12-16-2014

# Schisms in Schooling: Domains of Power as seen from Our Students

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A Dissertation Summited to the Graduate School of The University of Missouri – Saint Louis
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy and Leadership

**December 2014**

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## Abstract

This study investigated the dynamics of power available to students who are assigned to participate in small group instruction as an intervention to low academic scores. It proposes that student experiences of the phenomenon of small group instruction are not currently present in the research literature concerning low student performance in public education, and therefore the research literature is incomplete. A case study was conducted at a public school in St. Louis, Missouri, which resulted in a case of two teachers and five students recruited to participate. Through document analysis, classroom observations, and participant interviews, the participants provided data from which inferences, implications, and conclusions about the status quo of student participation were uncovered.

The theoretical framework through which these status quos were uncovered included Critical Race Theory, which led to a study design based on Patricia-Hill Collins' Four Domains of Power used as lenses to define as well as highlight the intersections of social location within an institution. These lenses were then used to further understand the social location thus the agency of students within the institution of public education. The findings depicted a matrix of status quos in which students are acted upon in order to integrate them into the current society and its norms, rather than realize themselves in order to further become conscious and critical actors unto themselves.

**Dedication**

"The role of the writer is not to say what we all can say, but what we are unable to say"

Anais Nin

This dissertation is dedicated to the students – both those I have and those I will serve. You all are worthy of my attention and love. If someone tries to convince you otherwise – send them directly to me.

**"**This thing will not return unto God void.**"**

- Albert Smith, a friend and confidant in equity and excellence

I dedicate this dissertation additionally to a host of people who encouraged me to start this journey and those who reminded me to finish in spite of life's struggles. First and foremost, these people include my immediate family – my mother, Karen McGrady, and maternal grandparents, Leroy and Shirley McGrady – who inspired in me from birth a sense of, "of course you can." My UMSL partners-in-crime – Drs. Latishua Lewis and Chantam Trinh – exemplified what it meant to have hubris and grit. Dr. Sarah Olbrantz demonstrated flawlessly that nothing can stop you but yourself. The principal at the school I worked at during the last years of writing – Dr. Kacy Seals – reminded me that this work is important for myself, my students, and the society that we live in. My significant other – DeVon Williams – and his family didn't judge me when I missed gatherings because I was writing. Lastly, my cat – Monster - supported me with purrs and nudges, reminding me to take a break from the computer screen every once in a while.

## Acknowledgments

I acknowledge first the universe's role in creating a place and space for me to be and mature. Much of this place and space is tied to St. Louis and UMSL. The people on my committee are, of course, a big part of this completed dissertation. I'd like to give a special thanks to Dr. Matthew Davis, my committee chairperson, who created a graduate program at UMSL in such truth and agape that it rooted me firmly in St. Louis mentally, physically, and spiritually. Dr. Carl Hoagland was instrumental in motivating me to share these kinds of thoughts with the wider world. Dr. April Regester helped me firmly situate myself and my work in the wider academic landscape. Dr. Christian reminded me to stay true to my social location s as a black woman serving black children in America.

The UMSL faculty and staff provided a great sense of support to me throughout my course of study and my journey through myself. Though I am appreciative for everyone involved, some people deserve a special shout-out for helping me stay the path. Dr. Kathleen Haywood ensured that I could complete the program by helping me navigate through the trials of university red tape. Thank you to Dr. Jackie Lewis Harris who inspired a sense of historical import into my thought process. A special thanks is offered to Dr. Wolfgang Althof who made sense of the possibilities in qualitative research and Dr. Lisa Dorner who illustrated ways to conduct valid qualitative research.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## What's Wrong with Our Schools?

Over the last 30 years, employers have been offered access to an exponentially expanded pool of potential employees. Due to enlarged global markets, the potential employee pool has also become more diversified. In the swollen space of the worldwide applicant waiting room, job-seekers have begun to encounter a heightened sense of competition, given an ever-expanding collection of candidates are bringing to the table a higher quality and number of marketable skills than in decades past (Alliance For Educational Equity, March 2008). The rise of a global marketplace has also widened the routes employers use to search through the far ends of American influence for desirable employees. Simply put, un- or underemployed Americans are now no longer competing for jobs only with other American citizens.

The natural response toward making American citizens more marketable was to consider the state of the American public educational system. Since World War II, the American standard of living, individual economic earnings, and overall international economic competiveness has been considered to be a consequence of the academic achievement level of individual students, which in turn was considered a direct result of pedagogical methods in American public education (America's Perfect Storm). A hallmark of the American educational system is its local management and implementation, for the sake of being able to flexibly respond to the changing needs of a global economy as well as communicate the expectations and values of its local constituency (Place and Purpose). In this nexus of the local and national agenda managed by citizens living their lives (mostly, if not all) within a single community,

schools and their districts have assumed that adherence to federal educational policies would address and supply skills needed for individual international competiveness (Schafft and Biddle, 2013). The historical research calls into question this inference (Kirsch, Braun, &Yamamoto, 2014). We find now that though there seems to be more educational opportunity for American students after their free public schooling, the quality of the K-12 public education itself does not to provide a competitive edge for students in the international marketplace (Alliance for Educational Equity, March 2008).

The academic performance of American students reveals that some American students are less academically prepared than their international counterparts of the same age. International educational assessments have been implemented since the 1960s, and in each, the students from United States of America have failed to earn their way to the top of the scoreboard. In the 1960s, the First International Mathematics Study (FIMS) was administered to students in 11 countries; the average United States score ranked at 11th out of 12 participating countries. The first International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP) was administered in 1988 to students in twelve school systems, representing six countries. The United States was represented in this study as one school system, which scored 12 out of 12 in math performance and 9 out of 12 in science performance.

An interesting finding from the 1988 IAEP test revealed there was more difference in performance within school systems than between school systems. In 1983, The National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) reported on the quality of America's educational system. In this declaration, the NCEE made famous a perceived threat to our nation in short words.

> *The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur — others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments*. (A Nation at Risk, 1983, pp. 113)

In 2000, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) began to administer a more comprehensive test to a wider set of countries. The OECD was created in 1961 with the intent to have countries work together under the understanding that economies are interdependent, thus requiring cooperation to improve the quality of life on a global scale. One aspect of this cooperative was to do data analysis and peer reviews to identify and recommend the most productive ways for countries to work together. One method of data collection, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), tests students in Reading, Math, and Science and is administered every 3 years. PISA 2009 tested students in thirty-four OECD countries. On the 2009 PISA assessment of 15-year-olds, the United States performs around the average in reading and science and below the average in mathematics among the 34 OECD countries (Lessons for PISA for the United States).

In response to the consistency of average to low international educational rankings, educational researchers sought to identify the characteristics and causes of a seemingly failing public educational system (Thrupp, 1995). Early on, educational researchers and commentators attributed the average- to low-rankings of the academic performance of students as compared to our international counterparts to the straw men

of socio-economic characteristics of modern life, including the high relative poverty levels of the American student population and the racialized history of educational apartheid in America as well as the possibility of cultural bias in the test itself. Given a closer look at these factors in the context of the other countries' student achievement data, the socio-economic status of American students is not a cause, but a symptom of low academic achievement along those lines.

The data from the PISA 2009 test showed that the trend in other countries, the socio-economic status of a student no longer predicts how students will perform in other participating countries. The OECD in 2011 released a report, which situated the PISA 2009 United States performance scores within the overall global climate of PISA 2009 scores. In this report, the OECD contends "the greater socio-economic variability in the United States thus does not result from a disproportional share of students from poor families, but rather from an above-average share of students from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds" (OECD, pg 29). The low average American score cannot be relegated to the assumption that America has a higher population of disadvantaged students who, in turn, scores lower in higher numbers. In comparison, America tested a higher proportion of students from a higher than average socio-economic background as compared to other countries that participated. This recalibration is further supported by the fact that the United States has a comparatively average percentage of students who reached the highest levels of achievement on the PISA 2009 test – above percentage share in reading, average percentage in science, and slightly below average percentage in math. If the sample of American students tested was more heterogeneously grouped than the samples in other countries and socio-economic factors were truly a determining factor

in performance scores, then the average American score would be even smaller than what the data shows.

The same data does support the widespread assumption that in the United States the achievement gap is still one of socio-economic privilege. The OECD stresses that the socio-economic disadvantage continues to have a strong relation to student performance in the United States, though this is not hard fact across international lines (pg 29). OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurria points out that our belief that a status of first world ensures a high educational status is now outdated:

> "*While national income and educational achievement are still related, PISA shows that two countries with similar levels of prosperity can produce very different results," Gurria said. "This shows that an image of a world divided neatly into rich and well-educated countries and poor and badly education countries is now out of date*." (USA Today, December 7, 2010)

The OECD report dives deeper into this belief, highlighting how the calculated equity of the educational system within and between countries relates to its average performance scores. The highest performing countries had a much smaller variation in student performance based in socio-economic background; in the United States the variation between students of extremely varied socio-economic characteristics was 17% as compared to 9% in Canada (ranked number 1 in the PISA 2009 test) (pg 34). This indicates that in other countries that have a more equitable system of education even students from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds can still achieve at similar rates of their higher socio-economic counterparts.

These two conclusions, based in a comparative analysis of American scores and the highest achieving countries, force us to review how we are viewing the success of and equity available within our public educational system. William H. Schmidt, a co-director at the Educational Policy Center, wrote a short opinion article in 2012 in which he outlines three myths of American schooling which echo the results of the OECD 2011 report. The first myth is "everyone has an equal chance to succeed in school." According to the OECD 2011 report, that is flatly not true about American schools. Socioeconomic background has been a strong determining factor in the quality of the education that student receives in a much stronger way than higher performing countries (OECD).

Schmidt's second myth reads, "It is only a problem for poor and minority students." The OECD 2011 report investigates how tracking students based on early performance scores reduces the educational performance outcomes and opportunities for tracked students. This review found that students who were tracked into different curriculum or different schools with lower performance goals achieved less than students who were not tracked, reducing the overall average performance scores even after adjusting for the influence of lower socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, pg 47).

Schmidt's third myth asserts, "There's nothing we can do about it." The OECD 2011 report uses its first 82 pages of the report to situate American scores within the context of international scores. The rest of the 259 pages are dedicated to taking a deep dive into the characteristics, choices, and reform methods that other OECD countries have implemented. Instead of taking snapshots of the educational climate in each country, the OECD chose to tell the story of each country, comparing it to other countries and their choices and successes as well as their struggles. With the hopes of providing

America with examples of how reform can work and what reforms did work, the OECD reports to America that the kinds of reform necessary for America to improve its educational system are available given the historical and international opportunity for collaboration.

Why then, has America failed to improve its public educational outcomes? Many relegate this habit of inaction to an acceptance and adherence to national lore about 'the good old days' – one in which American educational was internationally innovative and fully student-centered. Schmidt notes that while myths have the power to influence how people view the world, the substantive incongruity of these legends don't allow for opportunities to update them via the facts our experience presents to us. The OECD cautions America to re-open its eyes and minds to the fact that America is no longer on top.

> *A century ago, when the United States was putting in place the education system that it has used ever since, it was eager to learn as much as possible from other nations as it designed its own system. It took the ideas of universal basic schooling and the modern research university from Germany. It borrowed the underpinnings of the world's best system of vocational and technical education from the Scots, who successfully developed the principles for Scotland's mechanics institutes, which were then among the world's high-technology leaders. And the design of America's leading private secondary schools was lifted whole from the model provided by England's leading "public" schools, such as Eaton and Harrow. … In the years following the Second World War, the United*

> *States alone had the resources to greatly expand its education system and soon topped all of the world's education league tables. Perhaps the United States assumed that once it was in the lead, it would always be in the lead.* (OECD, pg 231)

This blind assumption of American predominance has led to America to assume that inconsistent success of students in public education must be a consequence of a lack of student interest and ability, rather than a symptom of sickness within the system. This view, as the OECD explores, prevents America from changing its structures in light of changing circumstances in international "with cultural, political, social, and economic factors that have a direct bearing on the goals and effectiveness of education systems" (OECD, pg 228). This is a call that Arne Duncan echoes in an interview with the Associated Press: "I think we have to invest in reform, not in the status quo."

**Status Quos**

In 2010, President Obama spoke about how our stubborn adherence to the idea that America is the best and the people must be the problem is limiting American growth and subsequently competitiveness in the global economy.

> *Now, for years, we've recognized that education is a prerequisite for prosperity. And yet, we've tolerated a status quo where America lags behind other nations. Just last week, we learned that in a single generation, America went from number one to 12th in college completion rates for young adults. Used to be number one, now we're number 12. … We've talked about it, we know about it, but we haven't done enough*

> *about it. And this status quo is morally inexcusable, it's economically indefensible, and all of us are going to have to roll up our sleeves to change it*. (The White House, 2010)

President Obama references the concept of a status quo to call into question the reasoning behind how and why American institutions are resistant to change. The essential nature of a status quo is to be obedient to some belief or norm for the singular purpose of maintaining that belief or norm. In an institution, the status quo focuses constituent energy towards the preservation of an idea and away from authentic innovation and improvement towards outcomes that increase its positive impact. This is not to say there are not changes happening in the system itself. To maintain the status quo is to make changes where the system fails, but only variations in which outcomes that support the status quo are actualized. Protecting the status quo ignores the changing needs and characteristics of the population to be served. Geletkanycz (1997) asserts we are conditioned to maintain the status quo due to our social fears keep us from actual improvement. We fear that we will be considered whistle blowers; we fear that we have not done enough to make the current system work appropriately; and most of all, we fear that we have been wrong in implementing a failing system the whole time.

In the junction of local expectations, state monitoring, and federal regulations concerning public education, what is left unaccounted for is a shared understanding of how the world has, and is still, changing (Lynn & Adams, 2002). Blind adherence to a status quo in American public education continues to limit the present ability of student to become marketable in an ever-expanding global economy (Prete, 2006). The focus of

education research literature does acknowledge that there are structural gaps in the American system, but refuses to include all constituents (Klinger & Edwards, 2006).

In response to the fact of American educational inequity along lines of socio-economic difference, the current body of educational research literature focuses on the ability of individual teachers to educate every student effectively. Much of teacher professional development and education concentrates on the context-specific successes, inefficiencies, and failures of the techniques teachers implement on a daily basis. In the search for a single method through which teachers and administrators can use to improve educational systems based in teacher actions upon students, the conversation overlooks the characteristics, experiences, and opinions of the main constituency of American school systems – the students (Alonso et al., 2009). The body of educational research literature, as influenced by the status quo of 'adults know best', pushes to the back burner the voices of students. America needs this because the way we see the characteristics of our students determines the kind of education we help them achieve (Taylor & Clark, 2009). One method by which voices of these participants and receivers of public education can be uncovered and addressed is through deconstructing the inputs and effects of adherence to policies (read: status quos) using Critical Race Theory (CRT).

## The Influence of Critical Race Theory

CRT is both a theoretical standpoint and a methodology born of research in the legal field (Ladson-Billings, 1998). An innovative method of describing the purposes behind and implementation of acts, laws, and other legal decisions, CRT has helped to uncover the status quo of white supremacy in American society (Ladson Billings, 2009).

The focus of early CRT research was to highlight "less the issue of unearned advantages, or the *state* of being dominant, and more around the direct process that secures domination and the privileges associated with it" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 261). In this way using the method of CRT allows the researcher to uncover the purpose behind system operations. Within an educational context, using CRT allows the focus to be how the system's fidelity to a particular status quo does not serve certain subpopulations of its constituent, unlike the body of current research, which focuses on producing simple 'silver bullet' types of actions administrators and teachers can implement the very next day (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

One of the many "un-coverings" of research aspects unaddressed through recent CRT work is the weight of "humanist essentialism" in laws and policy (Balibar, 1990). Humanist essentialism is the notion that to be a particular "kind" of person means that the person must embody certain characteristics. For example, in racial identity in America, one must have at least one parent who is not fully White in order to be classified as anything other that White.

In education, the complications of acquiescing to humanist essentialism are exposed when viewing teacher effectiveness. Teachers are often considered effective if they execute a number of stipulated actions in their classroom – remain at the front of the room to teach, with desks in rows and students silent, for example (Miller, 2008). Students are considered successful at school if they are quiet and follow behavioral expectations without question. On the district level, teacher and student effectiveness are often linked to adherence to the policies of the district – appropriate dress, implementation of structure programs. These archetypes of teachers and students

represent how humanist essentialism influences what we perceive to be the correct status quo of public education, despite their lack of ensuring student performance. CRT, then, can be used to shift the conversation from what everyone needs to what every one needs (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

**Domains of Power**

As an outcome of this initial body of CRT research, many thinkers have attempted to devise formats through which the CRT method can be applied to different contexts (Leonardo, 2009). One format, in particular, can be used in education to expose the current hegemonic reality of a status quo underlying all that we do. Patricia Hill Collins (2009) has created a framework by which one can identify the power relations operational, not only on the individual relationship level, but also highlights the relationship between the outcomes of the system and its operating status quo. Her framework is called domains of power (Patricia Hill Collins, 2009).

In her book, *Another Kind of Public Education*, Hill Collins (2009) draws from her theoretical roots in CRT to describe 'color-blind racism' as an underlying status quo of public education, and therefore a form of social injustice. She claims that the institutional or personal factors, or the situational circumstance of a person, do not determine whether the actions taken against that person are racist. Her argument is that 'color-blind racism' is one of many status quos present in the American educational system. She posits that that 'color-blind racism' is "a system of power with four domains" (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 53).

Though Chapter 3 will include a more full discussion of the import of these domains in this study, what follows is a introduction to each domain from the theoretical

intersection of how the domains can be used to evaluate the purpose and state and institutional status quos. The first domain is the *structural domain*, the way practices are organized through institutions through which the interpersonal is collapsed, so that the status quo can be maintained without individual human agents. The second is the *disciplinary domain* by which individual people cite and apply rules to help maintain this status quo. The third is the *cultural domain* in which justifications for the status quo are created and then circulated in its populace. The final domain is the *interpersonal domain* where the interpersonal relationship returns to the forefront, highlighting the ways in which individual people make the choice to adhere to or reject the norms of the status quo in interaction with other individuals. Figure 1 depicts the point of convergence between each domain and American public education, which will be elucidated more in Chapter 3.

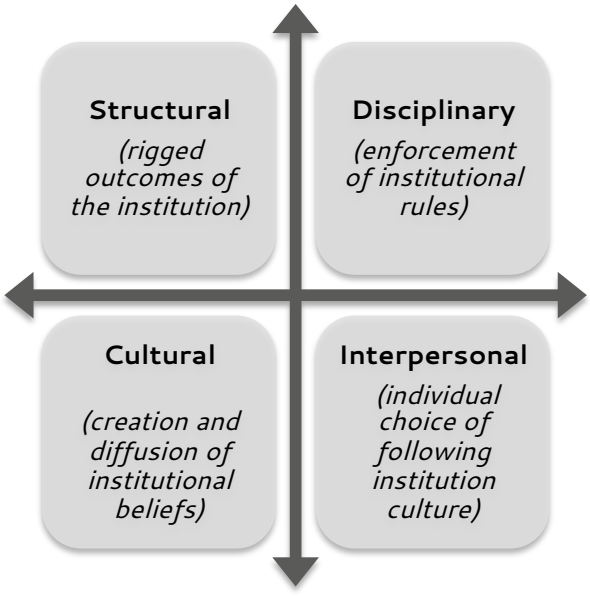


***Figure 1. Four Domains of Power***

Each domain of power is identified by discrete kinds of evidence within interactions between people. Though Hill Collins references these domains as separate

aspects of how racism exists as a status quo, she asserts that they are never applied in isolation from one another (2009, p. 54). She also points out that for an understanding to be truly a status quo, it must be foundational in all of the domains of power. This declaration is the crux of the domains of power's significance in students of educational policy, where auditing for a status quo's pervasiveness becomes precise and methodical. Finally, Hill Collins explains that because of the larger scope and variety of questions and data sources pulled from using her framework, a resulting analysis of a possible domain of power will be more complex and true to reality.

