role race plays in that process, could improve parent-teacher partnerships. It could also help forge common goals, and make positive changes in the education of boys of color. Additionally, it would be advantageous to schools, especially those serving a minority student population, to have the kind of equity training the teachers received at Lakecrest. Training that includes an examination of their own identity and reflection on teacher identity positively affects student-teacher and student-parent relationships. The leadership at Lakecrest was committed to equity, and one of the outcomes of this commitment was the positive view held by both teachers and parents of each other.

## **Parents and teachers**

Teacher and parent participants had suggestions for parents of boys of color that were supported by the findings of this study. Both parties stressed the importance of visibility and advocacy for parents. In addition to being visible and advocating for their sons, teachers suggested that parents teach boys how to advocate for themselves. Boys of color would also benefit when parents offer support by working closely with teachers and schools, while holding

them to high expectations. Additionally, parents and guardians of boys of color should attend and participate in parent-teacher organization as another means of visibility and partnering with teachers. Boys of color in schools would benefit from teachers that are both instructional and emotional supporters. Also, teachers that strive to build positive relationships, provide rigor, and believe in equity for students are ideal for this population. Lastly, teachers that are reflective and aware of their teacher identity and it's effect on their classroom practice and parent communication would be beneficial for boys of color.

As I proposed and eventually conducted this study, it was at times difficult to quiet my voice and perspective. There were several moments in each of the interviews and focus groups when I heard my own experiences shared through the responses of the parents and teachers. It was in some ways therapeutic. In seeking to affirm the voice of the parent and teacher participants, I found my own voice affirmed. I was in some instances amazed at how strongly I could identify with both teachers and parents alike. Like Rachel, both a mother of a black boy and a teacher, I give boys of color “extra steps” and chances. I, like Naira, remind my son that he is of Jamaican descent and that he should be proud of it, and represent his family well. Like Ralph, I wonder how students and parents who don't look like me perceive me, and reflect on how that affects my classroom and our relationships. As the study concluded I realized that not only was I the primary investigator, but also was a participant. My story was intertwined in the stories of the parent and teacher participants.

My personal experiences from both sides of the desk, as a teacher and a parent of a boy of color, coupled with literature and the findings in this study, all support my belief that they are a group that needs support, preparation, and protection. Parents and teachers have much they can learn from each other. This study affirms that stronger partnerships between these two groups

will yield powerful results. My hope is that the stories told by the participants in this study and the findings can serve as the impetus for further conversation about the education of boys of color and the role parent-teacher relationships play in it. Ultimately, assisting in leading to the awareness described by Lawrence-Lightfoot, and an enhanced educational experience for boys of color.

## Appendices

## *Appendix A-Analytic Memo #1* Identifying concepts & developing preliminary categories

January 2016

To start the analysis process I read each of the interview and focus group transcripts while listening to the audio to ensure accuracy. I then reviewed *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2013) by Saldana and took notes on the various types of coding strategies that I could employ. To analyze the data collected during the study I started by creating codes grounded in the participant responses. I coded not just actions but beliefs the participants held about parent-teacher communications. I drew upon the language used by the teachers and parents to capture their perspective as concretely as I could whenever possible. For the teacher interviews I generated and listed 86 codes, and 20 for the focus group. The parent interviews yielded an initial 120 codes and the focus group 15.

After this first stage of analysis I spent time reviewing my research question and conceptual framework. To develop preliminary categories from the codes I grouped similar concepts. I focused on the concepts that were related to my research question, sub question, and conceptual framework. The concepts that were significant and frequently occurred were grouped together to form (7 parent and 9 teacher) developing categories. The seven parent categories were: the ideal teacher for a boy of color; power in parent-teacher relationships; trust in parent-teacher relationships; teacher role in educational process; parent role in educational process; the effect of race; and parent-teacher conference & interaction descriptions. The teacher categories were: parent role in educational process, teacher role in educational process, power in parent-teacher relationships, trust in parent-teacher relationships, ideal teacher for boys of color, parent-teacher conference and interaction descriptions, teacher perception of challenges faced by boys

of color in schools, teacher training in parent-teacher communication and the effect of race and teacher history in the classroom.

The next step will be to review and refine the categories. Additionally, I will create and analyze patterns cutting across teacher and parent data. I will address what similarities and differences that emerge between the teacher and parent participants.

***Appendix B-Analytic Memo #2 -Informal Pilot Site and Gaining Access in Berry County***

My intended research site and the site of my informal pilot was Sunnybrook Middle School<sup>17</sup>, which at the time of the pilot served 750 students in grades 6 through 8. As both a teacher and a researcher at the site provided me with insider access but raised major limitations in Berry County approval that ultimately led to a new site choice for the study. Sunnybrook, like Lakecrest is located in Berry County and serves a majority minority population. However, Lakecrest’s student body is larger and is majority African American, while Sunnybrook’s population predominantly Hispanic. Both schools serve a high percentage of F.A.R.M.S students. Approximately 57% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch at Sunnybrook (Berry schools at a glance). Boys of color were also under achieving in several areas at Sunnybrook (see table).

*Sunnybrook/Berry County Middle Schools Comparison Chart*

<b>Racial/Ethnic Composition</b>	<b>Lakecrest</b>	<b>Berry County</b>
Asian	14.4%	14.9%
Black	32.3%	20.7%
Hispanic	41.2%	26.8%
White	12.0%	32.6%
MU	<5.0%	<5.0%

**Berry County Schools At A Glance**

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<sup>17</sup> For purposes of anonymity the name of the school has been changed.

*Boys of Color at Sunnybrook –At a Glance*

	<b>White Males</b>	<b>Black Males</b>	<b>Hispanic Males</b>
<b>Total % student population</b>	6%	15%	23%
<b>Honor Roll Quarter 1 2014-2015</b>	80%	55%	30%
<b>Met Measures of Academic Progress-Reading Proficiency (MAP-R) county benchmark. Fall 2014</b>	41%	29%	11%

Sunnybrook School Database

After my dissertation proposal I sought formal approval for external research request through the Berry County Office of Shared Accountability. This four to five week review process lasted five months (May – September 2015) due to changes in the research site methodology suggested by the Office of Shared Accountability. The changes included the research site, amendments to the methods of the study, and my University IRB. Though I had secured principal approval for the study at Sunnybrook, Berry County did not grant approval for the study at that site. Berry County strongly suggested a new site in order to receive approval, as I was a member of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) at Sunnybrook. My insider access as a staff member was the principal reason for the site change to Lakecrest, a neighboring school. The Office of Shared Accountability expressed some concern that parents and teachers might feel pressured to engage in the research because of my position on the leadership team. The principal at nearby Lakecrest and I took a class offered by the county in the summer (Observing Teachers –Part 1) after I submitted my request to Berry County. After sharing with him my new search for a site he agreed that with county approval I could conduct the research at Lakecrest.



My original methodology included participant selection of six to eight teachers and eight parents of boys of color in order to create a total of eight parent-teacher dyads. I originally sought to recruit four Black teacher-parent matched pair dyads, and four Hispanic. The demographics of Lakecrest made the recruitment of Hispanic parents more difficult as they were fewer in number.

In order to gain access to Lakecrest I was also advised by the Office of Shared Accountability to remove parent-teacher conferences as a means of data collection. My original methods included a parent-teacher conference that would be held at the school site. This was in addition to the regularly yearly scheduled conference at the school site. Drawing from the methods employed by Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2003) study, I hoped to observe parent-teacher conferences in order to achieve a greater understanding of shared knowledge between the parents and teachers. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) wrote that her observations provided some of the most provocative insights in her study of parent-teacher communication, "Listening to the dissonance between people's professed values and motivations and their actual behaviors and interactions, or from asking teachers and parents to offer their respective interpretations of particular moments in the dialogue" (p. 3). I had also hoped that the observation of parent-teacher conferences would provide me with a better sense of the communication between parents and teachers, as well as allow me to check for confirming and non-confirming evidence from the interviews.

I replaced the parent-teacher conference observations and survey with two focus groups as suggested by one of my committee members. One focus group would be held for teachers and the other for parents. The new site and data collection methods were resubmitted in an IRB to University of Maryland and once approved-resubmitted to Berry County. The amended four-chapter research request to Berry County was submitted during the summer of 2015 and I

received finally approval to conduct my research from September to December of 2015 at Lakecrest Middle School.

## *Appendix C- Parent Flyer*

### **Dissertation Research Project:** Shared Knowledge between Teachers & Parents of Middle School Boys of Color



*The goal of this project is to explore shared knowledge between teachers and parents of boys of color. Their perceptions of each other, beliefs about creating & maintaining a relationship, & overall shared knowledge between the two groups will be explored.*

#### **Why me?**

Are you a parent of a boy who is Black or Hispanic that attends Lakecrest Middle School? If so, I invite you to take part in this research project.



#### **What would be asked of me?**

You will be asked to participate in one audio-taped 60-90 minute individual interview and one 60 minute focus group with other parents of boys of color. You will have the opportunity to share your experiences and your perception of the factors that impact communication between parents and teachers of boys of color. If you decide to change your mind and cancel the interview you can do so at any time. All information will be kept confidential and your name will not

be used.

#### **Where will this take place?**

The interview and focus group can take place at Lakecrest Middle School, University of Maryland, or another mutually agreed upon location.

#### **Where can I get more information?**

If you would like additional information, please contact:

**Shasha Y. Lowe**  
PhD Student, M.U.E  
College of Education  
Benjamin Building  
University of Maryland  
301-523-0667  
[shshlowe@gmail.com](mailto:shshlowe@gmail.com)

**Dr. Victoria –Maria MacDonald**  
301-405-2234  
[vmacdona@umd.edu](mailto:vmacdona@umd.edu)

- Free dinner will be provided at the individual interview and light refreshments at the focus group.
- Participants will receive a gift card at the end of the study.
- If childcare is needed it can be provided for parents during the interview and focus group

*Appendix D- Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*

Dear participant, please complete this brief questionnaire by circling or completing the appropriate answers below. If you are uncomfortable sharing any parts of this information please leave the question blank.

1. What is your gender? a) Male      b) Female      c) Transgendered Male      d) Transgendered Female
  
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is your country of birth? (If not the United States please list the age that you moved to this country) \_\_\_\_\_ Moved to the U.S. age \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How do you identify racially and ethnically? (Select best fit)
  - a) Black American
  - b) White
  - c) Hispanic
  - d) African (i.e. Ghana, Nigeria), please specify  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e) West Indian/Caribbean (i.e. Jamaica, Trinidad), please specify  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - f) Multiracial, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - g) Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How many years have you taught as a certified teacher? \_\_\_\_\_.
  
6. How many years have you taught at this school? \_\_\_\_\_

**OPTIONAL:**

For the purposes of this study, please select a **pseudonym** (first name) that you would like to use. [Note: A pseudonym can be any name you desire. If this is left blank, the researcher will create a pseudonym on your behalf] **PSEUDONYM:** \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix E- Parent Demographic Questionnaire*

Dear participant, please complete this brief questionnaire by circling or completing the appropriate answers below. If you are uncomfortable sharing any parts of this information please leave the question blank.

1. What is your gender?      a) Male      b) Female      c) Transgendered Male      d) Transgendered Female
  
4. What is your age?      \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status? *Single*      *Married* *Divorced*
  
5. What is your country of birth? (If not the United States please list the age that you moved to this country)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Age moved to the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How do you identify racially and ethnically? (Select best fit)
  - a) Black American
  - b) White
  - c) Hispanic
  - d) African (i.e. Ghana, Nigeria), please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) West Indian/Caribbean (i.e. Jamaica, Trinidad), please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - f) Multiracial, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - g) Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. How many children do you have? What are their ages & grades? \_\_\_\_\_.
  