Though she uses racism as the status quo in her book, one does not have to make a large jump to applying this domain of power framework to discuss a different status quo – the ease of policy creation and application over student outcomes in public schools. The conversations about student outcomes, for example, is couch in terms of what the teachers must be asked to do and whether or not those requirements appropriately and fairly increase individual teacher work loads. Since the forced (attempt at) racial integration in our public schools, the question of whether a public education is truly earned by the students or simply distributed by the institution has been pushed to the forefront of the educational conversation. The "separate but equal" doctrine before the *Brown v Board* decision allowed separate educational systems to develop – one in which education was expected to happen (in the White system) and one in which education was optional (in the Black system) (Leonardo, 2009). Leonardo rationalizes this separation in expectation existed because it was assumed that black students would not be able to learn at the same rate and levels of white students – an outcome of the acceptance that people categorized as other than white were essentially different human beings whether this

difference was due to nature or nurture (Leonardo, 2009). Hill Collins defers to journalist Jill Nelson's work as evidence of the rigged educational system – rigged towards the excellence of the white student (p. 57). Only when those two systems – one system for white students and one system for black students - were ostensibly merged did the question of difference in system quality become apparent. The concern was not "What is the level of overall quality expected in our school system" as many purport the problem to be today. The question was "How can the quality of white students' education be secured given white students are in the same classroom as black students?"

There is plenty of research about the difference of expectations teachers apply to diverse racial groups in our research literature (Ryan, 2003). According to Russlynn Ali, the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education, schools are now more segregated since the *Brown v Board* (Ali, 2011). This highlights that the concern with quality is still present. Programs and policies at the federal, state, and local level such as No Child Left Behind, minimum requirements for class size and minutes of instruction, and scripted curriculums have been implemented to address the public concerns of equality in public schools. Yet the failure of these programs to quantifiably and directly affect education quality in terms of student outcomes leave to question whether every student is receiving an equitable education (Klinger & Edwards, 2006).

In Missouri, this dichotomy between segregation and quality of schools has also played out. According to the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, its mission "is to guarantee the superior preparation and performance of *every* child in school and in life. [emphasis mine]" If in this mission statement is every individual student can expected to be prepared and practice through staged academic

performance, we must check that every student is actually doing just that. We can do an initial check using the average academic performance percentages from the population DESE serves. According to the DESE website in December of 2014, the state has not yet met targets for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the nine years of its tracking (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2014).

AYP is measured by student performance on state-specific Communication Arts and Mathematics texts across grades 3 through 12. The most recent complete comparative data available references the goals and actual averages for 2011, where the goal was 75.5% of students reaching the top two levels on achievement out of four in Communication Arts; the state average for that year was 54.6% (DESE, 2014p. 2). The top two levels are Proficient – meaning the students are performing on grade level in reference to the state educational standards – and Advanced, which means above grade level performance. In Mathematics for the school year ending in 2011, the goal was 72.5%, and the state average was 54.2% (DESE, 2014, p. 2).

Despite the many legitimate critiques of standardized testing as a viable summative evaluation measure, the gap between the goal and actual performance of Missouri students by the state's own standard indications that almost half of its students did not learn enough and/or did not independently perform well on state tests in 2011. Despite the gap between the goals and actual academic performance, 96.9% of core content areas (including Communication Arts and Mathematics) are reported as taught by "highly qualified educators/teachers" in Missouri (DESE, 2014. p. 13). This discrepancy becomes even more problematic as we further investigate the symptoms and future options these trends afford to subgroups of Missouri students.

In Missouri, black students represented 16.4% of the population in 2014 (DESE, 2014. p. 14). Though the dropout rate was 2.5% overall in the school year ending in 2014, it is reported as almost triple that for black students at 6.94%; the dropout rate for Asian, Hispanic, Indian, and White students are 1.2%, 4.1%, 2.5% and 1.5% respectively (DESE, 2014, Nov 30, p.2). The graduation rate for Missouri public schools was 87.3% in the same year, but for black students it was only 74.9% while all of other disaggregated racial groups had no lower than an 80% average (DESE, 2014. p. 8). Yet surprisingly 97% of Missouri schools have been accredited by the state since 2009, even excluding districts that are only provisionally accredited. The conversation about whether accreditation is earned given low-performance rates often stalls on the idea that the statistics are skewed due to subpopulations included - for example the students who receive special education services (12.56%), English-language learners (3.07%), and transient populations (DESE, 2014. p. 15). In an effort to address the relative peculiar lower rates of these kinds of student sub-populations, many state agencies and districts turned to the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) programs.

## Response to Intervention (RtI)

The party line for adoptions of RtI district-wide is often to identify students who were not meeting benchmark goals, diagnose why these students were not reaching their goals, and provide more targeted instruction for those students in particular (Fuch, 2006). From the top of these institution's hierarchies, it seemed just as if RtI could be used an effective way to track and influence the academic progress of students through our schools in order to push the entire study body to meet federal and state student performance goals. The history of RtI as a district-wide initiative in relation to the

purpose of its conception, though, does not match those goals (Klinger & Edwards, 2006).

Often characterized by having a large caseload in tandem with decreasing public funding, public school special education departments have recently become a political special interest group. In 2004, the federal government addressed the dilemma of the special education special interest group by expanding the ways in which individual students can be referred to and accepted into the population of students who receive special education services.

One method of referral and acceptance, Response to Intervention (RtI), was adopted in the revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004 at the federal level to increase the effectiveness of special education departments countrywide. A student labeled as learning disabled acknowledges that s/he operates with a cognitive disability "intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction" (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1990). Though including RtI in IDEA was originally meant to limit the entrance of false positives into special education departments, thereby limiting special education funds used for students who do not actually need special education services, the colloquial conversation about RtI has not been focused on how it will benefit special education budgets. Advertised and used most frequently as a way to address student misbehavior and low academic performance in the schools, RtI has morphed into a mutant of its original conception – the ultimate "new thing" in education that can solve all a school's problems.

**RtI Tiers**

The general student population are considered to be in the *first tier* the moment they step through the door, and general education teachers are expected to give quality traditional (read: for the average student) classroom instruction, testing their students against a benchmark level that is set on the local level. Students are individually 'moved' to subsequent tiers if the individual does not meet the schools preset benchmark goals within a certain time period. The *second tier* is characterized by providing the student with more specialized instruction in a different environment, small group or individual. The methods of instruction may be altered in order to provide the students with a variety of ways to encounter the material and demonstrate their knowledge.

The *third tier* includes only students who receive special education services. The move from second to third tier is a referral to special education after general education mediations in instructional techniques fail to raise the student's academic achievement. The ultimate goal of the process of RtI is to keep students in the first tier and move students from the second tier back into the first tier through intensive interventions, presumably more instructional time and more directed, individualized instruction.

The state department of education in Missouri now promotes RtI to as a school- or district-wide option to limit behavioral issues and increase academic gains for students who are not students who receive special education services. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education describes RtI as "an organziational (sic) framework to create responsive, effective, and efficient educational environments for ALL students" (DESE, 2010). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education officially sanctioned RtI development in choice Missouri's school districts:

Sullivan, Wayneville, Richwoods, Willow Spring, and Francis Howell (DESE, 2014, Dec 14). Yet some school districts often adopt an RtI framework without the knowledge, approval, or support of DESE. These decisions to implement their own form of RtI occur at both the district and the school level without support for appropriate professional development about RtI.

Many schools have adopted RtI to manage every student based on academic educational research about its overall behavioral and academic improvement on the average student, and there has been a body of research completed on efficient implementation of the policy of RtI at the school- and district-wide level. There is much to suggest that students who are low performing in a traditional classroom but aren't diagnosed with a learning disability haven't been getting get the direct assistance necessary from general education teachers (Miller, 2008). In other studies, it has been uncovered that general education teachers feel they are not qualified to teach students performing at a level lower than the grade level they are assigned to (Al-Natour, Mayada; AlKhamra, Hatem; Al-Smadi, Yahya, 2008). Though there is a body of professional development for teachers on how to identify students themselves who do not have a learning disability diagnosis but who requires something other than a traditional classroom environment, little is shared about what interventions these students require and how to apply these interventions.

My general area of study is the stories of students involved in the application of RtI at the level of intensive or individualized instruction who do not have a learning disability because these students represent a large population that America's educational system is failing to serve. Instead of focusing on what actions the state is taking or not

taking to reach these students, it is more appropriate and valuable to study the ways in which adherence to the American educational status quo is not serving these students. The focus of this study is to examine how the application of the status quo of Response to Intervention, through the lens of Critical Race Theory, influences the students' perceived socio-physiological threat for students marginalized as Tier 2 students who do not have a learning disability.

Steele (2009) reminds us that knowledge of negative stereotypes can affect how students perform on tests. The current model of RtI, which scrutinizes test scores and the number of discipline referrals, has not unearthed the core reasons for our students' continued lack of academic and social success. Arguably, the actions of a student are constantly being influenced by how people expect the student to act – students, teachers, and parents. If negative individual stereotypes are perceived to underlay these persuasive interactions, Steele's effect can easily be called into play. Relations such as the kind of personal relationship the student has with the test administrator, identifications a student has with the school's structures, associations with others who are also in Tier 2, as well as the knowledge of how this information is used by others can affect how the student performs academically. This type of social-psychological threat "arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (Steele, 2009, p. 164). In trying on identities, as is typical of children as growing humans trying to identify themselves in the matrix of social connections, groupings have an immense influence. Embedded in our social dealings with one another, these avatars, both intrinsically and extrinsically applied, determine how we interact with each other.

The outcomes of these interactions are what color the expectations we have of our selves and can be long lasting (Wilson, 2009).

To address the gap in knowledge, my research question is as follows: In what ways do students experience having and not having power in the classroom, if they are not meeting minimum academic performance goals yet do not have a learning disability? My goal is to examine the stories of students in Tier 2 of a RtI framework, namely whether they feel the interventions are working, whether they feel marginalized in the system, and if they are aware of means to reduce this kind of marginalization, if apparent. The results of study will add to the current research body because in response to the achievement gap of students based in socio-economic status, the adults participant in the institution of public education have a responsibility to every child in our charge (Miller, 2008). The publication of the study will offer itself to address the needs of 15% of the student population, as this average size per school that qualifies for Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

## Comparing an RtI Response and CRT Response

Newell and Kratochwili (2007) note that the RtI model is limited in its approach to significantly reduce racial discrimination in assignments to special education departments as racial discrimination cannot be completely eliminated. Their argument is based on the fact that many students' referrals to special education departments is invalid because students have not spent appropriate time with the academic material due to disciplinary absences or inadequate instruction, both of which are characteristic of the disproportionate representation of students from disadvantageous socio-economic positions in special education populations. The rumination is that the process that the

institution employs doesn't protect these students from discrimination in the process of special education referrals. In this dissertation, I choose to offer an alternative perspective of RtI, focusing on the experience of participants in order to feature the problem Newell and Kratochwili outlines. To best serve this purpose, what follows is a discussion of how an RtI response to low student achievement looks to preserve the institution first, while a Critical Race Theory (CRT) response prioritizes finding the purpose of the institution as it is seen to operate on individuals.

The RtI response would be that the people of the institution should be changed because the people are not effectively attending to the structure. This is problematic because it does not address the issue of the possibility of discrimination in the process. Snider (2007) reflects upon the option to simply change the approach in response to a lack of student productivity. She outlines a compilation of six issues that could easily result given the possibility that teachers choose a method based on its internal validity instead of using specific student experience to inform instructional changes.

> *First, not all approaches are equally effective. Second, teachers may unknowingly pick and choose some of the [less] effective components of a particular model. Third, some strategies or components may not be effective unless they are implemented as part of a whole package. Fourth, elements of one program may be incompatible with elements of another. Fifth, using a mix of approaches may limit the sustained and systematic use of an approach that is necessary to obtain results. Finally, an eclectic teacher who uses multiple methods may not use any of them with enough skill to produce results. (p. 884)*

This kind of response ignores the prospect that the role of the school can include the validity of the cultural norms students bring before and while adding new language and other skills/concepts to a student's toolbox. Preference is to avoid the traditional

approach of getting students to conform or assimilate by getting them to shed their cultural reference points.

The CRT response would be more focused on the relationships between the teacher and student by identifying which students are failing and investigating how their behavior or academic performance might be read or misread based on their at-risk status. The explanation for underachievement of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds has its roots in a deficit model, which locates the problem within the student, their families, and their communities. The question instructional support team members must always ask is "to which culture have practitioners been most and least responsive?" Therefore, CRT modification would be that the status quo should be changed to serve the needs of its specific students by relating current practices to past, present, and future class experiences and situations. Figure provides a simplified compare of an RtI and CRT response to failures of the institution to reach its goals.

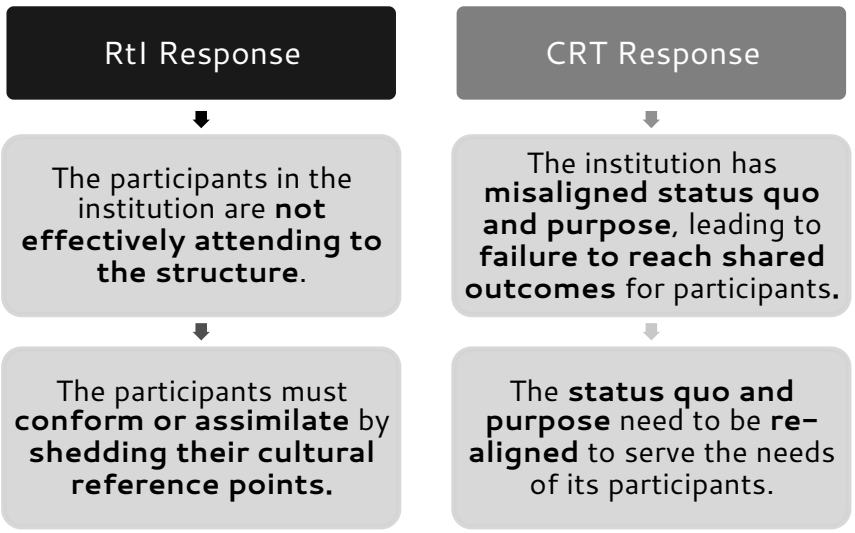


***Figure 2. Comparison of RtI and CRT Response***

## Reflections on Author Position

My objective for reporting the findings was to remain true to the essence of what each participant's narrative provided in order to outline a phenomenology that supports a beneficial change for both students and teacher. Indeed, the subjects of the study demonstrated their perspective with a passion and clarity that permitted me to accomplish this. I find this important because it demonstrates the agency that my participants enacted as both "knowers" of their own experiences and as youth with intrinsic intelligence and awareness.

I am cognizant that there are multiple ways to interpret the findings of my data, as the information provided through these narratives are both rich and dynamic. This presentation of a collective of narratives is somewhat shaped by my interpretations that stemmed (in part) from some of my own experiences as a practitioner, as a black woman, and my location as a teacher for these students and a colleague for the teachers. This interest and care speaks to the reflexive process between researcher, participant, and reader as a part of the critical, interpretive narrative process.

## Summary

The following chapters will be organized in the following sequence. Chapter 2 will include a literature review of the field with certain emphasis of other kinds of storytelling within RtI as well as perceptions of RtI effectiveness at Tier 2. Chapter 3 will include a discussion of the form of an initial survey used to determine a sample and its appropriateness for this kind of analysis, the semi-structured/open nature of the interviews, and the process of data analysis, including the researcher's decision-making process given the emergent nature of this project and its data. Chapter 4 will be an

outline of the findings in terms of Collin Hill's domains of power. Chapter 5 will include a summary of the project, conclusions gathered from the data, and recommendations for future research both tangential and extensive.

# Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

## Introduction: What About Those Left Behind?

The current educational research field is saturated with information about how to improve student performance, given that the political impetus is geared towards producing more varied and better academic and behavioral student outcomes (Reiss, 2009). Yet, the knowledge constructed in the multitude of scholarly articles and books finds its existential origin in a single discrete subpopulation active in public education, namely the adults. Though it is true that the drivers of the learning experience are the teacher leaders in the classroom and, indirectly the administrators, who help make decisions that will facilitate the learning of individual students, the reflexive nature of teaching and learning is too often ignored. The psychologist Abraham Maslow reminds us, "There is no teaching without learning. One requires the other."

Despite the common sense nature of this proverb, overall neither the spirit nor the letter of Maslow's maxim is exhibited in the research literature. The field of educational research tends to uphold an idea that if teachers exhibit certain actions and characteristics, then students cannot help but to learn the material. Research-based teaching practices offer a sort of guarantee: if you do this activity in this very specific way, then you can expect students to master the objective. The body of literature is then often distilled even more, as many classroom teachers don't read research reports and instead turn to their local bookstore for teaching guides. Teach For America's *Teaching as Leadership* and Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* exemplify this phenomenon. Both books claim to be based in the outcomes of educational research – namely both books studied and codified what the most effective teachers were doing in their classrooms. *Teaching as*

*Leadership* boiled it down to six principles "one would find embodied by any successful leader in any challenging context" (pg. 5). *Teach Like a Champion* claims that the book "is about the tools necessary for success in the most important part of the field, teaching in a classroom" (pg 2). Though both books cite research literature as well as offer many rich descriptions of classroom experiences, the location by which this is produced and geared toward is exclusively focused on the teacher.

As the pursuit of skillful teaching moves from an individual intellectual pursuit to a public commercial environment, the outcomes of educational research influence what kinds of products are offered to the targeted consumers, teachers. The conversation starts with the lack of expected student outcomes and jumps to exploring the actions of the teachers. Without accessing the experiences of the students as we as educators verify our effectiveness as educators, the conversation is one-sided and therefore incomplete. If the learning is not occurring, we must also recognize and assess how students are receiving, or not receiving, the information we are charged to teach.

Understanding how and why students experience public education overall as well as their own individual experience of education has direct implications for our methods for educational research. As stated in Chapter One of this dissertation, there is a general consensus that education currently is not doing enough to educate every student. The research literature has attempted to address this gap but only from the perspective of what teachers are feeling, saying, and doing in the context of their education and current school environment. Research about teacher actions has been clear about what technique is more effective than the other, but experiences of the students who are on the receiving end these actions is not present. Therefore the debate about what is best for the students

is ill informed. Without a through and more complete examination of how education is experienced, any 'solution' we choose to apply is incomplete and ultimately doomed to fail because the origin of the cause and the symptoms of its cause have not been fully considered.

A more complete view of the educational experience requires that we consider the social location and experience of both the teacher and the student. The discussion must include how each party relates his or her location to the other. This last part, how each party finds his or herself as an actor and influencer as they are engaged in the experience, is already in process in the research field, but on from the perspective of the teacher. Students have simply not been asked about how they view and experience themselves in a school setting. This review of the literature is grounded in verifying this fact.