7. At the school site what grade is your son currently enrolled in? \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. What is his overall Grade Point Average (GPA)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. What is your combined household? Circle one.
  - a) \$10,000-\$50,000
  - b) \$60,000-\$100,000
  - c) \$110,000-\$200,000
  - d) Above \$200,000

**OPTIONAL:**

For the purposes of this study, please select a **pseudonym** (first name) that you would like to use. [Note: A pseudonym can be any name you desire. If this is left blank, the researcher will create a pseudonym on your behalf]

**PSEUDONYM:** \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix F- Interview & Focus Group Protocol*

### *Interview Protocol*

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study, which explores shared knowledge between teachers' and parents' of boys of color. This interview is part of my dissertation research project in the Minority and Urban Education Program at the University of Maryland. This interview will last 30 to 60 minutes and will focus on your prior experiences when dealing with parents/teachers of boys of color, developing relationships and forming trust, and the role of power in those relationships. You will also have the opportunity to reflect upon challenges/opportunities in the creation of parent-teacher relationships.

Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a secure location, i.e., investigators' password protected computers. In addition, your name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. Only the principal investigator will have access to the participants' names. If you are a teacher at this school site, your standing will not be positively or negatively affected by your decision to participate or not participate in this research project. If you are a parent of a student at this school site, your child's grades/standing will not be positively or negatively affected by your decision to participate or not participate in this research project.

Additionally, If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact me, Shasha Lowe (Principal Investigator), by telephone (301-523-0667) or e-mail (shshlowe@gmail.com). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact the Institutional Review Board Office at the University of Maryland, by e-mail (irb@umd.edu) or telephone (301-405-0678). This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Do you agree to participate? [If yes, continue. If no, stop.]

The interview will last between thirty and sixty minutes, and I would like to ask your permission to record this interview for accuracy. The recording will only be available to me, and your identity will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any report. Instead, a pseudonym of your choice will be used in any references that are made to you. If your words are included in the results, any identifying information will be removed.

Do you agree for me to record this interview? [If yes, then turn on the recorder. If no, do not record the interview.]

### **Sample Individual Interview Questions-Teacher**

1. What do you believe is the purpose of parent-teacher conferences?
2. Please describe the parent-teacher interactions you have had. In your response, please consider how you feel before the conference, some of the reactions you have had during a conference, and your reactions afterwards.
3. Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot argues, “You always bring your own history to teaching?” Do you agree or disagree? Please explain why.
4. What do you believe the parent’s role is in a student’s educational process?
5. In your opinion what role does a teacher primarily play in a student’s educational process?
6. What are some of the challenges you have experienced in communicating with parents of students of diverse backgrounds (different in ethnicity, immigrant statuses etc.)?
7. Have you received training in parent-teacher communication? (in your graduate program or from your school)?
8. Do you feel you have the tools and/or techniques to communicate and have productive relationships with the parents of your students? Why or why not?
9. How often, if at all, do you engage in ongoing conversations with parents throughout the school year?
10. What has been your experience when dealing with parents of boys, specifically, boys with backgrounds different from your own (i.e. a different race, culture, or ethnicity)
11. Who leads the conversation during a parent-teacher conference? Who decides what topics are discussed? Who determines when the conversations ends?
12. How do you establish a rapport with parents of your students?
13. Please describe a positive parent-teacher interaction you have experienced.
14. Please describe a negative parent-teacher interaction you have experienced.

15. Do you believe that a parents' race and/or culture influences the ways in which you communicate with them? Please explain.
16. What would you like a parent of a boy color to know about you? How could this help the teaching and learning process?
17. Have you experienced any particular challenges working with boys of color? Please explain.
18. These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything that we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate? Do you have any questions for me?



## ***Focus Group Protocol***

***Purpose of the Focus Group:*** *Use to check tentative conclusions. And further discussion on themes that emerged.*

### Introduction:

Thank you for being present today. As you know, I am a graduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park. My research focuses on shared knowledge between parents and teachers of boys of color. My goal is to learn from the experiences of you- parents and teachers of boys of color, in order to help meet the needs of boys of color in secondary schools. This focus group should last 30 to 60 minutes. I will give you topics and questions to help direct the focus group. I will also let the tone of the group determine where the questions will go.

- 1) First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in understanding your perspectives about communication between parents and teachers of boys of color.
- 2) Second, you shouldn't feel that you have to agree with everyone else in this room if that's not how you really feel. There are \_\_\_\_\_ people in this room, so we expect that people will have different views. And it's important that we learn about all of the views that are represented here. But if you find yourself feeling upset about the talk, you can leave anytime.
- 3) Third, I want you feel comfortable saying good things as well as critical things. I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking about communications between parents and teachers of boys of color. I just want to understand how you as parents and teachers make sense of it.
- 4) Fourth, I ask that you talk one at a time so what we can be sure to hear everyone's views and get them on tape.
- 5) When you speak please say your name first so that the person who is transcribing will know who is talking. "This is \_\_\_\_ speaking"

Do you have any questions before we begin?

To keep an accurate record of this session, may I have your permission to audio record this group? (Turn on the recorder). If you have any questions as we go along, please feel free to stop me.

Let's have some group introductions.

Teachers: Name, years teaching

Parents: Name, grade of boy of color

Questions:

**Parents:**

- Specific boys of color questions in focus group for parents (Start with statistics handout)
- Have you seen these statistics before? How would you frame the problem? Your thoughts? Emotions (how does that make you feel? Do you often think about think that your son may encounter in schools? How do you deal with that?
- Do you have any conversations with them about being a boy of color and how that affects their experiences in school? Do you think those are necessary why or why not?
- What do teachers need to do in your opinion to effectively reach/teach/inspire boys of color? /to positively affect these statistics
- What do teachers who are not of color especially need to do to?
- A couple of you mentioned the distance in middle and high school because of several teachers vs. one in elementary school-how can we bridge that gap?
- Most parents noted this did not matter-How important, if at all, is the race/culture of the teacher for your son of color? Why does this matter or tell me why this does not matter. Explain more.
- How would you improve parent-teacher conferences?
- Advice for teachers in educating your son of color?
- Your recommendations for teachers when dealing parents of all students? Specifically boys of color?
- A couple of parent mentioned “What’s going on in the world (said a lot by both teachers and parent)” What is the implication for schools? What does that mean for teachers? Parents?
- React to Waller’s quote (on handout)
- These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything that we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate? Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I did not ask that you feel is important to note about parent/teacher communication among boys of color?

**Teachers:**

- Specific boys of color questions in focus group for parents (Start with statistics handout)
- Have you seen these statistics before? How would you frame the problem? Your thoughts? Emotions (how does that make you feel)? How do you deal with that in the classroom? Do you address it? How would you frame the problem?

- What do teachers need to do in your opinion to effectively reach/teach/inspire boys of color? ..to positively affect these statistics
- What do teachers who are not of color especially need to do? Or is it the same for those teachers.
- For those of you that sit at both sides of the desk you are both parent and teacher of boy of color-does it make you hyper sensitive?
- Training-implications for teacher education programs. Most of you noted that you didn't receive training.

Most of you noted that you have not received training in parent-teacher communication? (in your graduate program or from your school)? What kind of training do you wish you would have received and why? Is there any training you would think would be helpful for parents of boys of color.

- Your recommendations for teachers when dealing parents of all students? Specifically-boys of color?
- A couple of parent mentioned "What's going on in the world (said a lot by both teachers and parent)" What is the implication for schools? What does that mean for teachers? Parents?
- Explicit discussion about race with students? Yes no?
- Behavior comes up a lot-what kinds of behaviors are boys of color exhibiting to make them "problems" is it them or the construction of the school. What can we teach our kids "codes" to ensure that they aren't seen as behavior problems...how can we change what is viewed as normal...
- How would you improve parent-teacher conferences?
- Advice for parents.
- Some of you spoke about parents taking on the role of advocate. Explain what that would like.
- These are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything that we have discussed about which you would like to elaborate? Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that I did not ask that you feel is important to note about parent/teacher communication among boys of color?

*Appendix G Parent Interviews Concepts/Codes*

<b>Parent</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Eileen</b>	Parent as supporter Challenges in supporting students (Parent) Teacher challenges (having a number of students) Teacher as encourager Face to face preference Parent-teacher conferences (+) Work negatively affects her visibility Parent problem solving Good parent-teacher experiences What prompts her into action (parent problem solving) Next steps -remove students etc. Technology (negative and positive) Same page Race not salient No racial preference for ideal teacher One on one support as important Positive call builds trust Teacher =power in class Parent=power at home Teacher –holds knowledge Challenges in communication
<b>Nicole</b>	less interaction with teachers-middle school Parent-teacher interactions (+) Good parent-teacher experiences “Someone that looks like us” (race) Lowered expectations by teacher for son of color –“given grades” Parent problem solving (initiate contact) Teacher challenges (having a number of students) Race played a role in conflict-principal Resources –tutor to parent-teacher conference Parent-teacher conferences (-) “speed dating” “down the lane and right around the track” Preference sit and talk about individual needs More time to discuss whole student Boy of color shortchanged-given grades Parent-working closely, reinforce, my son is special Ideal teacher-well traveled, represent the world No racial preference for ideal teacher I trust what teachers say Communication as trust builders Teachers as surrogate mothers Colorblind approach-colorblind dinner table Shared power b/w teacher & parent Very visible parent “I go to school with them” Race-my kids are among other kids of color Teacher shared the same experiences with even if not same color-exposes her children Advocates for her child Prepares for conference with questions Distance with teachers as child gets older
	Teacher teaches syllabus & contacts parents Parents go extra mile if focused on education

<p><b>Amina</b></p>	<p>Strict rules=less problems          (No B's in this house/No TV during the week          Parent-teacher conferences (+)          Parent-teacher interactions (+)          Next steps -speak to principal          Parent responsibility to problem solve with child and teacher          Boy of color shut out of opportunity (AP class etc)          High expectations for grades &amp; achievement          High Family education bar set          Ideal teacher-caring, respectful          No racial preference for ideal teacher          Communication as trust builder          Honesty as trust builder          Some teachers forget how powerful parents are          Came to this country not thinking about race-experience makes her aware          Boy of color-work twice as hard          No one can take your education away          Advocates for her child-go above heads when necessary</p>
<p><b>Cathy</b></p>	<p>Parent assists with homework-studying          Parent-teacher interactions (+) says she has been blessed          Challenge in prompt response from teachers          Shared communication responsibility          Communication when there is a problem (she reaches out)          Technology (negative and positive)          Parent-teacher conferences (+) same page          Parent-teacher meeting where no one showed up(-)          Distance with teachers as child gets older          Parent problem solving-shadowed student for herself          Her sons not a behavior problem          C falling into D raises a red flag          Has a learning disability and was able to spot in her son          Illnesses have negatively affected her visibility          No racial preference for ideal teacher          Ideal teacher-strict, caring          Exchanging information as trust builder          Parent has the power          Teacher giving resources helped build trust          Lack of care=lack of trust</p>
<p><b>Gemini</b></p>	<p>Parent as supporter-give kids head start          Teacher as second parent          What prompts him into action (a bad report)          Preference face to face interaction with teacher          Parent-teacher interactions (+) generally on same page          Principal judged parent          Technology (+)          Parent-teacher conference (+) knows what to work on with student after          Boy of color-go above and beyond          Trains son to be successful          Ideal teacher=strong African American male (someone they can look up to)          Trust is built when teachers go the extra mile          Power=shared          Boys of color face situations in this world today          Arms sons with tools/information          Suggestion-separate class to help deal with issues</p>

<p><b>Selena</b></p>	<p>Parent's role=large (check grades, help with reading etc.)  Parent equally accountable for his education  Parent-teacher interactions (+) very responsive teachers  What prompts her into action (issues)  Parent-teacher conference (+)  Challenge-a teacher that was not encouraging  Advocates for her child  Parent-teacher conference (+)  Effect of Race has in a + and – way  Single parent –important for parents to know  Single parent-stigma  Ideal teacher-right personality and teaching style, can relate to the age group  No racial preference for ideal teacher  Diversity would be good  Trust is automatic-when violated then it is rethought  Power=shared  Communication builds trust  Negative experience with forceful teacher  Advocating –can negatively affect student/teacher relationship</p>
<p><b>Niara</b></p>	<p>Parent more accountable than teacher  Teacher role-Openness/Transparency  What prompts her into action (issues)  Advocates for her child  Distance in middle school  African Values  Ideal teacher-loving, fair across the board, classroom in an open place  No racial preference for ideal teacher  Communication builds trust  High standard=build trust  Parent has power</p>