This chapter is presented in three sections to highlight that there is limited evidence in the research body that focuses on the students and their view of themselves. The first section will be a review of the literature about one type of teacher action proven to positively effect student outcomes overall, the RtI process. This section will include the history of RtI and research about it as well as a discussion about the outcomes of that research, namely how RtI should be implemented by individual school districts, school buildings, and at a classroom level. The second section will explore how the discussion about student performance has been focused on what the teachers are doing in the classroom but ignores how teachers interact with students from the student perspective. The final section will make a case for using student experiences to improve how we conceptualize our path towards more robust and widespread student achievement by

focusing on the 'invisible' students in the research literature – the students who do not have a learning disability yet do not meet expected academic outcomes.

## RtI Research Focus on Teachers instead of Students

The literature on how to use RtI to improve student achievement has primarily studied what teachers should believe in order to prepare their teaching practice so that students have the opportunity for success in the classroom (Barton & Stephanek, 2009; Demski, 2009; Sprick, 2009; Short & Wilkins, 2009; Manthey, 2007; Samuels, 2007; Brown-Chidsey, 2007; Brown & Harleicker, 2008; Daly, Marten, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007). For these researchers success refers to researchers' interest in creating more learning time for individual students through an increase in the level of student engagement in the learning process as well as an increase of the number of students who remain in the classroom despite breeches of classroom culture. The relationship studied was the connection between how teachers navigate the educational path of their classroom as a whole and student performance outcomes. The questions asked and answered include:

- how does the environment dictate or make room for improved student performance growth, and
- what can teachers modify to make the classroom environment welcoming for heterogeneous classrooms with varied student characteristics?

Much of the research literature about RtI begins with a rationale about the purpose of RtI and a history of its introduction into the educational conversation (Fuchs, 2006; Morawski & Hughes, 2009; Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, & Brady, 2011). Starting with its history as a response to the need for legislative changes in special

education, President Bush's revision of IDEA in 2004 allowed the RtI model to be used instead of an IQ test to determine if a student qualifies for appropriate use of special education resources (read: money given to the schools to serve students who receive special education services). The general argument states that with earlier effective intervention, more students will be successful without special education because they will have had their minor deficiencies taken care of before they become severely hindered by those knowledge gaps, thereby reducing the number of students in special education over time (Fuchs, 2006). The logic follows that if there are less students receiving special education services, more students are meeting their individual academic goals in the general education classroom (Sprick, 2009). The argument rests on the idea that there is a proper way to structure and employ the RtI model so that RtI implementation can serve its original purpose – discriminating between low achievers and student with intrinsic learning disabilities (Wedl & Schroeder, 2005). These articles outline the major aspects of implementation as well as offers differentiated choices for administrators at each step. They also include some warnings for dispensation that depends on individual school features, aspects that each administrator must consider before a full and valid execution can be achieved. In addition this body of work raises contentions about what administrators should do when the system fails to remediate a student so that traditional classroom participation is an outcome rather than referral to special education (Manthey, 2007).

Some authors choose to highlight how RtI can fail students who are marginalized in a general education school setting and therefore end up in special education. Their marginalization is an outcome of individual student operational distance from American

linguistic or cultural norms understood to be habitual by the time the student enters the classroom (Klinger and Edwards, 2006). There is a recognition that the historical issue of expecting minority cultures to abide by the norms of the majority culture in public spaces leaves the participants of the minority culture with reduced social opportunities to participate in the institution itself. An essential part of being a responsible educator is basing the implementations we use for this unique group of students on evidence that we gather from similar groups of students.

Klinger and Edwards' argument revolves around the fact that the sample groups used to show the success of RtI too often do not include students who have the same socio-economic or cultural backgrounds of the students who typically slip through the cracks of general education and end up in special education. The general education classroom, they argue, should be less static when it comes to addressing difficulties that students in the cultural minority might face. Instead of waiting for these students to fail, Klinger and Edwards argue that "culturally responsive" practices should be a normal part of Tier 1 general education. These and calls like these are appeals for a new kind of RtI lead me to believe that an analysis of how students and teachers use and experience RtI is in order.

## Student Performance Focus on Teacher Actions instead of Student Experience

There is an increasing body of literature that focuses on the student outcomes in education (Reiss, 2009; Briscoe, 2009; Cassidy & Jackson, 2005; Jimerson, Flecther, Graydon, Schunurr, Nickerson, & Kundert, 2006; Wilson & Rai, 2010, Dover, 2009; Downing, Kwong, Chan, Lam, and Downing, 2009; Martin & Gune, 2002; Prete, 2006;

McDonald, 2008; Crockett & Buckley, 2009; Cooper, 2003). These studies divulge how teachers allow different kinds of students to interact variably with the academic material but these interactions are studied with a heavy emphasis on the beliefs and mindsets of the teachers. The consensus is that teachers are the distributors of learning opportunities, and their archetypes of what a good student is determines whether or not individual students are offered those opportunities (Briscoe, 2009; Downing, et al., 2009). Wilson (2010) wrote about the possibility of the teacher as a guide in the classroom for making students comfortable in participating in their own learning. Using problem solving as the construct of how education should happen, Wilson gives teachers tips on how to make students aware of the educational possibilities that they themselves can seize and manage on their own. By becoming their own advocates, Wilson asserts, the students can then learn more on their own. Despite Wilson's assertion that teachers can be gatekeepers, his position highlights the fact that teachers have the power to decide who goes through the gate. Steele confirms the fear that educational opportunities for growth are not offered equitably to every student, introducing into the conversation the effects of power dynamics in teaching and learning (2009). When teachers offer opportunities based on the perceived potential of individual students, the classroom is split into two (or more) classrooms; teacher archetypes of students dictate student access to learning activities (Nuun, 2009). When teachers show that they believe that they cannot reach a certain population embedded in one classroom, the students respond by segregating themselves along those lines (Martin & Van Gunte, 2002).

Seider and Hughely (2009) investigated how teachers' perceptions of social inequality affect the possibilities teachers think are reasonably appropriate for their

students. The teachers are unwilling to provide opportunities for success to students who were "less likely" to achieve given their socio-economic characteristics because teachers think it is a waste of both teacher ans student time, energy, or resources. Djik (1996) explores how teachers have the overarching ideological power in the classroom because teachers are the managers of 'text and talk' in the classroom. In a classroom, the power is shared (or not) with students by the teacher who dictates who is speaking, when they are speaking, and whom they are speaking to.

Both of these authors highlight the power of the teacher in determining who is truly an active participant in the classroom. Backed by the behavioral expectations of the schools' administration, teachers are expected to regulate how power is shared – never relinquishing all of that power to the students. Though these studies confirm that physical presence and teacher skills are not the sum of what influences learning, there is still a conceptual shortfall. All of these studies use the teacher as the primary data source and location of analysis. This student voice remains unheard.

Research exists that is focused on the students, but it is the student as the object rather than a subject. The conversation continues with research about what student issues keep students from reaching the expectations set out by their teachers. Reiss (2009) created an outline of six motivational reasons for low student achievement in the classroom, all of which have origins within the student his or herself. This article references many sources that claim to be derived from student perspectives, but many gather these perspectives through the use of the Reiss School Motivational Profile, a contrived scale, through which students' reported motivation is negotiated. Here we continue to find a lack of richly detailed student stories of experience and reflections

about education, which leaves us to continue to ask: what do students think about the education we are providing them?

## Research About Student Experience

The literature body is replete with rich analyses of the intersectionality of personal and societal characteristics which can lead educators to be more aware of the students in their classroom (Crockett and Buckley, 2009; McDonald, 2008; Cooper, 2003; Taylor and Clair, 2009; Prete, 2006). A research focus on how teacher views of their students directly affect the outcomes possible for each of those individual students is a step towards using the experience of students to improve teaching practice. Yet they fail to address the full concern because the application of the findings address the teacher perspective only. The argument is that discrimination in the classroom is based in the teacher's experience and compounded with the teacher's perception of the students' location derived from race, gender, ability, age and socio-economic location, which "can interact or intersect in ways that can either advantage or disadvantage the person's well-being and development" (Cassidy, 2009, p. 448). Yet acknowledging this kind of awareness in the research body does not directly translate into true engagement with the educational experiences and needs of those students.

Even research about positive turns in students' educational experiences refer to the student as a means to an end. Turning points are treated as if they are 'fairy tales,' or something that happens by magic (Yair, 2009). In order to make discrete the circumstances present or proceeding those turn-around moments, the authors' focus is singularly given to what the teacher must do to create those moments in the classroom. Student narratives of their experiences are used in order to define the interactions

between the student and the teacher that allowed the teacher to lead them to a path of increased educational opportunities, but little attention is paid to how the student was affected by the experience of being a low-achiever (Yair, 2009). In Yair's article, though, a section is dedicated to the characteristics of the narrative of a turning point. This targets future research about student narration to be more robust and directed towards the interaction between teacher and student so that the student voices are better heard, but does not allow for exegesis about the personal experience of the student as a low achiever.

Some studies choose to focus on the educational outlook students have about school, but mostly focus on how they react to what are culturally considered negative experiences. In a meta-analysis of the literature spanning 80 studies over the last 75 years, Jimerson et al. (2006) reported that a disproportional amount of retention occurs across race lines (more Black and Hispanic students) and gender (twice as many boys than girls), and that grade retention can have harmful effects on socio-emotional and behavioral adjustment as well as academic adjustment, yet no more than their socially-promoted low achieving peers. This has particularly important implications for classroom teachers and school administrators because (1) it identifies the 'lost' population (black and Hispanic males), (2) characterizes the experience as a low-achiever (retained or not) as a negative influence on their socio-cultural development and attitude about school, and (3) expounds how experiencing the stigma of being a low-achiever has a negative long-term influence on their future educational and occupational outcomes.

Though Jimerson et al. spend almost one hundred pages discussing the effects of being a low-achiever, only one 6-sentence paragraph is given to student perspectives

about grade retention. The student perspectives data is reported by making comparisons to the experience of being a low-achiever (for example, losing a parent or going blind), but does not share the narrative experiences of the students. This indicates that while there are studies being done to uncover how the experience of education feels to a student, the student voices are still filtered through a past tense memory instead of a future/forward looking inquiry. The body of work about what students are experiencing is lacking because the raw experience of the students has not been given any value in the research literature.

## Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature's explanation for low student achievement and motivation, uncovering the gap in the literature – the student voice and perspective. Even when the student is used as a source of data, the analysis of the data results in a conclusion about the teacher or the classroom instead of the student. I began with a review of how the literature discusses RtI in terms of application instead of experience, then I continued with discussing how literature about student performance is linked only to teacher actions. This chapter concluded with how student voices are used to view the teachers instead of shining light on the experience of the student. The next chapter, chapter three, will continue this line of thinking, namely to show how this research project will be structured so that the current gap of knowledge in educational research can begin to be fleshed out.

# Chapter 3: Methods

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will present an overview of qualitative research used in applied research as well as specific methods, theoretical frame, and design features used in this dissertation. The chapter layout is as follows. I will begin with a recap of the problem and research questions. Then I will present the focus of the dissertation and the research questions guided by a critical epistemological perspective. I will discuss the use of critical qualitative research and its focus on bringing to light the impact of social interactions on the opportunities and power of those acted upon. Next I will present my rationale for a phenomenological study in order to expose how the essence of an experience shapes the consciousness of the experiencing person. After presenting the background of my specific qualitative research, I will introduce instrumental case studies as the method that will inform my data collection choices.

In addition I will describe the design of the study in terms of how I identify the population, whittle the population down to a manageable sample, and determine my delimitations for this study. I will present how Critical Race Theory (CRT) has influenced the kind of data I will collect and the type of conclusions I wish to draw. Then I will address the frame through which my data will be analyzed, Patricia Hill-Collins' domains of power and Claude Steele's social-psychological threat, both born of a CRT methodology. In the summary of this chapter, I will recap what was presented and direct your attention to chapter 4, which will present my findings in a format appropriate qualitative data representation and interpretation.

## Problem and Questions

General education teachers are educated by our universities to teach in a traditional way to the average student. When presented with the opportunity to change their teaching habits in order to support a student who is not average and/or does not perform well in a traditional classroom, the average teacher refers this student to special education. The newest iteration of special education policy, the IDEA federal law updated in 2006, included a new policy by which special educators can ensure that general education teachers have truly done all they can to adjust the traditional classroom environment for a student before referring that student to the special education department. The burden of proving that nothing outside of the student causes the student's low performance rests on the general education teacher. The job of the special education teacher is to verify that there are unavoidable environmental attributes in the general education classroom that are negatively affecting the student and her/her academic performance. If a special education teacher does not think the general education teachers of a low performing student have truly changed their classroom practice to possible serve the needs of this student, the special education teacher has a right to question whether that special education referral is warranted.

The low performing student remains a responsibility of the general education teacher, but there is no policy, law, management expectation, or ethical impetus for the general education teacher to continue to innovate adaptations for that student. This leaves the student in a kind of purgatory, where no one wants to take responsibility for that individual student's development. The structure of RtI does not explicitly make room for a student to be a part of the decisions for designing her or his educational

trajectory. Missing from the classroom, the behind-the-scenes decision-making, and the research literature are the voices of the low performing students who are not learning disabled. This dissertation seeks to answer this gap by exploring how being left out of the conversation organizes the way these students feel about their educational trajectory and the degree and kind of control they have to influence their own education.

My research question is: In what ways do students, who are not learning disabled and are not meeting minimum academic performance goals, experience power dynamics in reference to changes in their individual learning plan? Having presented both the predicament and relevant educational research literature, this chapter is dedicated to presenting the history of my decision making to design a study that can help to understand and analyze the experiences of these students. As the focus of this study is to understand the meaning constructed around the social interactions experienced, a qualitative research method is the most appropriate.

## Qualitative Research as Applied Research

### American Qualitative Phenomenological Research.

Qualitative research is seen as a blanket term for the varied and vast range of research methods that look to describe the human experience in ways other than solely in terms of frequencies, averages, and probabilities. Merriam (2009) offers a view that qualitative research might not need to be divided into multiple discrete classes, but can be a broad net to catch various kinds of research lends itself to the possibility for individual and unique complexities between the research products. Using this standpoint, I plan to use this research project to pilot an novel method of focusing on, collecting, and analyzing qualitative data.

My study, in part, seeks to uncover the outputs of the student's meaning-making based in their lived experiences in terms of their identities as well as their opinion about the underlying status quo based in their educational experience. These outputs include memories of events, judgments about those events and people involved, perceived goals and efficiency, as well as their emotional reactions to these experiences. More specifically, this study will look to use student voices to describe the ways in which their educational opportunities (both current and future) are managed by the direct actors and characteristics of their educations, their teachers and classroom structures. In this way, my dissertation is critical of both the implementation of RtI as well as the research field itself. The critique is based on the idea that though students are the chief stakeholders in our education endeavors, their voices are undervalued in the creation of policy and implementation. Unlike a more traditional critical approach that focuses on the structure of the social institution (Merriam, 2009), I will be using a critical approach to move beyond what is not working in the organization of the institution towards what status quo informs the organization of the institution. This will be uncovered through the perspectives of the students as they experience how decisions made without their input highlight for them what is important in education, as reflected in the concern about power dynamics in my research question.

An American phenomenological perspective also informs this research. Caelli (2000) offers a distinction between American and European understandings and applications of phenomenological research. American phenomenology focuses on the everyday experience in contract to European phenomenology that "removes [the experience] from self-conscious thinking processes" (Caelli, 2000, pp 369). A European

perspective would first ask for the overarching opinion about the system and then ask for examples of experiences that formed that opinion. For my dissertation, the process of thinking about the experiences will occur during the interviews as I ask the students to share their experiences then reflect on how those experiences have shaped their view of what education means to them and those that educate them. This serves my purpose of moving past how the organization affects people's construction of themselves towards how people view what the organization is in existence to do.

**Case Studies.**

As a professional student myself, I recognize that students, especially youths, are not fully aware of the structure of the organization that exerts power over them. For this reason I chose a case study design to gather data. Merriam (2009) describes this as an in-depth analysis of a bounded system. My interest in the discovery and articulation of the perceived status quo of the institution of RtI dictates that the case studies are of an instrumental sort (Merriam, 2009). An instrumental case study uses case studies to gather information by which a more general issue or condition is made apparent. As the case is the tool rather than the output of this study, I will be gathering information from students under a multiple case study design. Unlike an intrinsic case study, my use of multiple instrumental case studies will focus on identifying both the redundancies between cases as well as the dissimilarities (Stake, 2005).

Stake (2005) identifies six kinds of sources for data that should be mined in order to uncover the range of individualities in each case. First is the nature of the case, which for me will be the implementation of RtI. The historical background of RtI and its implementation in the school is its second characteristic. The third is the physical setting

of the school. Background on contexts, for example the socio-economic factors at play at the school and for the student individually, refer to Stake's fourth kind of source. The fifth is other cases similar to this one as in my other cases. The sixth is "other informants through whom the case can be known" (Stake, 2005, p 447). This sixth expectation for case studies determines my population and ultimately my sample.

## CRT as a Research Method

In chapter 1 of this dissertation, I outlined my choice of using CRT as a theoretical background. In chapter 2 I presented the origins of CRT and its application to educational research. In this section of chapter 3, I will introduce the concept of CRT as a research method. I will first outline the ways in which CRT can be used as a research method. Then I will describe the specific outcome that CRT offers for this dissertation – namely, how its structure and aims will be used to uncover the students' perception of the status quo in RtI that underlies the structure, operations, and sustaining mechanisms of American public education. Finally, I will describe the two data collection and analysis techniques by which I will uncover this status quo. These two methodologies are domains of power (Hill Collins, 2009) and social-psychological threat (Steele, 2009).

### The Development of CRT as a Research Method.

CRT was developed as a response to race-neutral legal scholarship in the 1970s. Though much of the CRT scholarship has sought to include race as a central construct and focus first in the legal field and then in education in the 1990s (Lynn & Adams, 2002), I consciously choose to draw upon its foundation in a tangential way. CRT can be used to draw "from the historical and intellectual traditions that have existed in marginalized communities for centuries" (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 89). Using CRT,

then allows the researcher to ask and answer questions to previously marginalized populations in order to provide counter-narratives via which the master narratives can be challenged.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) is one of the chief supporters of using CRT in educational research. She argues that a CRT research standpoint works to emphasize how, through research conclusions, institutions are found to serve the continuance of a very particular status quo – the superior position of White people. The concept of defining what status quo institutions operate to preserve makes CRT appealing as a tool in this study. In education, CRT has been used to highlight the distance between the social understanding of equal opportunity in our schools and the structures that make equal opportunity impossible in our current school systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Studies like these reveal that the operational status quo in schools is reflected by an assumption that if the student fails to meet academic or behavioral expectations, the deficit lies in the individual student, a prognosis that requires particular and individualized remediation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Without negating or lessening the value of previous CRT works in education, it is essential to point out that these studies are focused on the organization and its structure rather than the outcomes experienced by the constituents acted upon by those organizations. In education, these constituents are the students and their caretakers. Ladson-Billings in the same study also warns researchers not to ignore the effect of the experience of the classroom in discerning status quo in education. In response to her recommendation, I will be using CRT as a research method in hopes of uncovering the status quo and its surrounding assumptions at work in RtI by emphasizing the stories of its marginalized group, Tier 2 students.

**Domains of Power: Uncovering the Status Quo.**

In order to help me conceptualize questions geared to uncovering the status quo and its assumptions, I call on the work of Patricia Hill Collins as she presents it in her book, *Another Kind of Public Education* (2009). Here she outlines four domains of power through which injustices can be identified and resisted. Her creation of the domains of power framework was born of an impetus to add to the CRT research field (Hill Collins, 2009). Though she uses the domains of power to highlight the import of race in education, I will use this framework in order to inductively uncover the status quo of RtI as seen through the eyes of its marginalized students. One intriguing aspect of this framework is that the domains of power are not limited to single bounded cases of discrete institutions. Instead it takes into consideration the nuanced interactions that one experiences as a participant in an institution with other participants in that institution. The following outline of the four domains that compose the framework will serve to make apparent how interactions are identified and analyzed within RtI.