**Focus Group codes:**

Boys of color negative statistics as sad  
Current statistics show little progression in society  
Lack of opportunity for boys of color  
Systemic Bias/Prejudice  
Teacher perception  
Explicit discussion with sons about race  
High standards  
Ideal teacher as understanding not rigid, open minded,  
Same page  
Advocacy important  
Advocacy looks like (not falling through cracks (BOC), visible, involved, invested)  
Technology (+)  
Race is salient  
Different experiences  
Importance of Role models

## *Teacher Interviews Concepts/Codes*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Latisha</b>	Parent Role as communicator Teacher role to prepare students for curriculum Parent-teacher conference=evaluate progress of student Parent-teacher conference + when parent supportive Parent-teacher conference - when parent defensive, accusatory, or enabling Challenge in parent/teacher relationship=parent not returning calls etc. No training in communicating/building relationships with parents Daily contact with parents Boys of color-lack of role models leads to trouble in school Latino males cultural disconnect leads to trouble in schools Extra communication with parents of BOC Mentoring Program=positive results Sincerity helps build parental trust "Equitable not equal" should be the goal for teachers Building relationships =important to reach BOC Students don't have the same story Awareness of challenges BOC face in schools
<b>Myra</b>	Parent-teacher conference=communicate, create solutions together for student success Parent-teacher interaction (+) Teacher history shaped outlook (+ or -) Parent provides structure, consequences, encourage Teacher provides structure, consequences, encourage & feedback (same thing) No training in communicating/building relationships with parents Challenges for BOC in schools=feminine system, lack of role models in schools Awareness of challenges BOC face in schools Communication builds trust When all parties do their part trust is built Challenge- kinetics /movement needed Belief in BOC ability to achieve "I believe their son can earn an A"
<b>Lisa</b>	Parent-teacher conference=academic purposes Parent-teacher interaction (+) Teacher history shaped teacher persona Parents role=first teacher, they set structure Teachers role-build on what parents start, give hope, parent away from home Challenge in parent/teacher relationship=follow through No training in communicating/building relationships with parents Parents of BOC get extra information ("I'm more friendly") Positive view of BOC Understanding of Parents of BOC-"I live the internal concerns" Power=teacher perceived as having all of it (until something goes wrong) Power=shared Extra step for boys of color Suggestion of parent advocacy Race as salient
<b>Rashad</b>	Parent-teacher conference= establish relationships Parent-teacher conference=show parent investment Parent-teacher interaction-missed opportunities/challenge time span Teacher history shaped teacher strategies Parents role=first educator, advocate Teachers role (teacher as advocate/counselor)

	<p>Communication challenge-lack of support,  Challenge-lack of support (teacher accountability not student accountability)  No training in communicating/building relationships with parents  Perception of absence of POC as disinterest  Extra attention to BOC  Teacher experience as motivator for BOC  Caring, committed to BOC  Talk vs. Referral  Teacher as mentor, change agent  Teacher problem solving-meeting parents where they are</p>
<b>Ralph</b>	<p>Parent-teacher conference=same page  Parent role as foundation builder/value giver  One class training in communicating/building relationships with parents  Teacher awareness of how race affects student relations  Whiteness affects student perception  Acknowledges need for fairness for students of color  “Different” than other teachers</p>
<b>Susan</b>	<p>Parent-teacher conference=learn expectations  Parent-teacher interaction (+)  Different parental values from school=disconnect  Recognition of white privilege changed teaching  Elimination of white privilege in classroom  Whiteness affects student perception (wall description)  Different journey from students  Parents role to form learning mindset  Teachers role to form learning mindset  No training in communicating/building relationships with parents  “Different” than other teachers  Anti gatekeeper  Wall=generations of distrust  “Equitable not equal” should be the goal for teachers  Extra step for parents of BOC boys of color (advanced course info)  Importance of teacher reflection  Empowered vs. power  Acknowledges need for fairness for students of color</p>

**Focus Group:**

Teacher Challenge: filling learning gaps  
Missing fundamental skills  
Explicit discussion about race important but tricky  
Student awareness of race in the world  
Survival mode for parents=education is not the priority  
Need for relationships  
BOC need academic challenge  
BOC need role models  
Boys vs. Black boys  
Motivation factor in learning  
Education perceived as not “cool”  
Communication with parents (+effect on students)  
Learning Individual experiences  
Parents want BOC held accountable



Higher expectations-BOC have to be better  
Understanding parent position of protection  
Fairness for BOC  
Advocacy=visibility, teaching BOC to advocate, as ?'s  
Parent Empowerment  
Community presence-ideal teacher  
Curriculum can't fully prepare for PT interaction

*Appendix H-Preliminary Categories*

**Parent Data:**

<b>Initial Codes (Selected)</b> <i>Significant/Frequent</i>	<b>Preliminary Categories</b>
Ideal teacher-well traveled, represent the world No racial preference for ideal teacher Ideal teacher-caring, respectful Ideal teacher-strict, caring Ideal teacher=strong African American male (someone they can look up to) Ideal teacher-right personality and teaching style, can relate to the age group Ideal teacher as understanding not rigid, open minded,	The ideal teacher for a boy of color.
Teacher =power in class Parent=power at home Teacher –holds knowledge Shared power b/w teacher & parent Some teachers forget how powerful parents are Parent has the power	Power in parent-teacher relationships.
Positive call builds trust I trust what teachers say Communication as trust builders Exchanging information as trust builder Trust is built when teachers go the extra mile Honesty as trust builder Trust is automatic-when violated then it is rethought Teacher giving resources helped build trust Lack of care=lack of trust	Trust in parent-teacher relationships.
Teacher challenges (having a number of students) Teacher as encourager Teachers as surrogate mothers Teacher teaches syllabus & contacts parents Teacher as second parent	Teacher role in educational process.
Parent as supporter Parent problem solving Parent problem solving (initiate contact) Resources –tutor to parent-teacher conference Parent-working closely, reinforce, my son is special Very visible parent “I go to school with them” Advocates for her child Parents go extra mile if focused on education Parent responsibility to problem solve with child and teacher High expectations for grades & achievement Advocates for her child-go above heads when necessary Parent assists with homework-studying	Parent Role in Educational process

<p>Shared communication responsibility  Parent as supporter-give kids head start  <b>What prompts him into action</b> (a bad report)  Parent’s role=large (check grades, help with reading etc.)  Parent equally accountable for his education  Strict rules=less problems  (No B’s in this house/No TV during the week  Parent problem solving-shadowed student for herself  C falling into D raises a red flag  Advocating –can negatively affect student/teacher relationship  Work negatively affects her visibility  Arms sons with tools/information  Advocacy important  Advocacy looks like (not falling through cracks (BOC), visible, involved, invested</p>	
<p>“Someone that looks like us” (race  Lowered expectations by teacher for son of color –“given grades”  Colorblind approach-colorblind dinner table  Race-my kids are among other kids of color  Teacher shared the same experiences with even if not same color-exposes her children  Boy of color shut out of opportunity (AP class etc)  Came to this country not thinking about race-experience makes her aware  Boy of color-work twice as hard  <b>Boy of color-go above and beyond</b>  Boys of color face situations in this world today  Arms sons with tools/information  Suggestion-separate class to help deal with issues  Effect of Race has in a + and – way  Lack of opportunity for boys of color  Systemic Bias/Prejudice  Explicit discussion with sons about race</p>	<p>The effect of race.</p>
<p>Face to face preference  <b>Parent-teacher conferences (+)</b>  Good parent-teacher experiences  less interaction with teachers-middle school  Parent-teacher conferences (-) “speed dating” “down the lane and right around the track”  Preference sit and talk about individual needs  More time to discuss whole student  <b>Technology (negative and positive)</b>  More time to discuss whole student  Preference face to face interaction with teacher  Parent-teacher interactions (+) generally on same page</p>	<p>Parent-teacher Conference &amp; Interaction descriptions</p>

**Teacher Data:**

Initial Codes (Selected) <i>Significant/Frequent</i>	Preliminary Categories
Parent Role as communicator Parent provides structure, consequences, encourage Parents role=first teacher, they set structure Suggestion of parent advocacy <b>Parents role=first educator, advocate</b> Parent role as foundation builder/value giver Parents role to form learning mindset Different parental values from school=disconnect Advocacy=visibility, teaching BOC to advocate, as ?'s Survival mode for parents=education is not the priority	Parent Role in Educational process
Teacher role to prepare students for curriculum Teacher provides structure, consequences, encourage & feedback (same thing) Teachers role-build on what parents start, give hope, parent away from home Teachers role (teacher as advocate/counselor) Teachers role to form learning mindset Teacher Challenge: filling learning gaps	Teacher role in educational process.
Parent Empowerment Power=teacher perceived as having all of it (until something goes wrong) Power=shared Empowered vs. power	Power in parent-teacher relationships.
Wall=generations of distrust Communication builds trust When all parties do their part trust is built Sincerity helps build parental trust	Trust in parent-teacher relationships.
Building relationships =important to reach BOC Students don't have the same story Teacher as mentor, change agent "Equitable not equal" should be the goal for teachers Importance of teacher reflection <b>Need for relationships</b> Learning Individual experiences Community presence-ideal teacher Understanding parent position of protection Building relationships =important to reach BOC	Ideal teacher of Boys of Color
Parent-teacher conference=evaluate progress of student Parent-teacher conference + when parent supportive Parent-teacher conference - when parent defensive, accusatory, or enabling Challenge in parent/teacher relationship=parent not returning calls etc. Daily contact with parents Parent-teacher conference=communicate, create solutions together for student success	Parent-teacher Conference & Interaction descriptions

<p><b>Parent-teacher interaction (+)</b>  Parent-teacher conference=academic purposes  Parent-teacher conference= establish relationships  Parent-teacher conference=show parent investment  Parent-teacher interaction-missed opportunities/challenge time span  Parent-teacher conference=same page  Parent-teacher conference=learn expectations  Parent-teacher interaction (+)  Communication with parents (+effect on students)  Teacher problem solving-meeting parents where they are  Perception of absence of POC as disinterest</p>	
<p>Fairness for BOC  Parents want BOC held accountable  <b>Higher expectations-BOC have to be better</b>  BOC need academic challenge  BOC need role models  Boys vs. Black boys  Motivation factor in learning  Education perceived as not “cool”  Acknowledges need for fairness for students of color  <b>Extra step for parents of BOC boys of color (advanced course info)</b>  Acknowledges need for fairness for students of color  Extra attention to BOC  Extra step for boys of color  Understanding of Parents of BOC-“I live the internal concerns”  <b>Parents of BOC get extra information</b> (“I’m more friendly”)  Positive view of BOC  Belief in BOC ability to achieve “I believe their son can earn an A”  Challenges for BOC in schools=feminine system, lack of role models in schools  Awareness of challenges BOC face in schools  Building relationships =important to reach BOC Students don’t have the same story  Awareness of challenges BOC face in schools  Boys of color-lack of role models leads to trouble in school  Latino males cultural disconnect leads to trouble in schools  Extra communication with parents of BOC  Mentoring Program=positive results  Talk vs. Referral</p>	<p>Teacher perception of challenges faced by boys of color in schools</p>
<p><b>No training in communicating/building relationships with parents</b>  One class training in communicating/building relationships with parents  Curriculum can’t fully prepare for PT interaction</p>	<p>Teacher training and parent-teacher communication.</p>
<p><b>Teacher history shaped outlook (+ or -)</b>  Teacher history shaped teacher persona  Race as salient  Teacher history shaped teacher strategies  Teacher experience as motivator for BOC</p>	<p>The effect of race &amp; teacher history in the classroom</p>

Teacher awareness of how race affects student relations Whiteness affects student perception Different” than other teachers Recognition of white privilege changed teaching Elimination of white privilege in classroom Whiteness affects student perception (wall description) Different journey from students “Different” than other teachers Anti gatekeeper Importance of teacher reflection	
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**Appendix I- IRB Consent**