The first domain is the *structural domain* is the way practices are organized through institutions through which the interpersonal is collapsed so that the status quo can be maintained without individual human agents. For the purposes of my research, the structural domain is represented by the school policies and implementation expectations of RtI. As a system of power, RtI is characterized by the practices of those who implement RtI. The idea of RtI can be consider separate from the person, but it is the action of its operators that make RtI a force in the world either for or against the academic success of our students.

The second domain of power is the *disciplinary domain* by which individual people cite and apply rules to help maintain this status quo. The ways in which the practices of RtI are first checked for appropriateness is indicative of the disciplinary domain. Similarly, the social and academic opportunities granted (or denied) to students dependent on their location in a particular tier and their movement between the tiers also highlights the rules by which RtI should be applied.

The third is the *cultural domain* in which justifications for the status quo are created and circulated. For my study, I expect these validations to be made apparent in the decision-making of the teachers that lead to the matrix of opportunities they decide to provide for each student. Similar to how Hill Collins finds that this is the domain in which "the color-blind story play(s) out," I expect my exploration in this area to highlight how the deficit-model thinking works to exclude the voices of students in Tier 2 (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 53).

The fourth domain is the *interpersonal domain* where the interpersonal relationship returns to the forefront, highlighting the ways in which individual people make the choice to adhere to or reject the norms of the status quo in interaction with other individuals. The interaction between the teacher who makes the RtI decisions and student who must abide by these decisions is the main source of data to answer the questions of this domain.

**Social-Psychological Threat.**

In 1998, Claude Steele argued that a student's knowledge of other's negative stereotypes about that student affects how that student performs on academic tests (Steele, 2009). The actions of a student are influenced through that student's

internalization of negative stereotypes about their ability. One example of a negative stereotype is a deficit perspective of the achievement gap. A deficit perspective of the achievement gap blames the gap of student performance separated by socio-economic factors is entirely due to essential characteristics about the populations and disregards the possibility that the structure of the school system works to create and maintain this gap. It is called deficit because the perspective assumes that there is something wrong with the student. A negative stereotype such as this can have a negative effect on the self-identity of the students, further limiting their individual impetus to participate in the classroom and perform at their full potential.

This negating effect is called the social-psychological threat, or stereotype threat. In other studies, the impact of the threat is measured in terms of the student's academic performance on tests. I choose to measure the Tier 2 student's social-psychological threat by collecting each student's reflection of those who can apply power to their educational lives. The influences of interactions with student peers, individual teachers, and parents are identified as data sources to identify the students' perceived social-psychological threat. Relations such as the kind of personal relationship the student has with the test administrator, identifications a student has with the school's structures, associations with others who are also in Tier 2, as well as knowledge of how this information is used by others can affect how the student performs academically in the Tier 2 interventions and in other academic areas.

## Research Design

### Special Considerations in the Selection of Population and Sample.

Referring back to the importance of building a complete understanding of the case by using teachers to share the aspects of RtI implementation students are not privy to define my population. The selection of educators in a large public urban district in a mid-sized Midwest city was purposeful because I knew that RtI was being implemented in this site. I chose to direct an initial survey to educators of grades five through eight at this site for two reasons. In order to have students reflect on how the personal experience of RtI affects what they believe about the goals of the educational system dictates that the student be ready to think metacognitively. Though the current research focus about metacognition consists of ways teachers can teach so that students can learn to be metacognitive, the common belief in education is that metacognition is first possible at the pre-teen level. Secondly, at the high school level, tracking down informants about how RtI is implemented is much more complex as the students move between 6 to 9 teachers a day.

The participants were identified through one of many institutions – the school district itself or self-identification through a professional educational organization, for example. After these teachers are identified, a link to a survey in Survey Monkey was emailed to them in order to gather information about whether or not their situation is appropriate for one of my case studies. Questions on this survey elicited responses to indicate to me whether the teacher uses RtI, whether they think RtI is a successful program to affect the performance of low-achieving students, and whether they have students assigned to Tier 2 that were found to not have a learning disability. As

responses came in and possible cases were identified, I chose one site at which to do a single case study. The choice of cases was primarily be made according to the teacher's perception of the efficacy of RtI. As the implementation of RtI can vary from school to school even within the same district, the teacher's perception of how effective RtI has been on a single student, in place of focus on the 'kind' of RtI, is more important to the outcomes of this dissertation because the status quo as illustrated through the implementation of the program is primary to answering the research question. Though teachers were interviewed to provide access to the structure of RtI as it is implemented at their school site, this information is secondary and only used instrumentally.

**Data Collection.**

After gaining IRB approval of my research, I sent out a field test of my Survey Monkey survey through a local professional educators' organization. I sent out a final Survey Monkey survey via email to my population of grade 5 – 8 urban educators to their work email addresses via their human resources department. As possible sites were identified, I began interviewing teachers using a semi-structured method informed by their survey responses in order to identify that site's RtI decision-making process. These interviews were video recorded. After the interview I found that the teacher and site could serve my research needs, I then arranged for consent forms to be signed by the student and his/her family. I also produce a set of field notes focusing on possible follow-up questions I asked student during their individual interviews.

After the teacher interviews are finished and the student consent forms are in, I began observations of each student engaged in their differentiated learning activities and document collection at the school site. The classroom observations were focused on

observing the differentiated instruction activities that fall into the plan for the Tier 2 student and will be either audio or video recorded. Documents as artifacts of this experience were gathered and included class products from the differentiated instruction as well as teacher-generated paperwork about the implementation of RtI for this student. After witnessing the differentiated instruction, I interviewed the case study students to gather how they experienced those learning opportunities and what those experiences told them about what is important in education. These interviews were also audio recorded.

Due to the emergent nature of this research process, I transcribed the interviews and classroom observations and code with member checks along the way in terms of follow-up interviews. As the primary instrument in the research process, my position as a Black researcher who is also a middle school teacher will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

**Delimitations.**

The unique construction of my research study dictates three major delimitations. First I am using a small number of case studies in order to provide the richest descriptions I can of the entire phenomenon. The only kind of data I am interested in collecting is in relation to the varied descriptions of students' perceptions of power within Tier 2 in conjunction with the teacher's perception of RtI's effectiveness in serving that student. Data outside of the realm of impact of these two perceptions is extraneous to the conversation. Second the demographic information about the participants is not primary to the discussion. Though their location in the social world may provide some insight on the researcher's behalf about possibilities available to others who share their social context, the diversity of the participants is solely limited to the position of the teacher

about RtI. Lastly, my data collection time frame is only three months long. Starting my data collection in the middle of the school year gives teachers time to identify students who are low performing and apply differentiated learning activities to those students' learning plans.

There are some delimitations, or factors I cannot control, which will influence the data available in this study. One is that individual teachers choose which students need Tier 2 interventions, which means the teachers essentially choose which students I can interview. The decision process to place students in Tier 2 may vary between teachers or within individual teacher-student relationships and can include academic concerns, behavioral concerns, personality clashes, and/or a lack of professional knowledge on the teacher's part to reach the students academically.

**Trustworthiness and Ethics.**

Special ethical considerations were given to this study. There will be consent forms for teachers and assent forms for students (and their families). All electronic files will be password protected and never stored on the Internet. Field notes will be written using aliases with the codes for the aliases stored in a locked cabinet. Any videos recorded of participants will be destroyed at the dissertation's final publishing and the final product will be made available to participants upon request.

The credibility of my study's results will be ensured because the various levels of teacher-perceived efficacy of RtI will dictate the variety of the case studies. If I paid no heed to whether the teacher felt the program was working, I could end up with case studies of teachers and their students who were not invested in the program – meaning they are less likely to put forth effort to try to make RtI work. Instead a wider, purposive

range of teacher perceptions negates this possibility. The transferability of my research project will be strong because the data that is collected will refer only to the implementation of RtI as a decision-making process. I will not have interest in collecting data that tests empirically the success of RtI or compares implemented models of RtI between cases unless such a comparison highlights the ways in which the decision making process affected the matrix of power.

Teacher and student/family follow-up interviews will be used to bolster the dependability of the study. As the data collection and analysis is expected to be an iterative process, any lack of clarity on my part in what I observe in the classroom, collect as artifact, or hear in an interview will be followed up with the participant in which the data was gathered from. This also will include member checks of my transcripts, so that both teachers and students have the opportunity to further reflect about what the experience means to them.

**Limitations.**

There are two major limitations dictated by the parameters of this study. The first is that I cannot check with any other data sources to triangulate the self-reported perceptions of teachers and students about RtI. The concern is that what they tell me may not match how they actually feel inside. This may be due to lack of accurate articulation skills on an individual basis. The participants, both teachers and students, also may fail to acknowledge or participate in the interventions or the entire program of interventions due to factors other than the efficacy of the program or its interventions.

Secondly, the volunteer aspect of creating my sample limits my study. Even though I have a target population, teachers whose site may otherwise be perfect for my

study must choose on their own to participate. The same goes for the student participants.

## Summary

In this chapter, I briefly recapped chapters 1 and 2, reviewing my research questions and focus as supported by the literature review. I described the choice of following an American phenomenological trajectory rather than a European location in how self-reflection is accessed. Then I outlined how I use case studies to highlight the circumstance that leads the student to identify a particular underlying status quo of RtI. I portrayed the design of the dissertation as partially based in the possibility of gathering narratives from students who are able to make metacognitive connections about relationships and how they feel they may be able to use the power they have. I then expressed the aspects of this phenomenon I chose to ignore in this study and how my data would be collected.

Finally I illustrated about the data analysis aspect of this study, namely the trustworthiness of my data analysis and the limitations my data presents me with. I discussed CRT as a research method and described the two methodologies, domains of power and social-psychological threat, both of which will inform both my data collection and analysis. In the last two chapters of this dissertation I will present the themes from the data obtained from the interviews, classroom observations, and data analysis in Chapter 4 and an interpretation of my findings in Chapter 5.

# Chapter 4: A Narrative Description of the Findings: The Implications of Small Group Instruction on the Experience of Power

## Power Seen through Lenses of Domains

Patricia Hill Collins presents four domains of power in her book, *Another Kind of Public Education* (2009), through which a matrix of domination can be investigated and uncovered through their intersectionalities. This is the framework by which I chose to inductively examine the status quo of small group instruction. By considering the nuanced interactions that participants in an institution interact with each other, given tiered locations within that institution, my goal was to discuss the socially specific experience of low performing students identified to need additional, small group instruction. The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to: (1) an elucidation of how the four domains of power apply to the data collected, (2) describing the data collected in terms of the four domains of power, (3) an introduction to the context of the findings, and (4) a summary of the findings. Hill Collins describes the four intersecting systems of power as structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal.

### Four Domains of Power.

The first domain is the *structural domain*. This domain looks to expose the structural parameters that organize the way power is related to participants in the institution. This domain is represented in the interviewee expressions of the purpose and policies in determining how students are identified for small group instruction.

The second domain of power is the *disciplinary domain*, where individuals control and organize the behavior of others in the institution. This domain is expressed in

respondents' expression of which rules, both said and unsaid, are applied to those subjects participant in small group instruction.

The third is the *cultural domain* in which the organization of the institution is legitimized through the language, images, values, and ideas used to justify and support the status quo of that institution. For my study, this domain is represented in the data as student- and teacher-expressed evidence as to why students should participate fully in the activities of the in small group instruction.

The fourth domain, the *interpersonal domain,* is where individuals decide whether or not they adhere to the status quo in light of maintaining or dissolving interpersonal relationships. The source of data for this domain is represented by how participants identified themselves in the context of the institution and the reasons they use to accept or reject the domination of others in that institution.

## Introduction to the Findings

My research question is: In what ways do students, who are not learning disabled and are not meeting minimum academic performance goals, experience power dynamics in reference to changes in their individual learning plan? The domains of power, each in turn discussed as a comparison of the experiences of students and teachers, will be the organizing format of the next sections of this chapter to explore how the data answers the question posed above.

This study uses interview and observational data collected from five participants, two teachers and three students, in a Midwestern free, public charter school. Teachers who teach $5^{th}$ – $8^{th}$ grade subjects were emailed a survey to determine whether they uses of a Response to Intervention (RtI) model to make academic decisions in their classroom,

the extent to which they believe an RtI framework is helpful for student success, and whether they have students who are not meeting minimum academic performance goals but do not have an special education diagnosis. Teachers who use an RtI framework and have at least one student who is not meeting minimum academic performance goals but do not have a special education diagnosis were invited to participate in the study. Figure 3 illustrates the institutional positions and relative characteristics of the five participants in this study.

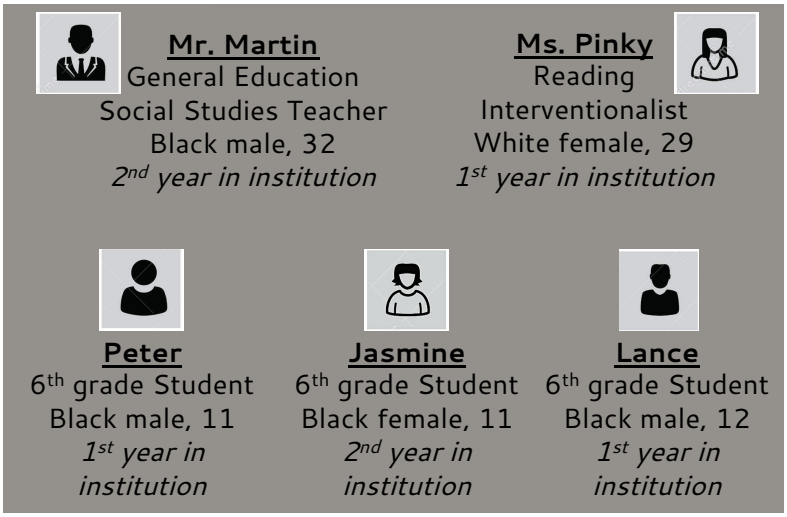


***Figure 3. Participants***

After the online survey, I conducted a videotaped semi-structured interview with the teachers in which I asked about their decision-making process for the activity that I would be observing (during school hours at the school site). Then I videotaped the individualized, small group activity within the normal educational setting. During this time, the teacher-created planning and lesson activity documents for that activity were collected as additional data. After the video evidence was collected, I conducted a

follow-up interview to supplement my understanding of the background, purpose, and outcomes of the videotaped activity and the documents with both the teachers and the students.

**Domain 1: The Structural Domain.**

The structural domain was illuminated in this study through the ways in which small group instruction was determined a valid intervention for and applied to individual students. During the narrative interviews, students provided much more detail and shared more robust information than the teachers, both of whom seemed to provide only school-based precise reasons for including these students in small group instruction. One student, Peter, had been pulled for small group instruction in previous school years. Lance has previously not been pulled for any group, though this was his second year at the 6th grade level, being retained in the 6th grade.

Peter communicated that the small group instruction was too sporadic for it to be effective. To him it seemed as if groups were only taking place when the teacher was ready to come and get him. When I asked him how often the small group teacher, Ms. Pinky came to get him, he responded with, "sometimes, (pause)." After rephrasing what he said and giving him some wait time, he indicated that he didn't understand why he didn't come everyday.

> *Sometimes like sometimes she gets ready to pick me up. she mostly works with Sydney. I mostly did everything kinda by myself. so but it was helping me out.*

When I asked Lance about why he was in the group, his response was very similar to the other students, but much more robust. His discourse settled around the specific

information he needed to know in order to be successful on tests and other assessments of their content knowledge.

> *Um I think I'm kinda average, I get a's and b's. a couple of c's. I have gotten some I's. {Pause) but um I started getting better and better but um I think the last unit kinda hurt me the most. but I started I'm for sure I did better than I... I know I gave it a good run though… because the benchmarks were hard.. it took us all the way back to the um the beginning of the year. and some of the stuff I knew but {Pause) I tried to remember. I couldn't really remember because it was all the way from the beginning but more of the newer stuff you know I started to get and I used the newer stuff to help me with the old stuff. I'm for sure I got some of the old stuff wrong and I think I did some of the new stuff pretty good.*

I continued questioning whether Lance felt that he should be in a small group. He indicated that since it was his first year in the school, he thought he should be receiving more help because his previous school didn't really teach students new information.

> *This is a new and harder school and I'm just starting to get good at it and I think that I did a good job because coming to a new and harder school not really knowing what's going to happen, so I think I did a good job. I didn't really feel like I was learning anything in my old school. like I was learning but then we never reviewed. we just left it alone. so {Pause) it was kinda, you know difficult to remember something when these tests come up and stuff. sometimes like they didn't always do it but like it comes {Pause) every once in a while.*

Lance continued to talk about why this school was different.

> *Lance: well here … its different because {Pause) you get to like {Pause) learn like bigger and harder things. like we learn like college level stuff here, but at my old school, they keep us at like fifth grade level.*

*Interviewer: so like even though you were doing the same stuff - you were going to classes, you were getting pulled out by different specialists - like why don't you think you were learning as much in that other school?*

*Lance: because they just didn't have the level of {Pause) I guess education as these teachers here.*

*Interviewwe: do you think that the teachers at your old school um were trying to help you and just didn't know how or were they just not as committed to helping you grow?*

*Lance: Not as committed. One thing that me and my dad actually found out about (my other school) is that the teachers they can quit whenever they want. They don't have like a year or two year contract. They can just leave whenever they want. And that kinda messed me up with my - like that messed over my reading over the long run because I'm getting different teachers and we stay just in one class. we don't move class to class and I be changing teacher after teacher after teacher. And its just confusing because I got used to one then I got to get used to another one and it just started getting confusing to me and that's why my reading level got so low.*

*Interviewer: so having different teachers coming in and out of the classroom was like unmotivating for you?*

*Lance: yes*

Jasmine spoke more about social promotion – allowing students to move to the next grade level without meeting the minimum standards in light of an advanced age. Jasmine had not been held back a grade but the teachers reflected that it might be a possibility for this year. Jasmine was very motivated to stay ahead of being held behind and wanted to earn the right to move on with her classmates.

*Interviewer: so is school just about moving to the next grade, or is it about something else?*

*Jasmine: it's actually about how your behavior is, how your grade is, and if you're moving on to the grade that you need to.*

*Interviewer: why do you think we have grades for example?, like 5th grade, sixth grade, seventh grade.*

*Jasmine: oh. So people will know like what level of learning you're learning. like are you learning like college level, or are you learning like kindergarten level or something like that.*

*Interviewer: so do you think that for example if somebody is just failing all of their classes in the fifth grade, do you think its fair to move them up to the sixth grade level?*

*Jasmine: no.*

*Interviewer: no. do you think that places don't care about grade level and they just stick you with the same age group?*

*Jasmine: yes*

*Interviewer: do you think that's ok? (Jasmine shakes head no) So you would rather everybody stays at the level where they're learning the best. right?*

*Jasmine: yes*

*Interviewer: so you think you have to like get everything right in the sixth grade before you can move up to the seventh grade?*

*Jasmine: well, you don't have to get like EVERYTHING right, but if you get most of it right, I believe that you're ok to go up there. Because you're gonna progress.*

The teachers in this study conceptualized the horizon of their students' goals and purpose of inclusion into the small group in a much smaller time frame and with more specialized, explicit content in relation to participation with the institution of the school. Ms. Pinky met with students that were low performers in the reading classroom, and explained that their goal was to move up a level from where they were given an intervention reading curriculum the school adopted for this purpose. During the observation, Ms. Pinky mentioned to the students that their last meeting was two weeks previous. This highlights a fundamental difference between the goals the teachers outlines with those the students shared.

*Interviewer: How often did you meet with that group?*

*Ms. Pinky: once maybe twice a week. Not enough.*

*Interviewer: When did you start meeting with them?*

*Ms. Pinky: Not until late April, so I only had a month with them. It wasn't enough time but it was better than nothing.*

*Interviewer: Not enough time?*

*Ms. Pinky: comprehension is much more challenging thing to make growth in and seek gains in especially at this age level because it's really about building scheme using background knowledge that they don't have as much information about and that takes time. I didn't get to measure to see if they made it was any growth. When [the reading teacher] identified her lowest readers, I "Stepped" those readers with the UFC step assessment.*

*Interviewer: What was the goal of pulling those students into the small group?*

*Ms. Pinky: They need to pass tests in the curriculum. The whole point is to help them increase in their instructional level. For the test on each level, students have to have 80% of questions answered correctly. If*

*they start at a Level N, then they would move up to an O leveled book the next time we meet.*

Mr. Martin opened up about how he chose his group when I asked about the objective of the small group lesson for the videotaped lesson. The objective for the observed small group activity was to "analyze current even articles focused on senior pranks." This objective was typed on the day's class packet, which included three separate articles about instances of high school senior pranks that school year that resulted in police attention.

*Mr. Martin: break down a current event topic. I wanted them to connect really with the main character in the article.*

*Interviewer: why was it important to have that objective?*

*Mr. Martin: Throughout the year, students struggled to make inferences and take them to a higher level - what is exactly is happening in this story, or in this event.*

*Interviewer: So, was it based inside the class that students were lacking or from some other origin?*

*Mr. Martin: a combination of things. These students usually struggle in the classroom – with both classwork and [homework]. They struggle specifically in reading and writing about what they read.*

*Interviewer: did you confer with the reading and writing teacher to structure what you should be working on in this small group?*

*Mr. Martin: yeah, it was focused on the inference and comprehension. Then I took that when we started focusing on the MAP test and built on that.*

*Interviewer: what kind of objectives were they struggling with in social studies when you realized this was a problem because they don't have inferencing skills?*

> *Mr. Martin: Analyzing texts. Breaking things down into different parts and I wanted them to be able to infer from a particular part of the text that was broken down.*

Mr. Martin's focus, deviating from both all of the other students' in this study as well as Ms. Pinky's, was on applying what information they gathered during the small group to their current and future lives both inside and outside of school. The daily packet included two duplicate sets of ten questions used to engage students in the articles. The first six questions were geared towards comprehending the content of the article itself. The last four questions were higher analysis questions, moving the student beyond simple recall or skill/concept thinking. Mr. Martin used these questions to focus the activity in the small group setting, drawing the conversation towards thinking about why student answers were valid.

> *I feel like the conversations were very meaningful. When I talked about why this was important and how this applies in different areas of their lives, kids were able to receive it and they express how they were able to use it in different areas of their lives. If I wanted to relate this to a person in the text, the kids were able to see that oh well, because of the choices that this person made or what have you, then they can see how it affected the outcome for that person or persons in the text. If I am able to think along those lines in my own life, then I can see how that can maybe change the outcomes in my life that may happen.*

The singularity of Mr. Martin's interpretation of the purpose of the small group highlights the variance at play within a single institution's constituents. While the convergence of his energy is geared towards allowing student the space to operate more effectively both in the current moment and in the future as critical thinkers, Ms. Pinky's focus is to simply foster student achievement in terms of the institution itself.

**Domain 2: The Disciplinary Domain.**

The disciplinary domain was illuminated through ways that participants were allowed to interact with one another in the small group setting. The students were excited and ready to help other students in the group when they made mistakes, but the teachers didn't allow students to correct other students in the group. Peter was clearly the most extroverted participant in this study, which led to some frustration on his part when he wanted to help other students who made mistakes during the small group instruction. I asked Peter about how much help and what kind of help people get in the small groups. He began talking about the teacher, but quickly moved to his concern about other students in the group.

*Peter: Um [Ms. Pinky] was helping me at certain points but she us {Pause) she normally uh lets me read mostly by myself {Pause) because not to make [another student in the same small group] feel bad or anything but she kinds needs more help than I do.*

*Interviewer: umm hmm, so how does she get more help than you?*

*Peter: so we normally just help her out more than she helps me out so she can like you know like get better at it. So I guess that's just how it goes. Um {Pause) yeah I used to help her too before but Ms. Pinky doesn't like that because she thinks that its going to make her get confused. By me helping her, but most of the time when I help her, she understands a little better than Ms. Pinky because we're about the same age and she understands me better.*

Peter's reflection of a wider view of students in the small group setting alludes to a supplementary examination of the disassociation between student and teacher goals. From his perspective, Ms. Pinky didn't seem to be listening to the interests in students; while he wanted to apply his new skills to harder texts, Ms. Pinky wanted to him to

remain focused on the texts that were below his assigned grade level but appropriate for his overall reading level.

*Interviewer: what was it about being in class that was more helpful than being in a small group with Ms. Phillips?*

*Peter: because um in class we was reading much harder books like forged by fire and stuff like that. So when I was reading it helped me more because I was taking like when I saw like huge hard words pretty much our best readers in our classroom couldn't even get it. Like when I saw those I broke it down because it was smaller words when I was with Ms. Pinky in the bigger words so I started getting it.*

*Interviewer: so you wanted to move on to harder stuff than go with Ms. Pinky all the time?*

*Peter: pretty much*

*Interviewer: oh ok. So then by the middle of the year she only pulled you out a couple of times? And then you felt comfortable doing the more challenging stuff in the classroom because of all that extra work she did with you in the beginning?*

*Peter: yes*

*Interviewer: ok, um do you think that what Ms. Pinky did helped you more than if you were just not getting pulled out at all?*

*Peter: um I think she did help me at points. um {Pause) but at certain times I didn't really understand that she was actually trying to help me so I got kinda mad at certain points, but then she kept on talking to me and talking to me trying to tell me that like I'm only doing this for your own good and I couldn't understand that at first but then when I started listening more and stopped getting mad, it started coming to me.*

Ms. Pinky seemed to be employing a linear model of pedagogy. In an article summarizing overarching teacher beliefs, Snider and Roehl (2007) noted that most

teachers believe that emphasizing lower level skills (for instance, math computation facts or single word decoding) is always a foundation for student achievement, especially for students that are behind their age peers. These researchers also noted that this belief is consistent with teacher beliefs that explicit teaching is better than using a constructivist model. This indicates that teachers who believe that students who are low must start with being introduced to the easiest information and skills, then should be led through the depths of knowledge in order to get to the target learning experience instead of guiding students through encountering that knowledge and skills in order to operate on the target level immediately. Peter spoke about this phenomenon of starting low and without connection to the regular reading classroom.

Ms. Pinky noted that the curriculum she used was not on their grade level, but on their instructional reading level. Her small group was reading a short ten-page realistic fiction book about a class election, which the curriculum leveled at grade 3. During the interview she mentioned that the books they were reading only referenced background knowledge for that grade level – for this group, a third grade level – and she didn't speak about the texts they encountered in the whole classroom setting. The guided reading program Ms. Pinky used during the observation was focused on understanding that particular text in the context of the real world, as the world relates to the theme of the text. The supporting materials she presented as data for the observation were focused on how to guide students through the book instead of making the skills translatable to habitual reading and were not aligned with the reading skills that students were working on in their regular reading class.

Mr. Martin was more focused than Ms. Pinky on teaching skills in his small group that would immediately and directly translate to his social studies class. His small groups structures were derived from a more deep engagement with the same texts and content from the regular class, with more teacher support given the smaller size of the group. During the observation, Mr. Martin modeled think-alouds and made parallels between the articles and more obvious real-life student experiences when students didn't immediately have an answer or opinion to the question he posed.

> *Interviewer: Do the kids have any say in how the conversation moves?*
>
> *Mr. Martin: Absolutely. I want to get the kids to come up with some other opinions. Ones that may not be popular or ones that challenge even their own personal opinions, or family traditions or beliefs. Just so they can understand that these topics are not always neat.*
>
> *Interviewer: What are the costs and the benefits of having a small group structure for the kid? For example, some kids who are pulled out of study hall for a small group lose that independent practice time before they get home.*
>
> *Mr. Martin: It was more on lines of the latter. I wanted an opportunity to see clearly are you able to satisfy what I thought was appropriate as far as your understanding of the objectives.*

This divergence in teacher- vs. student-perceived small group purpose led the students to be very concerned with how to continue to interact with the teacher and their peers in their regular reading classrooms. Jasmine shared an experience of being pulled out of reading class to go to small group instruction, then returning to reading class.

> *Interviewer: so when you're in reading class, for example, do you think you get the help that you need or like in order to be a better reader for ever and ever or do you just get the help for that one particular book?*

*Jasmine: I think I get the help I need because [the reading teacher], she doesn't…when I start to doubt myself she tells me that "you're doing good. Just keep on going. Don't worry about no body else." And she just keeps me where I {Pause) uh {Pause) where I get more confident with my reading and I start raising my hand more.*

*Interviewer: do you sometimes worry about where your reading level is in relationship to other students?*

*Jasmine: um {Pause) sometimes. Because I feel like because I feel like I could do better {Pause) and it feels like I can't like {Pause) it feels like people are like {Pause) like for instance, when I read when I raise my hand to read and she calls on me, sometimes they say like "hhuuhhh" and its stuff like that it kinds brings my confidence down because I know I can do better and if I just keep on trying I can do better.*

Ms. Pinky seemed more focused in starting at the students instructional level and filling in gaps using lower level texts, but not checking to see if this translated into the whole group classroom setting. Ms. Pinky seemed to be more focused on employing the structure of the curriculum instead of monitoring whether the intended outcomes of the curriculum were manifesting either in their small group outputs or in the regular reading classroom.

*Interviewer: Talk more about your overall small group structure. What is it that kids can get in a small group that they can't get in class?*

*Ms. Pinky: Conferencing. Day to day conferencing. Having discussions about the book. Making small corrections that they would never correct themselves on a day-to-day basis. You start seeing significant changes in their reading behaviors and their ability to correct their own when you are teaching strategies of how to make those corrections.*

*Interviewer: would you expect the things that you teach in the small groups to translate in the classroom or even reading outside of school?*

*Ms. Pinky: yes*

*Interviewer: are you able to see that or is what they are doing in the classroom totally different?*

*Ms. Pinky: no. It's really based on the assessments that I give them. When I listen, that's when I decide what the focus of the day is. It's harder to see with comprehension whether your strategies are working and they are actually comprehending the text. But you can hear it when they read aloud.*

Ms. Pinky was more interested in providing a structure to small group instruction, rather than providing space for students to explore and try out the skills she was teaching them, in opposition to the exploration space Mr. Martin was trying to provide. The disciplinary domain points to the power dynamics, which Mr. Martin seems less afraid of encountering than Ms. Pinky.

**Domain 3: The Cultural Domain.**

The cultural domain was illuminated via the reasons communicated about why the small group was the right decision to make for these particular students. Ms. Pinky and Mr. Martin again differed on what and how their students should buy as justification for student participation in the small group. Both teachers had the opportunity and freedom to choose the students who were in their small group as well as what instruction was applied. This freedom extended then to how the teacher's choice of including that student was communicated to through teacher words and actions. Specifically, each teacher in this study focused more on the materials used in small group instruction as the reason for student participation in the small group. Ms. Pinky noted that because she

didn't use the materials from the traditional class setting, she had a more difficult time keeping student focus and interest to participate fully in the small group setting.

> *Interviewer: What was more important - understanding those particular books you were reading to build their schema so they can use it when reading other texts, or was it more like you were trying to make sure that they knew the process of what comprehension looks and feels like so they can use it later?*
>
> *Ms. Pinky: I think it was probably a little of both. We talked mostly about strategies - if we are not understanding, what are the strategies that we can use while we are reading, and building up the background knowledge about the text before reading the text as well. I don't think one is more important than the other.*

I continued probing Ms. Pinky's thoughts by asking what she thought would work best with the students in this study in particular. Ms. Pinky explained that the structure of how students were scheduled to come to the small group was a concern. She was pulling students out of their traditional classroom setting in front of other students to work with them in another room.

> *[Jasmine] was excited about that. There are some kids that aren't necessarily excited. Peter came in, in a bad place. He feels very picked on and insecure. His partner Jasmine reads faster than he does. I used to have them read silently until I cued them in to me. But I found out that Peter was actually just skimming, so I had them both read out loud to me. He definitely has a hard time conferencing with me, and hearing that he needs to work on things.*

Her transfer of the problem to the structure of the schedule altered me to the possibility that her focus was more about the adherence to the status quo of the school. Unlike Mr. Martin, Ms. Pinky was not a regular classroom teacher; therefore she could choose when she pulled the students out for small group instruction.

Turning the focus back to the students, I asked ho she shared her reasons to pull the students out of the regular reading classroom for small group instruction. Her response was laden with frustration, her nose scrunching and her tone dropping noticeably. Ms. Pinky also pointed to the habits students exhibited in the small group as evidence as to why students should be in that small group.

> *Without it, Peter is going to continue reading books that are above his level. Most of his errors come out when he is reading out loud. He will continue to not monitor himself. Jasmine needs a lot of pushing on how to be inferential and connect texts to her own life and to the world. That takes a lot of work from a teacher. She won't get that kind of attention when there are 30 kids around that need that kind of help. The goal is to get kids to be able to read independently.*

Ms. Pinky continued to refer to the status quo in a cyclical way to try and impart motivation to the students in her group. She referenced the progress students made in the small group as justification for why they should participate with the purpose of inspiring continued cooperation. I asked Ms. Pinky how the purpose of the small group was communicated to the students.

> *There is a lot of going back and looking at where they were when they started with me. So they can see how much growth they made. They still feel like they are so far back from where they are supposed to be, even though they have made two years of growth.*

Mr. Martin employed his power to lead through flexible scheduling and construction of his small group. His group was pulled during a time in the schedule when students would have been otherwise engaged in enrichment activities, both academic and extra-curricular. His focus was also on how he guided students to use the current day's text in a more robust way. Mr. Martin's tone during this part of the interview was proud, as if

he had somehow found a way to teach the students in spite of the school. During the observation, he made students engage highly with the material through teaching techniques as chaining and no opt out (Lemov, 2010).

> *The way I designed my questions were more base level and then more specific, more evaluative type questions. It puts the kids in the position where they have to address the real event, the social ramifications of the topic. It's my hope and my intention to allow the space to take something like this and bring them into the next class period. Trying to find an opportunity to trigger that. They want to then show that they are being successful in the small group. I think the small group was critical. They were able to gain a sense of accomplishment and being comfortable with social studies, which I think will translate into confidence next year. I think it was essential that we had that small group time.*

Peter, as a participant in both groups, seemed to reject both options for justifications as provided from the teacher. Peter didn't believe that the groups were working for them to bring them closer to the goals and participation in the whole group, traditional classroom setting. He said that he could focus more in the small group setting, but the habits he needs in the traditional classroom setting, he felt as though he wasn't supposed to use in the small group setting and vice versa. His tone was whiny and complaining.

> *Um yeah because I can focus more. That's why I kept on trying to read to myself so I can uh keep on reading because I couldn't read out loud or I was going to mess up. Kids understand me better so, when I was in reading class, really I started getting my reading points because I'm not the strongest reader but I'm starting to get better. And actually for me staying in class and not going with Ms. Pinky… actually it help me a little more.*

The cultural domain highlighted how justifications are created and shared given the power of the people involved in the institution. From both perspectives of the

teachers, I saw that there were conflicting purposes at play. Ms. Pinky was more concerned with assimilating students into the culture of the institution, prodding them to play along because the system had already been set up for them. Mr. Martin, on the other hand, was focused on providing opportunities for and the experience of success within the current state of the institution.

**Domain 4: The Interpersonal Domain.**

The interpersonal domain was illuminated in the reasons why and how they should participate in the small group instruction. Students focused on the benefit of the small group because they experienced success within this small group, despite the fact that they didn't see small group interactions as helping their success in the traditional classroom setting. I asked Lance about whether getting pulled out of the regular classroom setting for small group instruction helped him learn and participate more than not getting pulled out.

*Lance: um I think [Ms. Pinky] did help me at points. Um {Pause) but at certain times I didn't really understand that she was actually trying to help me so I got kinda mad at certain points, but then she kept on talking to me and talking to me trying to tell me that like I'm only doing this for your own good and I couldn't understand that at first but then when I started listening more and stopped getting mad, it started coming to me.*

*Interviewer: why would you get upset when she was trying to help you?*

*Lance: because when I was reading I thought I got it right and I couldn't understand like was she just trying to attack me or was she actually trying to help me? Because I know I because like {Pause) it was hard for me at the time and I didn't really understand and like I kept on reading and reading and reading and I never got why she kept on*

*doing it. So when I understand it more why she was doing that, I stopped getting mad and I understood what she was trying to do.*

*Interviewer: so what made the change? What was it that she said or some change in you that let you know that she was really trying to help you and she wasn't just trying to attack you?*

*Lance: um, she actually called my dad and he {Pause) she told my dad what I was doing and my dad, you know I get a better understanding from my dad. So he basically... I wasn't like in trouble. She just explained to my dad what she was trying to do. And the way I was thinking at that time, my dad knew how to explain it so my dad explained it to me and I didn't have no problems after that. Basically that just came from me getting older and I know I won't have this help throughout everything. And I noticed that Ms. Pinky wasn't pulling me as much as my old school, so I knew I had to make a change, so I did.*

Teachers seemed to think that this was the last resort for their students, highlighting a lack of trust that a traditional classroom setting would support the needs of these low-achieving students. When talking about the motivation of individual students, Ms. Pinky references how students have already given up on school overall. She indicated that students were no longer interested in being good students or even pleasing the teacher, but would be motivated by the actions of other students. During the observation, Ms. Pinky asked Peter to speak louder four times within five minutes. Thirteen minutes into the observation and the small group activity, Peter removes his glasses and hangs his head.

*A lot of positive motivation throughout the reading and conferencing after with [Lance]. His struggles are sounding out words and pronouncing blends, but he comprehends very well. He may have one bad day in a week. I try not to let him get out of it, because I want him to work through it. Some days he*

> *doesn't give me his 100% and there is nothing that I can do about it because I have other students there too that I want to read with. Students don't choose any of this so it's hard. Jasmine would just jump back into it. The other girls that were there were also very positive too – "come on Jasmine you can do it!" If she didn't understand the question, I would have to break it down more and more, and then the other girls would try to help because they all knew the answer. She would get over it much more quickly than Peter would. But it's a challenge to keep kids motivated. 7th is too far gone. They have to trust in the process. At this age, they lose trust and faith in adults.*

Mr. Martin seemed to have a different experience in motivation in the small group. His purpose is to refocus their efforts on being successful while engaging with the assigned task, instead of using their peers as levers toward a greater motivation towards school. In order to motivate students who seem to have 'checked out' of the lesson, Mr. Martin references a personal but shared goal that the school sets for every student. During the observation, the students in Mr. Martin's small group were either immediately participant in the discussion of the question or they were addressed soon therafter by Mr. Martin through modeling a stop and think to provide students with modeling of and guidance towards using a different thought process as well as time to employ those skills.