<b>Project Title</b>	“Natural Enemies” Or Intentional Allies? Teachers’ & Parents’ Perspectives On Middle School Urban Boys Of Color And Their Academics, Engagement, & Behavior
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Shasha Lowe at the University of Maryland, College Park. The purpose of this study is to explore shared knowledge between teachers’ and parents’ of boys of color. The perceptions of each other, beliefs about creating and maintaining a relationship, and overall shared knowledge between the two groups are explored. The research concept is drawn from sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2003) classic work on parent-teacher relationships.</i></p> <p><i>Specifically, the research question and sub questions of my study are: 1. What do parents and teachers want each other to know about their middle school son/student of color regarding academics, engagement, and behavior?</i></p> <p><i>a. What are the major challenges/opportunities in creating productive communication between the two groups?</i></p> <p><i>b. What role does trust and power play in the creation of this communication?</i></p> <p><i>I am asking you to participate in this study because you are a parent or a teacher of a boy of color in middle school.</i></p>
<b>Procedures</b>	<p>You will be asked to participate in one 30 to 60 minute individual interview that will be audio taped and transcribed. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed on setting.</p> <p>In the interview will focus on your prior experiences when dealing with parents/teachers of boys of color, developing relationships and forming trust, and the role of power in those relationships. You will also have the opportunity to reflect upon challenges/opportunities in the creation of parent-teacher relationships. For example:</p> <p>Please describe the parent-teacher interactions you have had. In your response, please consider how you feel before the conference, some of the reactions you have had during a conference, and your reactions afterwards.</p> <p>You will also participate in one audio taped focus group for 40-60 minutes at the school site or another mutually agreed upon location.</p>
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	<p>You may have feelings of discomfort, anxiety, or sadness in discussing difficult events in the interview. You may also feel uncomfortable with the knowledge that your interview is being recorded. You can refrain from answering any question that you feel uncomfortable discussing. You will also have the opportunity to</p>

	<p>review all of your interview transcripts for accuracy. Finally, as stated earlier, you will be able to ask questions throughout the study and withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. In the event that you choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from you will be destroyed and not used in the study.</p> <p>Because you will be audio recorded this project presents some risk. To protect your identity, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym, if you do not create one, I will create one for you. I will maintain records to match your identity for accuracy. You will also be reminded that your participation is voluntary and that you can decline to answer specific questions or to end your participation at any time without penalty.</p>
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	<p>Although this research was not explicitly designed to benefit you, it may have several benefits to you. You may benefit from the opportunity to share your experiences, focusing on how you as a parent or teacher of boys of color make sense of your own reality and could serve as a tool of empowerment. If you are a teacher in this study you could also benefit from reflecting on your teaching experiences and practices with students of color and communication with parents. This could potentially lead to professional growth.</p> <p>In the future, others might benefit from this study through improved understanding of communication between parents and teachers of boys of color.</p>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p>All of the data that is collected in the study will be stored in a secured office and on a password protected computer. To protect your confidentiality, you will be asked to select a pseudonym (if you do not select one, one will be chosen for you). Therefore, names will not be included in the surveys or other collected data. I will also assign a code to each survey and any other collected data. Through the use of an identification key, I will be able to link surveys to participants and only I will have access to the identification key. If a conference paper, professional development, or an article is written about this research project, pseudonyms will be used when referring to workshop participants, and participant identities will be protected to the maximum extent possible.</p> <p>Audio recordings of your interviews will be transcribed. These documents will be stored as password protected computer files and destroyed no later than five years after the initial recording dates. Your name will not be disclosed during any of the audio recordings.</p>
<b>Right to Withdraw and</b>	



<b>Questions</b>	
<b>Participant Rights</b>	
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shasha Lowe</b>  <b>301 523-0667</b>  <b>(email) <a href="mailto:shshlowe@gmail.com">shshlowe@gmail.com</a></b></p>
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>University of Maryland College Park</b>  <b>Institutional Review Board Office</b>  <b>1204 Marie Mount Hall</b>  <b>College Park, Maryland, 20742</b>  <b>E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a></b>  <b>Telephone: 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>
	<b>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</b>
	<b>[Please Print]</b>
	<b>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</b>
	<b>DATE</b>

Appendix J- Focus Group-Discussion Prompt

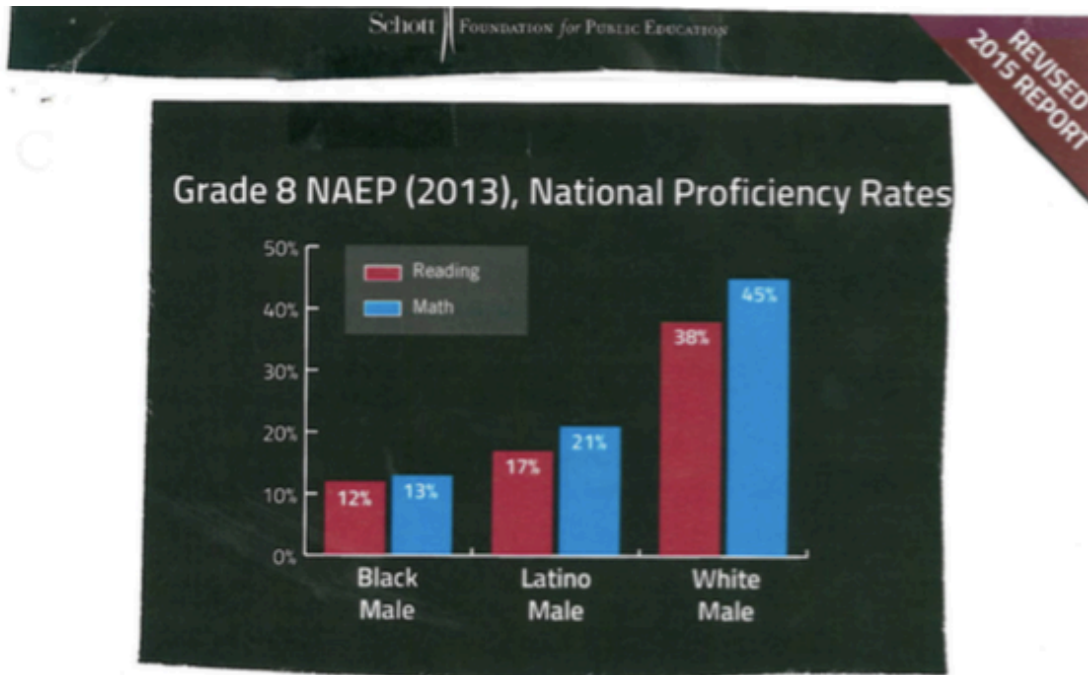


TABLE 11.  
NAEP 2013, Grade 8 Reading, Percentages at or Above Proficient  
SORTED BY BLACK MALE PROFICIENCY