> *Mr. Martin: It's my hope and my intention to allow the space to take something like this and bring them into the next class period. I spend small group time trying to find an opportunity to trigger that. They want to then show that they are being successful in the small group in the regular classroom where they are unfocused because of peers or not getting they help that they need. …I choose kids that are kinda floating. Really anyone who needs it. … that will continue to push hard.*

*Interviewer: If Lance has a really bad day, and then you brought him up to small group and then he continues.*

*Mr. Martin: I rarely send kids back downstairs because I feel like that this small group is kinda like a last resort for these kids. I try to find something and disguise it towards the things they are interested in. I want to have kids say, "I have a place." For example, Lance likes to share information with the whole class so I encourage him in small group to identify things he can point out so that he can use that skill in class.*

As with the cultural domain, the interactions between the teacher and the student are highlighted in the interpersonal domain. For Mr. Martin, the focus was engaging the students as a model and a thought partner in the task, whereas Ms. Pinky was focused on assessing students on the task she provided.

## Summary

The findings described in this chapter exposed issues of power and influence all participants had in the institution. I began this chapter by organizing the findings from the data collected through observation and interviews through the lenses of the domains of power. The narrative descriptive findings from the perspective of the student, teacher, and observer were compared and contrasted. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, I present interpretations of the findings as implications and inferences as well as concluding thoughts.

# Chapter 5: Implications, Inferences, and Conclusions

## Introduction

The focus of this dissertation was to explore how being left out of the conversation organizes the way these students feel about their educational trajectory and the degree and kind of control they have to influence their own education. This study was guided by a single research question: In what ways do students, who are not learning disabled and are not meeting minimum academic performance goals, experience power dynamics in reference to changes in their individual learning plan? Using CRT and Hill Collins' 4 domains of power this research asks teachers and students about their experiences in small group instruction in order to identify any counter-narratives via which the master narratives about the status quos of public education can be evaluated and challenged.

In this chapter, I introduce an interpretive discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4. I begin this chapter by reflecting on the literature review to identify implicit status quos and compare to the implications from the data received. The next section of Chapter 5 elicits inferences about the data gathered in addition a comparison of a typical RtI response and a CRT response to the inferences outlined previously. The conclusion of this chapter includes my operating assumptions and premises, the contributions of the study to the body of research literature, suggestions for future research, and reflections of the author position.

In order to ground ourselves in the experience of small group instruction, let's return to a description of Ms. Pinky's classroom in narrative form in deference to the case study model specific to both American qualitative phenomenological research and CRT

research methods. As the three students file in, they gather at a small kidney table. Ms. Pinky provides some context for what their activities will be today, including the fact that they haven't met for two weeks and will be rereading the same text they did then to build fluency. She instructs the students to all start reading out loud in tandem, and soon it is clear that students are reading at different rates. A student comments, "This is taking all day," and continues to read aloud. Another student repeats, " I can't read with other people talking," on three separate occasions within the first eight minutes of tandem reading. Ms. Pinky does not address either of these comments. When she does speak, she corrects a student who has inserted an incorrect word, and she explains why the skill implemented correct but not why its use is important for future comprehension.

## Implications

This chapter synthesizes and discusses the results in light of the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have organized the summary of my findings into implications and inferences. To distinguish the two, the discussions of the above are specific to the directionality of the qualitative information encountered. The speaker implies by putting a suggestion into the message indirectly. The writer or speaker sends a message to the reader or listener. With this in mind, let's return to the literature review to reexamine our location in the arena of educational reform in academic research.

### Reflections on the Literature Review.

In the section of the literature review titled, 'RtI Research Focus On Teachers Instead Of Students,' the major implication communicated is that students encounter the classroom environment with their own individual academic and cultural habits, and those

habits should not be attempted to be changed by teachers. These habits can serve the student well, or operate as a roadblock, depending on the kind of lesson, teacher, or activity being applied in the classroom. Therefore, a culturally responsive classroom is not one that asks students to assimilate into the cultural norms of the wider culture, but pretend to participate given the cultural norms – whether or not those habits are appropriate for true understanding of the content of the lesson. Said in another way, the teacher is not asked, "what have you done to fix students' bad habits or fill their gaps in knowledge?" The question asked instead is, "what have you done to avoid the short- and long-term impacts of those holes?"

The next section of the literature review, 'Student Performance Focus On Teacher Actions Instead Of Student Experience,' explores what teachers are asked to do to support more positive student performance scores. The discussion uncovered readily lent itself to a discussion focused on adherence and complicity to very specific instructional and pedagogical structures rather than how student experience is reflected in change in student behaviors, habits, and academic outcomes. The major implication is that it's the students' responsibility to take advantage of learning opportunities, instead of the teachers' responsibility to make sure the learning opportunity is successful to every student present in the classroom.

The final section of the literature review, 'Research about Student Experience,' reviews how student experience is seen through the eyes of academic researchers. The implication is that the only student data that is important is how students can provide feedback for individual teachers or discrete teaching methods by reflecting on what already happened. The lens used to encounter student experiences is always hindsight,

all of the sources particularly bereft of an application of those student experiences by using foresight to use student narratives to figure out what we will need to do for them in the future. This disregard of how teachers can plan for students in the future is tantamount to pushing students away from the planning table.

**Status Quos.**

Identifying the status quos about public education based in the evidence I provided in Chapter 4 serves multiple purposes. First, it frames the context of the teacher and student experiences communicated through the interviews and observations. Second, it highlights how these narrations hint at implied status quos are divergent from the status quos of the wider academic research field. The academic research status quos related above are considered representative of the existing state of affairs in the institution of public education in America. It is appropriate to note that individual people participate in these institutional norms, but are not held socially accountable for their origin or endurance because individual people are removed from the norms by time and or space. In the space below, I outline the prime implied status quo and its successive ramifications through the lenses of the domains of power.

The predominant status quo tacit in the interviews and observations is that *small group instruction further assigns explicit adult accountability for individual student outcomes*. When a student in a general education classroom is identified as not reaching the benchmarks that the other students in the classroom are reaching, the student is then removed from that setting in order to be reassigned to another adult who assumes future culpability for that student's achievement. The unique aspect of this practice is that if the student continues to not reach a set of benchmarks, the student is again reassigned to a

different tier (such as the special education department), which connotes that the student is the problem, instead of the instructional methods or teacher's ability. As this status quo is fed through the domains of power, more status quos are unveiled. From the teachers' location in the institution, these status quos were disclosed:

- Structural: the traditional classroom structure doesn't allow for individualized supervised opportunities to diagnose and develop the discrete skills that individual students need. This leads one to believe that teachers recognize the distinct be-ing of each student, yet choose to operate as if students are more or less similar, or that teachers and lessons can reach an 'average' student, via a single lesson or structure.
- Disciplinary: within the traditional classroom, adherence to a general curriculum is endorsed by the institution due to its assumed relevance to the average student in the population; the curriculum blamed if a majority of students do not accomplish its goals and the student is to blame if a minority of the students do not reach its objectives. Here the accountability is removed from the teacher, who is replaced by the validity of the curriculum.
- Cultural: any innovation to traditional classroom instruction in the form of differentiation is considered to happen in spite of the curriculum. The curriculum is to blame, so a sense of "either/or" or separate is equal is assumed by the teaching staff in relation to educating student sub-populations. The curriculum is replaced instead of added to.
- Interpersonal: the teacher is the holder of knowledge in the classroom and small group setting. Students should be active in the activity provided by the individual

teacher, but are not be agents in creating learning opportunities for themselves, either with or without partnership with the teacher.

From the students' perspective, these status quos were delineated:

- Structural: access to future opportunities is determined by and can be predicted by student achievement in the form of grades and assessments. Being a good student then is portrayed as a prerequisite of that person's success later in life, read frequently as the ability of being able to avoid specific aspects of social domination and oppression in the future.
- Disciplinary: teachers operate with the rationalization that participation in the classroom learning opportunities is the only or best opportunity for growth. Alternatives are weighed only in relation to the availability of time, money, and access as it rests in individual teachers.
- Cultural: the origin of low student performance, as a minority of the classroom population, emerges from skill and concept deficiencies within individual students, not the structure, purpose, or application of the learning opportunity. If the student doesn't get it, that's because the student has an issue.
- Interpersonal: The teacher is the representative and enforcer of the institution and its culture and conventions. They are the guide as well as the archetype of how society will treat students in the future depending on students' willingness to conform.

What follows is Figure 4, a stylized version of the implications with the teachers' view in the center circle and the students' view in the boxes surrounding.

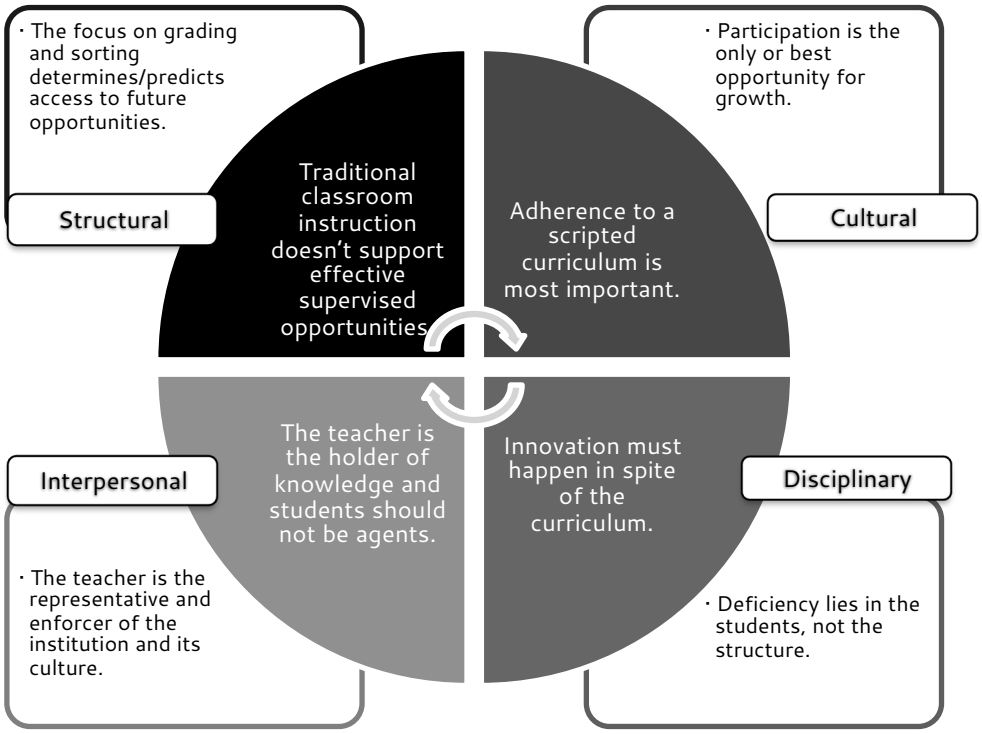


***Figure 4. Implications from the Study***

## Inferences

In this section, the main status quo is inferred from the teacher and student experiences communicated through the interviews and observations. An inference's directionality relies on what is deduced by the listener. Here, the reader or listener instead takes a suggestion out of the message that the writer or speaker communicates. Below I outline the principal inferred status quo and its subsequent teacher and student radiations through the lenses of the domains of power.

### Status Quos

The paradigmatic status quo tacit in the interviews and observations of this study can be summarized in the following phrase: *there is a misalignment between pedagogical*

*theory and practice existing due to the tension between "the banking concept of education" and "the students as conscious individuals."* In analogy, the banking concept of education sees students as buckets by which students' skills and concepts are simply poured in and made homogenous simply based in the fact of access to the information. The banking concept alludes to students that the world is one of domination and oppression, and that participating in public education is where you learn how to operate in a world of this kind.

In contrast, to teach as if students are conscious individuals requires the teacher to enter into conversation with every student, requiring constant, shared meaning-making from both the student and the teacher position. Seeing interacting with individual students as a temporal and physical impossibility, the teacher views of turning pedagogical theory into practice reveals of set of inferences about education that reflects an assumption and acceptance of a limited locus of control of student learning and performance. The following minor status quos were surmised from the teachers' perspective of the main status quo:

- Structural: every student won't master every key point, objective, or assessment the first time they encounter it because teachers can't possibly be expected to prepare for every eventuality in relation to students' prior knowledge of a concept or readiness to apply a skill.
- Disciplinary: it's the teacher's job to produce and provide rationale for why the small group is the correct choice for that student. Since teachers are in contact and communication with each student individually, the teacher is seen as the

person who makes the decision to exclude the student from the typical classroom experience of that school site.

- Cultural: updates or improvements to the instructional structure must be brought in from outside of the institution. Teachers feel they've done all they knew how to do so they must reach out to get extra help for the student. The only effective way to improve the structure requires a complete replacement of the strategies used instead of tweaking the strategies already in use.
- Interpersonal: the students' minds must be empty to accept the knowledge prepared by the teacher because there is no time to focus on only one student when you have other students in the classroom as a trait of good classroom practice.

From the students' perspective, their experience of the tension resulted in the suggestion of these status quos:

- Structural: teachers don't care why the student doesn't perform well. In their experience, the method of differentiation doesn't change based whether the deficiency lies within in the student as a learning disability or simply a lack of experience or access to information, specifically regarding ignorance of how and what skills to apply.
- Disciplinary: teachers believe that low performing students are not smart enough to make choices or have input about what is appropriate for their learning as those students are not learning in the way that is already prepared for them.

- Cultural: teachers believe that additional instruction is the appropriate intervention as it is separate from regular classroom instruction, simply because the student hasn't been successful in the regular classroom.
- Interpersonal: the teacher is the sole possessor of the knowledge and skills students need to know to be successful in the institution.

Figure 5 compares the student and teacher experiences in inference form.

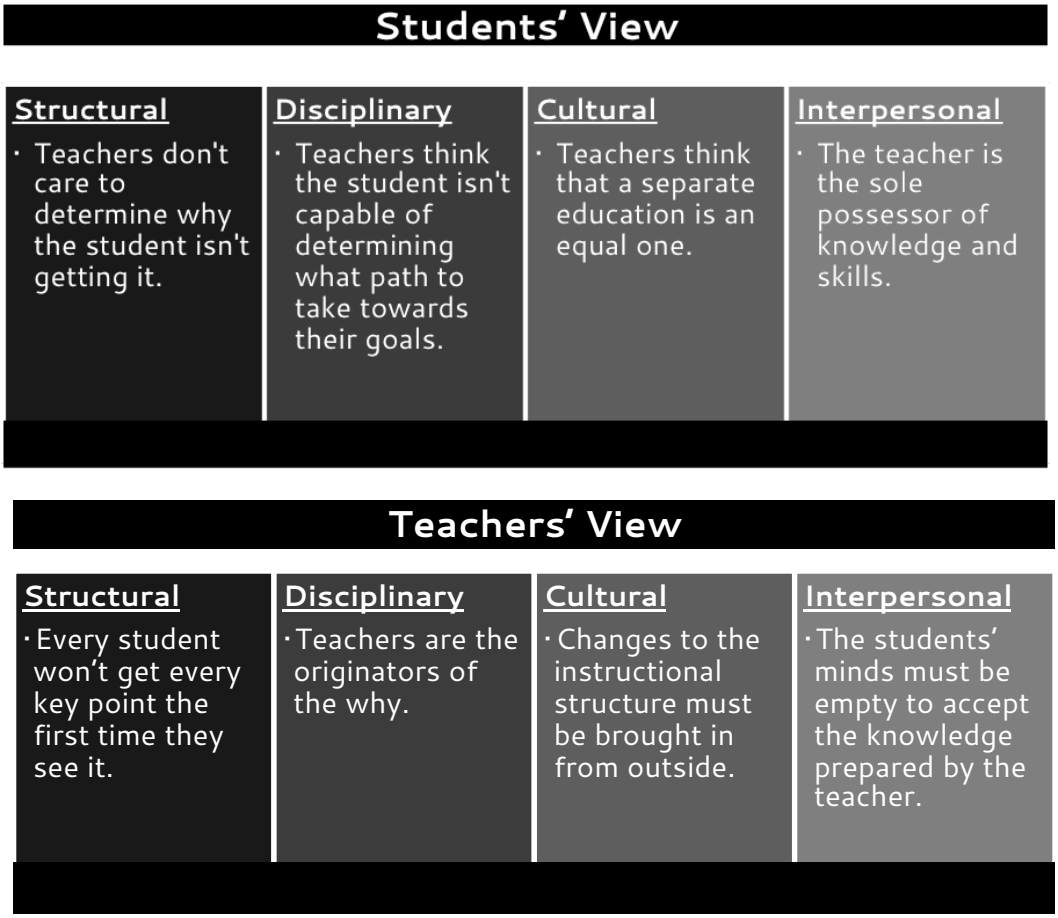


***Figure 5. Inferences from the Study***

## Conclusions

My research question was: In what ways do students, who are not learning disabled and are not meeting minimum academic performance goals, experience power dynamics in reference to changes in their individual learning plan? The domains of power, each in turn were discussed as a comparison of the experiences of students and teachers, was the organizing format of the my sharing of data gathered through interview and observational data collected from five participants, two teachers and three students, in a Midwestern free, public middle grades charter school.

The operating assumptions and premises that I began the study with were derived from the body of historically based academic research and included the following hypotheses based in the results of that literature. The first premise is that students are not getting what they need to perform well. In addition, instructional changes on a classroom, school, or district level should result in improved academic achievement on an individual student basis. Lastly, students are not being consulted in the planning in their individual educational trajectory. Figure 6 represents the misalignments this study uncovered in relation to the institutional status quos and the institution's outcomes.

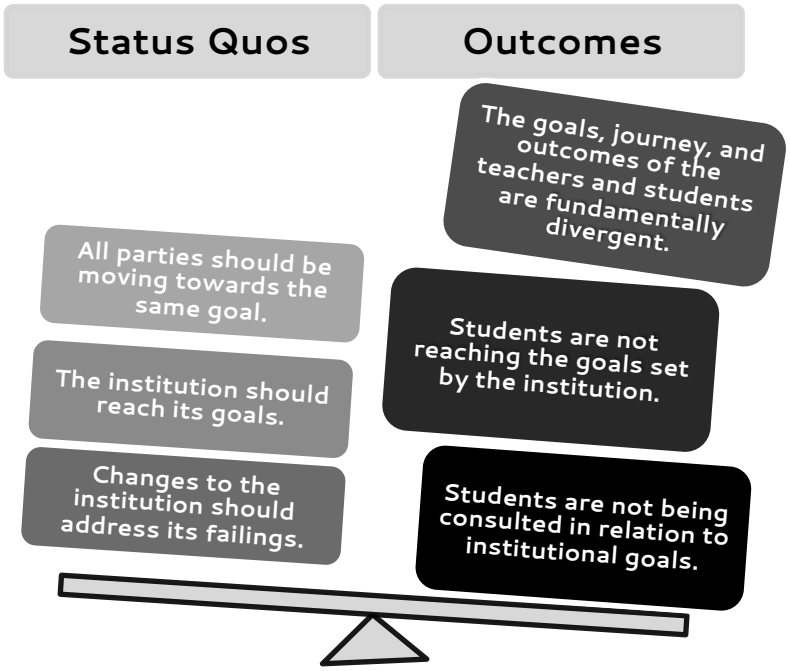


***Figure 6. Misalignments***

In light of these suppositions at the junction of the implications and inferences presented in this dissertation, four final conclusions are further interpreted. Out of the structural domain, the underlying status quo concerning the power dynamics of students in Tier 2 is that students are immediately identified as outsiders to the institution of public education from their entrance into the institution. This is supported by the implication of a focus on grading and sorting as well as the inference from the student perspective that teachers don't care to find out why a student isn't performing to their standards in the context of students as conscious beings.

In the cultural domain, the ambient status quo concerning power dynamics is that students are acted upon by a force characterized as the institution but should not expect to be actors upon or influencers of the path they are taken on in order to meet the goals of the institution of public education itself. Given that students feel they must participate in

the institution in order to get the kind of knowledge they need to succeed within the institution, students are treated as if they are possessors of consciousness, which is accessible only when a student is in the classroom engaging in a learning activity, but not as a conscious being, as if students' consciousness is present with or without the structure of or experience within the institution.

From the disciplinary domain, the encompassing status quo relevant to power dynamics from the perspective of students is that they are wrong, imperfect, and/or unworthy for immediate acceptance in the institution presupposed based on their incoming status as a student. The inclination towards this status quo is germinated by the assumption that a lack of student performance in relation to academic benchmarks must be attributed a deficiency originating within the student's ability or capability of understanding. It is also highlighted by the fact that students are pulled from general education settings into small group setting during the school day, which assumes that an education can be both separate and equal.

The interpersonal domain chronicles the final conclusive status quo of this research. In terms of the power dynamics available to students, students are expected to participate in only one way, related to the structure of the interactions deemed appropriate by the institution itself and set by the institution and its participants who hold a higher position within that institution, namely the classroom teachers. The junction of the implications and inferences illustrated by this study depict teachers as representatives of and enforcers of the culture, beliefs, and outcomes of the institution wherein teachers are considered the sole possessors of the knowledge and skills students are expected to gather in order to meet the goals of the institution. In another form, students are expected to be

docile listeners instead of critical co-investigators, even in the context of problems posed by the teacher as learning experiences. Figure 7 relates the inferences and implications from the student perspective to the conclusions outlined in this dissertation.

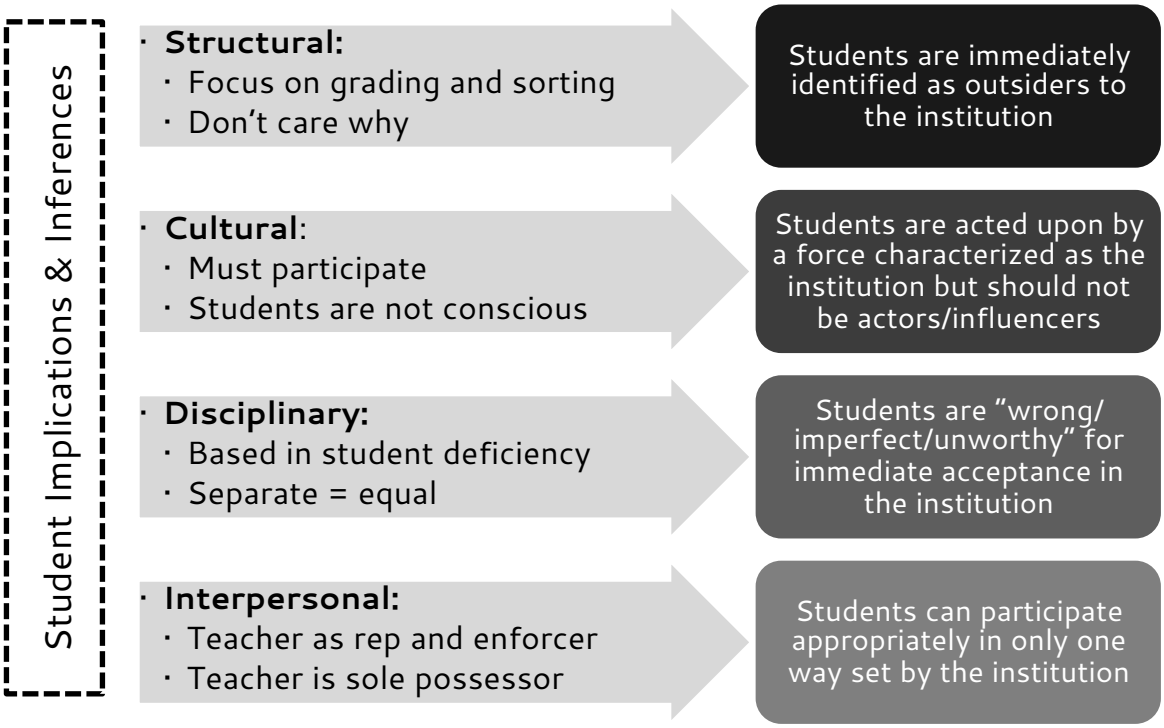


***Figure 7. Conclusions from the Study***

**Contributions of the Study.**

This study contributed to the field in four important areas. First, this study highlights the planning gap between interventions and student experience. From the students' perspective, there was a gap between the students' and teachers' perception of the justification and instructional foci of the small group instruction. Lance wanted to see success for all students. Peter wanted to be successful in school from his father's perspective. Jasmine wanted to earn her way into the next grade. The students' goals

were longer term and more specific than what the teachers cited. Mr. Martin wanted students to be come more critical thinkers, but only used the materials already created for his classroom. Ms. Pinky was more worried about what help she could provide for each student individually in the same school year.

This dissertation also highlights the difference between the concepts of differentiation (as a teacher skill) and responsiveness (as a teacher mindset). The teachers differed because Mr. Martin created his group in order to support more differentiation in his subject area for his students while Ms. Pinky created her group to provide differentiation within that group experience.

This dissertation, in addition, highlights gap between doing what sounds good for the teacher and what is based in individual student needs. This assumes that what is good for the teacher and what is based in individual needs do not have a shared goal. With common teacher effectiveness evaluation tools geared towards classroom culture instead of student outcomes, the status quo of the institution are not aligned with what it takes to actually educate students. Simply put, the status quos uncovered do not support a culture of individual student success.

Finally, this study outlines a unique way to apply CRT research methods for the end of sense-making in research about public educational systems. Using the Hill-Collins' four domains a way to identify what the status quos of public education are couldn't have happened without CRT. Her domains operating as a matrix of domination allowed for the researcher to accentuate the nuances of system in practice from the mouths of those participant in that institution. Using the domains as lenses to view participants'

interactions with each other and themselves allowed the "common-sense" ideologies of the institution to come to light.

**Suggestions for Future Studies.**

I recommend four areas that could extend the work of this dissertation. The first would involve a follow-up student about effectiveness of scripted plans with Tier 2 students. Another study could directly investigate a comparison of the effectiveness of RtI with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. In addition a longitudinal investigation of how professional development and support of teachers address or ignore the reach of common and popular instructional learning activities that may allow for cultural misinterpretations to serve as a root cause for lack of student understanding. Finally more studies could examine the history and impact of status quos in education and its effect on student efficacy across socio-economic lines.

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# Appendix A: Student Interview: Peter

**Interviewer:** Thank you for meeting with me. I'm going to ask you some questions about school in general. Some of them about remember when I videotaped you with Ms. Pinky and I think (other students) were in there. I'll ask you how you felt during that activity. Do you remember that activity pretty clearly?

**Peter:** (nods head)

**Interviewer:** And there's no right or wrong answers. I'm really here to get an idea about what you think and how you felt. So I'm not going to say that I disagree with you or anything like that. If I ask you to explain more, its because you actually experienced it and not me. I wanna know what you think. Alright?

**Peter:** (nods head)

**Interviewer:** Alright, if you don't want to answer a question, you don't have to. So if I ask you something that you don't want to give an answer to, it's ok. You don't have to answer. You understand?

**Interviewer:** If you have any questions about anything that I say - like if I'm not clear or you want more information about a question I ask, you can always say, " I have a question" and then go ahead and ask me the question. So lets first start with the activity that you did with Ms. Pinky. So it was you Ms. Pinky and Sydney sitting at the table in there and I think you were reading, "How A Bear Lost Its Tail." Do you remember that book?

**Peter:** I think so, yeah. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** I have two books. I think it was... This one "How A Bear Lost Its Tail."

**Peter:** Yeah that was it

**Interviewer:** Ok I'm going to give that to you. So this is not like a test or anything. You won't have to worry about getting a right or wrong answer. Ummm... But you had already read that book before ummm I came in and watched you read it again, right?

**Peter:** (nods head)

**Interviewer:** Ok, umm, why do you think Ms. Pinky wanted you to read the story again?

**Peter:** Ms. Pinky wanted us to reread the story because it helps us better with our reading and if we ever like she gon ask us questions we'll better remember them.

**Interviewer:** ok. So what kind of questions does she ask?

**Peter:** she asks like (pause) she asks like ummm... What is the main idea? Why did Fox like do certain things, or why did bear do anything. Stuff like that. Like something to do with the characters.

**Interviewer:** Ok so something to do with the characters. So did Ms. Pinky tell you that you know to get better at reading so that you can answer questions that that was the reason that you guys were reading the book again, or is that just from some other experience that you had?

**Peter:** no she actually said that. Umm umm. We reread so that we can be better readers.

**Interviewer:** oh ok, that makes sense. Um do you think that like Ms. Pinky says it helps you be a better reader, do you think reading the book again actually does help you learn?

**Peter:** yes because it helps me to memorize words that I didn't get right at the first time. Now this time I can get more (inaudible)

**Interviewer:** Alright. So when you reread that book what book I'm sorry like what did you, what example, what word did you learn that you didn't get the first time around?

**Peter:** Well the first time I had, I didn't really get any words wrong. I sound, like I got stuck a little bit, I sound it out but I got it right so I didn't really have no problem with that.

**Interviewer:** so then do you think that rereading the book in this way was helpful?

**Peter:** yes

**Interviewer:** still do, ok. And why do you think it was helpful?

**Peter:** because uh rereading it means that since I already sound them out and everything I can just read through it now.

**Interviewer:** ok so was it... Did you understand the book more the second time that you read it?

**Peter:** hmm yeah, I understanded [sic] more about it because I read it again, but the first time I knew a nice little portion of it but I didn't understand all of it. Rereading it helped me understand.

**Interviewer:** Understand all of it?

**Peter:** yeah

**Interviewer:** huh that makes sense, so she had you reading, you and Sydney reading aloud at the same time.

**Peter:** yeah

**Interviewer:** Ok so you were trying to get everything perfect. That makes sense. Um Do you think Ms. Pinky was like helping you read or do you think you were doing all the work yourself?

**Peter:** Um she was helping me at certain points but she uhh {Pause} she normally uh lets me read mostly by myself {Pause} because not to make [other student] feel bad or anything but she kinds needs more help than I do

**Interviewer:** umm hmm

**Peter:** so we normally just help her out more than she helps me out so she can like you know like get better at it. So I guess that's just how it goes.

**Interviewer:** so you were with Ms. Pinky like every other week roundabout?

**Peter:** sometimes like sometimes she gets ready to pick me up. She mostly works with [other student]. I mostly did everything kinda by myself. So but it was helping me out.

**Interviewer:** Ok, um do you do that is other classes as well?

**Peter:** we sometimes do it in reading class when we was (sic) reading

**Interviewer:** so what if that was the only thing that you couldn't do? You can't just put the magic wand on your head and you're on a college level reading. You have to change something about the way school is to help you learn. What would be that one thing that you would change?

**Peter:** um that one thing I would change... Well, I'd change probably the level of book I was reading. Because I think if I started reading like and my dad said if I started reading harder books {Pause} I know yall say this all the time, but if we don't read

on our level we don't get better. But I think it's the other way around. If I started reading harder books, I start getting harder words or I start understanding those harder words. Because as all my teachers always said I'm good with comprehension. Like I understand better than a lot of these students but if I can get my reading at the level of my comprehension , I can umm I can {Pause} get better in my classes.

**Interviewer:** so do you think that when you're reading books that are on your level for example, when you're working with Ms. Pinky that your not really learning anything new?

**Peter:** sometimes, yeah. I feel like that because it seems like I'm just looking at the same old words and not getting anything much bigger or harder. That's just same old words that I done seen like a thousand times.

**Interviewer:** when you were reading Forged by Fire, {Pause} the words themselves were harder. But were you still understanding it? Were you comprehending the book pretty easily?

**Peter:** yes because every time she asked a question, I raised my hand and she always said "good job" excellent job" "good job" And I was starting to understand it.

**Interviewer:** do you think that because you had some trouble with larger words sometimes that you read a little bit slower than other students in the classroom?

**Peter:** yes because like ... Its something with me where I {Pause} think about it too long until it starts sounding right to me and that's where it kinda messed me up because I don't move on until I like understand it completely. Like for instance in math class you know how I'm always raising my hand all the time to make sure I understand it. That actually helps me.

**Interviewer:** at one point you said, "um, I can't read while she's talking" talking about Sydney. How is that, why is reading while Sydney is reading hard?

**Peter:** because um because when I read it just difficult when I hear other people reading at the same time and umm and then I'm hearing them and I'm trying to read and its kinda hard.

**Interviewer:** yeah does it confuse you?

**Peter:** yeah it confuses me where I am because I be reading where I am and then she reading in another place and I'm just getting confused like I already read that, did she read that? I'm getting confused

**Interviewer:** I understand. Sometimes like during the time that I was videotaping you, you seemed to get a little frustrated about reading aloud, would it have, would you enjoy reading aloud if Sydney wasn't reading aloud as well?

**Peter:** Um yeah because I can focus more. That's why I kept on trying to read to myself so I can uh keep on reading because I couldn't read out loud or I was going to mess up.

**Interviewer:** so it was helping you out?

**Peter:** by doing it by myself because I was starting to get more independent.

**Interviewer:** so when you for example are reading and Sydney's reading at the same time... Do you find yourself wanting to stop reading your book and help Sydney out?

**Peter:** um {Pause} yeah I did that before but Ms. Pinky doesn't like that because she thinks that its going to make her get confused. By me helping her, but most of the time when I help her, she understands a little better than Ms. Pinky because we're about the same age and she understands me better.

**Interviewer:** oh ok. Um do you think that Ms. Pinky, you said that she doesn't help you out a lot. That she spends most of her time with Sydney that's ok because you are still becoming more independent as a reader, but do you think being with Ms. Pinky actually helps you only?

**Peter:** mmm? Being with Ms. Pinky only? Um {Pause} I mean {Pause} really when I was in reading class, really I started getting my reading points because I'm not the strongest reader but I'm starting to get better. And actually for me staying in class and not going with Ms. Pinky actually it help me a little more.

**Interviewer:** ok so you were getting more being in the class with everybody else

**Peter:** yeah

**Interviewer:** why do you think that is? What was it about being in class that was more helpful than being in a small group with Ms. Pinky?

**Peter:** because um in class we was [sic] reading much harder books like forged by fire and stuff like that. So when I was reading it helped me more because I was taking like when I saw like huge hard words pretty much our best readers in our classroom couldn't even get it. Like when I saw those I broke it down because it was smaller words when I was with Ms. Pinky in the bigger words so I started getting it.

**Interviewer:** so you wanted to move on to harder stuff than go with Ms. Pinky all the time?

**Peter:** pretty much

**Interviewer:** pretty much. So did you feel that way at the beginning of the year, or was it just at the end of the year that you got really really strong with being an independent reader?

**Peter:** uh actually it happened like at in the middle of the year. At the beginning of the year, I was kinda new at this school and really didn't know anybody. I knew a couple of people because my cousins are here so I was kinda... Cause I didn't know my reading level was kinda low because I came from a low school. And {Pause} and um It was kinda difficult for me because I knew this was school was kinda hard {Pause} so when so like in the middle of the year I started like getting it and I got better.

# Appendix B: Student Interview: Lance

**Interviewer:** Lance, thanks for sitting down to talk to me. We are going to talk about school, and I'm going to ask you some questions about your experiences at school. Some questions will be about what I videotaped when you were in Mr. Martin's and Ms. Pinky's classroom and others are just about your opinion. When I ask you a question, there are no right or wrong answers. I just want to know how you feel and what you think. Ok?

**Lance:** (nods head)

**Interviewer:** Great, if you don't want to answer a question, you don't have to.

**Lance:** ok.

**Interviewer:** If you don't understand a question that I ask, please ask me to explain.

**Interviewer:** So we're not just going to talk about this year in reading and with Ms. Pinky but we're also going talk about just how your education overall has being going ok? And this is still your opinion. There's no right or wrong answers because I've only known you for about a year now and I want to know about everything that has happened to you at school. Ok? Umm so just overall how do you think you do at school? Like with school being a student?

**Lance:** um I think I'm kinda average, I get a's and b's. A couple of c's. I have gotten some i's. {Pause} but um I started getting better and better but um I think the last unit kinda hurt me the most. But I started I'm for sure I did better than I... I know I gave it a good run though.

**Interviewer:** so why do you think the last unit gave you some trouble?

**Lance:** because the benchmarks... It took us all the way back to the um the beginning of the year. And some of the stuff I knew but {Pause} I tried to remember. I couldn't really remember because it was all the way from the beginning but more of the newer stuff you know I started to get and I used the newer stuff to help me with the old stuff. I'm for sure I got some of the old stuff wrong and I think I did some of the new stuff pretty good.

**Lance**: yeah, because this is a new and harder school and I'm just starting to get good at it and I think that I did a good job because coming to a new and harder school not really knowing what's going to happen, so I think I did a good job.

**Interviewer:** what about at your old school? Did you feel successful even though it was easier?

**Lance:** no I didn't really feel like I was learning anything. Like I was learning but then we never reviewed. We just left it alone. So {Pause} it was kinda, you know difficult to remember something when these tests come up and stuff.

**Interviewer:** did they, were their tests similar in that they tested you over stuff you learned awhile back too?

**Lance:** sometimes like they didn't always do it but like it comes {Pause} every once in a while.

**Interviewer:** so at your old school then... Let me make sure I got this right, you're saying that things here are better, they're harder, you're learning more than you did at your old school, right?

**Lance:** yeah. Its like the smartest people at that school would probably die at this school.

**Interviewer:** so why would... What was different about that school or those teachers or whatever it is that you were supposed to be learning in that school, what is different about that than where you are now?

**Lance:** well here at (THIS SCHOOL) its different because {Pause} you get to like {Pause} learn like bigger and harder things. Like we learn like college level stuff here, but at my old school, they keep us at like fifth grade level.

**Interviewer:** so like even though you were doing the same stuff - you were going to classes, you were getting pulled out by different specialists - like why don't you think you were learning as much in that other school?

**Lance:** because they just didn't have the level of {Pause} I guess education as these teachers here.

**Interviewer:** do you think that the teachers at your old school um were trying to help you and just didn't know how or were they just not as committed to helping you grow?

**Lance:** Not as committed. One thing that me and my dad actually found out about (previous school) is that the teachers they can quit whenever they want. They don't have like a year or two year contract. They can just leave whenever they want. And that kinda messed me up with my - like that messed over my reading over the long

run because I'm getting different teachers and we stay just in one class. We don't move class to class and I be [sic] changing teacher after teacher after teacher. And its just confusing because I got used to one then I got to get used to another one and it just started getting confusing to me and that's why my reading level got so low.

**Interviewer:** so having different teachers coming in and out of the classroom was like unmotivating for you?

**Lance:** yes

**Interviewer:** ok so what was it that helped you get it so that in the middle of the year... Let me ask you this question instead. Were you, at the beginning of the year, getting pulled out by Ms. Pinky or any other teacher?

**Lance:** um {Pause} I got pulled by Ms. Pinky only a couple of times in the middle of the year. But I did mostly all my stuff all by myself.

**Interviewer:** so at the beginning of the year you were doing mostly everything by yourself?

**Lance:** no I was doing um I was with Ms. Pinky and people pulling you out at certain times.

**Interviewer:** oh ok. So then by the middle of the year she only pulled you out a couple of times? And then you felt comfortable doing the more challenging stuff in the classroom because of all that extra work she did with you in the beginning?