State	2012-13 Cohort				
	Percent at or Above Proficient			Gap	
	Black Male	Latino Male	White Male	Black/White	Latino/White
New Jersey	19.6%	30.9%	47.5%	27.9%	16.6%
West Virginia	18.7%	‡	19.7%	1.0%	‡
Maryland	17.8%	27.9%	48.5%	30.7%	20.6%
Massachusetts	17.0%	16.6%	51.9%	34.9%	35.3%
Connecticut	15.5%	21.1%	47.9%	32.4%	26.8%
Delaware	15.3%	22.1%	35.8%	20.5%	13.7%
Nevada	13.9%	14.6%	35.2%	21.3%	20.6%
Ohio	13.8%	22.2%	38.0%	24.2%	15.8%
Minnesota	13.7%	18.4%	38.4%	24.7%	20.0%
Texas	13.5%	16.7%	42.6%	29.1%	25.9%
New York	13.3%	14.4%	40.2%	26.9%	25.8%
Georgia	13.2%	22.8%	34.5%	21.3%	11.7%
Pennsylvania	12.8%	17.4%	45.2%	32.4%	27.8%
Tennessee	12.7%	30.7%	34.4%	21.7%	3.7%

### State-Level AP Enrollment, Top 5 and Bottom 5 States for Black Male Student Enrollment in at Least One AP Course, 2011-12

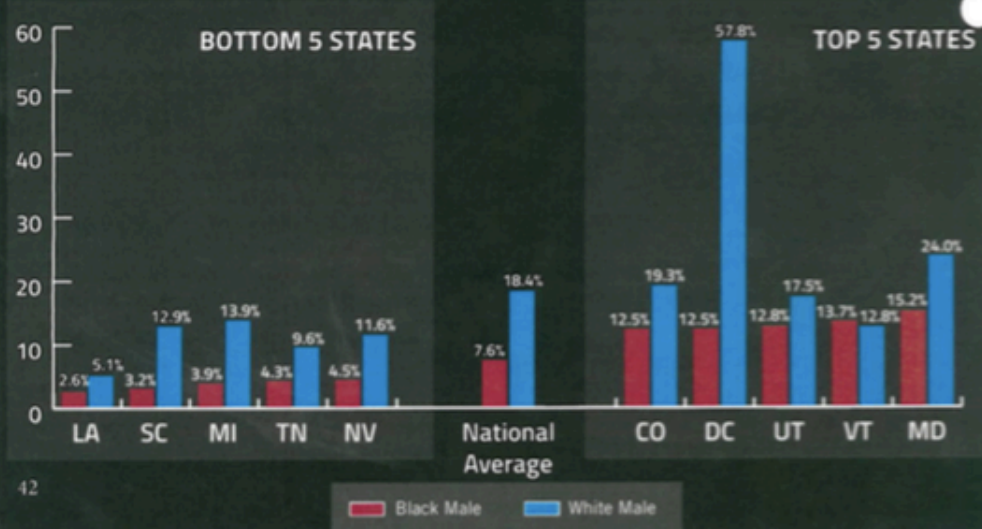


TABLE 10.

### State Out-of-School Suspension Rates

SORTED BY STATE

State	2012-13 Cohort				
	Suspension Rate			Gap	
	Black Male	Latino Male	White Male	Black/White	Latino/White
Alabama	18.9%	5.7%	6.3%	12.6%	0.7%
Alaska	9.0%	5.4%	4.4%	4.6%	1.0%
Arizona	14.1%	7.4%	5.2%	8.9%	2.2%
Arkansas	20.0%	6.6%	5.8%	14.2%	0.9%
California	15.1%	6.7%	5.6%	9.5%	1.1%
Colorado	12.4%	7.6%	4.0%	8.3%	3.5%
Connecticut	11.4%	7.2%	2.1%	9.3%	5.1%
Delaware	16.5%	8.9%	5.9%	10.6%	3.0%
District of Columbia	14.3%	6.3%	1.5%	12.8%	4.8%
Florida	23.3%	9.8%	9.3%	13.9%	0.5%
Georgia	17.4%	6.9%	5.1%	12.2%	1.8%
Louisiana	12.9%	7.8%	6.3%	6.6%	1.5%
Maine	10.0%	5.7%	3.6%	6.5%	2.2%
Maryland	8.3%	4.2%	4.7%	3.6%	0.6%

### Waller-“Natural Enemies?”

Willard Waller (1932) describes the parent teacher relationship as one of mutual distrust and enmity. Waller introduced the term “natural enemies” and notes that the two parties are predestined for the discomfiture of each other. Lawrence-Lightfoot describes Waller’s parent vs. teacher adversarial scenario as follows:

In other words, when parents pleas with the teacher to be fair to their child, they are usually asking for special consideration for their youngster. They want the teacher to consider the unique struggles and strengths of their child and offer a differentiated response. But when teachers talk about being “fair” to everyone, they mean giving equal amounts of attention, judging everyone by the same objective, universal standards, and using explicit and public criteria for making judgments. Fairness, for teachers, ensures a more rational, ordered, and dispassionate classroom. Inevitably, said Waller, these differences in perspective produce conflicts and distrust—often masked and oblique—between parents and teachers, even though both would claim that they are laboring with “the best interest of the child” foremost in their minds (p. 44).

Waller noted that tensions arise from the different functions and roles teachers and parents play in the lives of children. Parents, he claimed, have a particularistic relationship with their children, where the bond is deeply passionate and individualistic. They speak from a “position of intimacy, advocacy, and protection for their child”. Teachers on the other hand, have a more distant and dispassionate relationship with students. “They work hard to find a balance between responding to the needs and capacities of individual students and supporting the development of a classroom community in which children learn to be responsible and accountable to the group” (p. 43).





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