**Lance:** yes

**Interviewer:** ok, um do you think that what Ms. Pinky did helped you more than if you were just not getting pulled out at all?

**Lance:** um I think she did help me at points. Um {Pause} but at certain times I didn't really understand that she was actually trying to help me so I got kinda mad at certain points, but then she kept on talking to me and talking to me trying to tell me that like I'm only doing this for your own good and I couldn't understand that at first but then when I started listening more and stopped getting mad, it started coming to me.

**Interviewer:** why would you get upset when she was trying to help you?

**Lance:** because when I was reading I thought I got it right and I couldn't understand like was she just trying to attack me or was she actually trying to help me? Because

I know I because like {Pause} it was hard for me at the time and I didn't really understand and like I kept on reading and reading and reading and I never got why she kept on doing it. So when I understand it more why she was doing that, I stopped getting mad and I understood what she was trying to do.

**Interviewer:** so what made the change? What was it that she said or some change in you that let you know that she was really trying to help you and she wasn't just trying to attack you?

**Lance:** um, she actually called my dad and he {Pause} she told my dad what I was doing and my dad, you know I get a better understanding from my dad. So he basically... I wasn't like in trouble. She just explained to my dad what she was trying to do. And the way I was thinking at that time, my dad knew how to explain it so my dad explained it to me and I didn't have no [sic] problems after that.

**Interviewer:** every once in a while. Alright so then what was easy about being a student at your old school?

**Lance:** umm {Pause} {Pause}

**Interviewer:** like what made being a student easy? What made success happen very easy for you

**Lance:** because the tests wasn't [sic] that hard. They never, made like where we actually had to think, like, it was like nothing.

**Interviewer:** it was nothing? It was just...?

**Lance:** like at my old school I was doing good [sic]. I thought I was doing good [sic] and I kept on getting a's and b's, c's proly [sic] like one or two i's. Um but at this school I noticed that it was a lot harder and at the beginning of the year I was kinda rocky. I was getting probly [sic] like a c then I when to like one b and like a couple of i's. But in the middle of the year I was getting used to it. I was making friends and everything else and I got like I started getting like more B's and A's than C's and i's. Like last... Matter of fact, at the middle of the year I only got like one I and the rest was like A and Bs and Cs.

**Lance:** you keep mentioning that in the middle of the year there was like this change because you felt more comfortable and you had more friends here because you got to know more people. What was it about getting friends that made it easier to be successful at school?

**Lance:** because you know like coming with a new crowd didn't really know them I felt kinda nervous because I didn't know how they act. I didn't know how if they was gon be [sic] bullies, mean to me or something like that. So I was kinda nervous like raising my hand for questions or something, but then when I started making friends I didn't really worry about it because my friends can help me and stuff. The stuff I didn't know - well they'd help me out and stuff they didn't know I'd help them out. Cause I think one of the most uh {Pause} um {Pause} {Pause} mmm ... Subjects I think the best in was math because I understand it more. And I always loved math. So it was kinda better for me.

**Interviewer:** so at your old school, were you getting pulled out for any groups like you did with Ms. Pinky here.

**Lance:** yes, actually it was this teacher named Mr. A, Ms. M, and Ms. D that pulled me out. I can't remember the other lady but she was really nice. She actually helped me a lot. She was the one that got me good with math. And but Ms. D, she helped me with reading but she kinda had like that rivalry with me for some reason. She didn't really like me. Cause I you know, me... If I get in trouble and I don't think I did anything, I will fight for... Until I know that I didn't do nothing [sic]. If I know I didn't do nothing wrong, I know I can speak up. And I'm not one of those kids that just say ok or yeah I did it. I'm not like one of them. I'm gonna speak up for myself.

**Interviewer:** so that was your problem with her.

**Lance:** and some of the teachers here, they actually have a problem with that too. Because I spoke up for myself and it wasn't, I guess they wasn't used to that.

**Interviewer:** so when you speak up for yourself, do you think that the teachers still want to help you even though they might be upset?

**Lance:** {Pause} I'm not really for sure about that question, but {Pause} like I had a couple of times like that with Ms. Pinky but she {Pause} she helped me and I don't know if she kept on... I don't know if she slacked off or she was actually just trying to make me do it by myself for I get better at it or whatever she did, I guess it kinda helped me in the long run.

**Interviewer:** so let me make sure I'm asking all of the questions I need to. So you said that {Pause} you seemed to be learning more and faster here at (THIS SCHOOL).

**Lance:** yes

**Interviewer:** why do you think that is, as compared to (previous school)?

**Lance:** because um {Pause} as I said before, yall like have better {Pause} better proly focus and better education than other teachers at (previous school) had. {Pause} but I will say there were three teachers that I actually felt like they was actually helping me. And those three teachers were Mr. A, Ms. M, and my fifth grade teacher Ms. S.

**Interviewer:** so Mr. A and Ms. M were people who pulled you out?

**Lance:** yeah in fourth grade and fifth grade, actually I started going to Ms. D because Mr. A, he got move up to like pretty much like the one that controls like the teaching and stuff like that. He was like, even though he was pulling people out, he was like the discipline person of the whole school like. Everybody loved Mr. A like if we had a problem, we automatically go to him. He was like a second father to me basically and Ms. M was like my second mom too. She like took care of me at times when I was in trouble. If she knew I didn't do... She knew me good enough where she know [sic] I didn't do something like that. And she'a [sic] stick up for me. And my fifth grade teacher, Ms. S, I basically adored her because she was fun, outgoing, and she actually did help me.

**Interviewer:** so... {Pause} it sounds like you're saying like the teachers - like everything that you are learning and stuff before even when you came to (THIS SCHOOL) - was based on how good the teacher was, right?

**Lance:** yes

**Interviewer:** so read better. I know you said that you got really good at math before you came to (THIS SCHOOL). So with your stronger math skills and your stronger reading skills... Like what college would you like to go to?

**Lance:** mmm I would like to go to,... Well me and my cousin T. We actually thought we wanted to go to Duke for ... We was actually was gon [sic] go to Duke for the two years and then we said we was going to change from Duke to the UK for uh the other two years.

**Interviewer:** so when did you guys decide that?

**Lance:** um we decided that probably like in the middle of the year because we wanted ... We are good athletes, but we're also good at school so we wanted to actually get a scholarship for education plus sports. Cause I play basketball and he play football. And we was gon [sic]. But we kinda [sic] like both. Both play football and both like basketball. So we wanted to like go to like go to Duke to play basketball for two years on a full scholarship for that. But at UK we wasn't gonna [sic] take our

basketball scholarship. We was actually gonna play football for UK. And like we wanted to get two scholarships for that, if it's possible.

**Interviewer:** so do you think that would ... You think you and Trey would have come up with this plan if yall both went to (previous school)?

**Lance:** {Pause} ummm, I'm not really for sure because they don't really {Pause} push the fact that we're gonna be going to college in a couple of years. But yall you guys yall um really push the fact that we're gonna go to college, that we have it.

**Interviewer:** so {Pause} what ... If I... Say you had stayed at (previous school) this past school year, and I had asked you, "so what is it that you wanna do after high school," what do you think your answer would have been

**Lance:** what am I going to do after high school?

**Interviewer:** if you had never came to (THIS SCHOOL) and then I just saw you on the street and I said "hey, little guy, what are you going to do after high school?" What do you think you would have said if you had stayed at (previous school)?

**Lance:** I would have still wanted to go to college, but I probably at a high level college. And I'm actually sad to say that, but it would be true.

**Interviewer:** why do you think it would be true? How do you... Why do you believe that you probably wouldn't think about going to Duke, but you might think about going to a lower-level college?

**Lance:** {Pause} umm because like {Pause} I can probably go to Duke. I would probably really really really want to go to Duke because I actually have a godbrother that's actually been accepted to a lot of schools. If he really wanted to, he could have gone to Harvard. But he actually wanted to go to Mizzou. That's where he headed to now. And he's kinda like another brother to me because I have five brothers, six sisters. And like probably like ten nephews and nieces all together. Uh but {Pause} with all that on my back, it tells me that I have to stay on track because all my brothers and sisters are older than me. I'm the youngest. But I have nieces and nephews and I'm real close to pretty much all of them. {Pause} but I know that one point they're gon be asking me for my help so I know I got to stay on track.

**Interviewer:** umm so do you...Backtrack. . You said that this year you had started to become more independent.

**Lance:** yeah

# Appendix C: Student Interview: Jasmine

**Interviewer:** Let's get started, Jasmine. Today I'll ask you some questions about when I came and observed you in Mr. Martin's and Ms. Pinky's classroom. This isn't a test, because I want to know your opinion. Since your answers should be about what you think, there are no right or wrong answers. Even though I'll ask a lot of questions, I'm not testing you – just trying to understand more about what you are saying.

**Jasmine:** ok

**Interviewer:** If a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you don't have to answer it. Ok?

**Jasmine: (**nods head)

**Interviewer:** You can also ask me questions if I am unclear. So let's get started… do you feel successful as a student?

**Jasmine:** Um, sometimes. I am behind in my grade. I don't read or write very well. By the time I move up, I will be a better student in 7th grade.

**Interviewer:** so is school just about moving to the next grade, or is it about something else?

**Jasmine:** it's actually about how your behavior is, how your grade is, and if you're moving on to the grade that you need to.

**Interviewer:** why do you think we have grades for example?

**Jasmine:** like {Pause} like the level? Like A, B, and C?

**Interviewer:** no, like fifth grade, sixth grade, seventh grade.

**Jasmine:** oh. So people will know like what level of learning you're learning. Like are you learning like college level, or are you learning like kindergarten level or something like that.

**Interviewer:** so our levels have something to do with like {Pause} the kind of stuff and how hard the stuff is that you're doing?

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** so then what do you think the point of college is? We talk about (THIS SCHOOL) as a way for you to get to college. What's the point of college then?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} the point of college is basically to study over everything you done learned throughout the years to make sure that you know to be ... To be uh well-rounded as an adult. And actually live your life.

**Interviewer:** so do you think that for example if somebody is just failing all of their classes in the fifth grade, do you think its fair to move them up to the sixth grade level?

**Jasmine:** no.

**Interviewer:** no. Do you think that places don't care about grade level and they just stick you with the same age group?

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** do you think that's ok?

**Jasmine:** (Shakes head no)

**Interviewer:** So you would rather everybody stays at the level where they're learning the best. Right?

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** so you think you have to like get everything right in the sixth grade before you can move up to the seventh grade?

**Jasmine:** well, you don't have to get like EVERYTHING right, but if you get most of it right, I believe that you're ok to go up there. Because you're gon [sic] progress.

**Interviewer:** so when you're in reading class, for example, do you think you get the help that you need or like in order to be a better reader for ever and ever or do you just get the help for that one particular book?

**Jasmine:** I think I get the help I need because [classroom reading teacher], she doesn't. When I start to doubt myself she tells me that "you're doing good. Just keep on going. Don't worry about nobody [sic] else." And she just keeps me where I {Pause} uh {Pause} where I get more confident with my reading and I start raising my hand more.

**Interviewer:** so do you think... Let me rephrase that. Do you sometimes worry about where your reading level is in relationship to other students?

**Jasmine:** um {Pause} sometimes. Because I feel like because I feel like I could do better {Pause} and it feels like I can't like {Pause} it feels like people are like {Pause} like for instance, when I read when I raise my hand to read and she calls on me, sometimes they say like "hhuuhhh" [sic] and its stuff like that it kinds brings my confidence down because I know I can do better and if I just keep on trying I can do better.

**Interviewer:** oh ok. That makes sense. Whether it's a small group here or a small group at your old school, do you feel like you're missing something in class?

**Jasmine:** yeah {Pause} like here she kinda pulled me out during reading during Forged By Fire sometimes like when we was reading books, but I feel like I was missing a good part of that book or something like that. And I feel like I maybe should start like maybe keep reading myself in class because when she stopped coming to get me more of the time and started getting [another student], I started getting better at my classes. Getting better at my reading and everything else.

**Interviewer:** ok umm so let me ask you think if you could do one thing differently, like you had a magic wand and you could change one thing about school, I want you to think about the one thing that could help you learn better or more quicker. What's the one thing you would change?

**Jasmine:** I would change my reading because I think if I get even more better than I have with my reading I think it would help me more with my other classes.

**Interviewer:** so you would change, like you would just put all the reading knowledge into your head?

**Jasmine:** pretty much.

**Interviewer:** so why do you think ... You seem to have a real positive attitude and I know from talking to [general reading teacher] and Ms. Pinky that you have grown a lot this year in reading. Well why do you think that for example that some people have a higher reading level than you do?

**Jasmine:** because they been to better schools than I have and proly [sic] had better help than I had

**Interviewer:** what do you think, when you went to (previous school), what do you the teachers thought the purpose of you being at school was?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} they kept on saying that the purpose was you being here was to get an education. And stuff like that, like yall say [sic]. But I felt that I wasn't really grabbing anything. I felt like I was just going to school just to be there.

**Interviewer:** and how is that different from what you're doing here now?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} well for here now. It felt like I was actually learning something because I KNEW I was learning something because one night my sister had had actually when back to school - to go back to college. {Pause} um and she {Pause} had a friend that actually went to school, back to school with her. And that had - like we learn algebra, they had some college level algebra to do and I actually helped them with it.

**Interviewer:** sounds good, baby. So at (previous school), you were saying like the teachers just didn't seem as committed. Can you give me another example about how you saw that they weren't as committed?

**Jasmine:** because they just {Pause} they just kept on leaving. They didn't really care. They just left.

**Interviewer:** what would happen in the classroom that was different at (previous school) that was different than it was here?

**Jasmine:** um {Pause} can you say that again

**Interviewer:** what was different? When you were sitting in the classroom at (previous school), how did a (previous school) classroom feel different than a (THIS SCHOOL) classroom?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} well, one thing was different was that we had the same teachers but we move class to class. So we saw the same teachers every day but we was moving class to class but we only had one teacher for every subject. And {Pause} when we did that, it just like {Pause} at (previous school) when we did that, plus the teachers can leave whenever they want it was kinda difficult cause we only had one teacher. Here if one of yall leave [sic], we have our other teachers that we already know and we only have to get used to only one new one. So it's a little better, but at (previous school) it was just one specific teacher that was teaching us everything. It was just getting hard.

**Interviewer:** and then you talked a little bit about {Pause} you becoming more independent as a reader here at (THIS SCHOOL).

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** what do you think made that switch? So before it was all about the teacher, but now you're learning how to do it yourself. Where did that come from?

**Jasmine:** basically that just came from me getting older and I know I won't have this help throughout everything. And I noticed that Ms. Pinky wasn't pulling me as much as my old school, so I knew I had to make a change, so I did.

**Interviewer:** are you nervous about possibly going to high school in a couple of years? Or college?

**Jasmine:** no.

**Interviewer:** no? You ready for it?

**Jasmine:** yes.

**Interviewer:** so it is because you're a little bit more independent?

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** You're ready to continue to grow about that? That sounds good baby. Um {Pause} so do you think - I know you think that (THIS SCHOOL) is better than that other schools you used to go to, but if (THIS SCHOOL) could do one thing better, what would that one thing be?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} ummm {Pause} better? Better? Hmmm

**Interviewer:** like to make sure that you are doing the most that you can do to make sure that you are learning the most, the fastest, to get you up to the highest level in every subject before you go to high school. What's one thing that we could do better for you?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} um for me I think {Pause} I think the best thing yall can do is that yall go over the subject again like probably like once or twice out of the year so I make sure that we these tests come up that I know it. And I think that will help me the most.

**Interviewer:** so making sure that we go over stuff. You keep talking about like going on over stuff. You talked about at (previous school), they would test over stuff that you learned months ago and not review it. Why do you think that reviewing is very important?

**Jasmine:** because if we review it, we remember. But if we don't, it's just like a thing of the past.

**Interviewer:** do you feel like a lot of what you learned before you came to (THIS SCHOOL) was treated as things of the past?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} mmmm... {Pause} kinda, like some of the stuff that I learned at (previous school) it did help me here. {Pause} but {Pause} not a lot of it. It pretty was nothing but (THIS SCHOOL) this year.

**Interviewer:** so do you think that you can have more control about how quickly you can learn?

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** in what ways? Can you give me an example?

**Jasmine:** umm {Pause} for example, {Pause} um. The way that me being more independent can help me learn faster is that I'm starting to take on my education and putting it back on me where I can learn. Like being more independent is where I can um where I can like {Pause} where... What's that worked? {Pause} where... I can learn better. I can like take it in my own hands to like study and stuff like that. Nobody has to tell me to.

**Interviewer:** that makes sense. So do you think its more, easier to learn being more independent, even like being in a regular classroom?

**Jasmine:** yes.

**Interviewer:** in what ways? How is it easier?

**Jasmine:** it's easier because you'd not always like needing somebody else's hand. I will admit to this - I did need a lot of help but I did most of the work by myself and I'm actually right about that?

**Interviewer:** so do you think your teachers want you to be more independent in the classroom?

**Jasmine:** {Pause} yes

**Interviewer:** why do you think it's more important for them that you're more independent in the classroom?

**Jasmine:** so they a know that I'm' ready to move on from level to level. Well from grade to grade

**Interviewer:** yeah so when you were... Are taking tests, even here at (THIS SCHOOL) - doesn't matter the subject. Is taking tests and like this is something I learned a while ago - whether it was at your old school or earlier in the year here at (THIS SCHOOL) - you talked about things that you forgot and you just knew you got wrong. How did you feel about leaving wrong answers on the page?

**Jasmine:** I didn't feel ... I didn't feel right. I tried my hardest on it and I just gave it my best answers that I can get. But I just {Pause} like at points I just felt like "is it right? Is it wrong? Am I getting the right answers?" and I just kept going over and over it until I felt like that could be the right answer.

**Interviewer:** ok so when you.... When you're taking a test and there's a lot of questions that you're like "uh, I don't really see how this is having to do with anything else," do you think that everything that you've learned for one grade level - for example, everything that you learned in the fifth grade - helps you do better in the sixth grade?

**Jasmine:** no because at my old school, it didn't really prepare me for this. It actually {Pause} I just felt like I was back in like {Pause} like because I felt like I was learning because I had Ms. Smith but I wasn't learning at the level yall was learning in fifth grade. So it basically kinda didn't help me.

**Interviewer:** why do you think the adults at (previous school) chose to teach in that way, rather than teach you stuff that would prepare you for sixth grade at (THIS SCHOOL)?

**Jasmine:** Umm {Pause} I guess they're just not at that level, I guess. I'm not really for sure.

**Interviewer:** so is there a reason ... Let me backtrack... Do you think that sixth grade at (THIS SCHOOL) prepares you for seventh grade anywhere?

**Jasmine:** um yes, I think that if I actually did sixth grade at (THIS SCHOOL), it'll take me all the way though 8th grade at (previous school).

**Interviewer:** yeah. So what do you think that the difference is in the teachers? Do you think that the teachers at (THIS SCHOOL) know higher levels of subject areas so they can teach those higher levels or do you think that it has something to do about what they believe about what school should be?

**Jasmine:** They believe about what school can be?

**Interviewer:** so what do you think is the difference? Like what do you think an (previous school) teacher thinks what school should be as compared to what (THIS SCHOOL) teacher thinks school should be?

**Jasmine:** well I think that at (previous school), they have {Pause} they have the mindset that pretty much, I'm just here" but {Pause} at (THIS SCHOOL) they actually feel like we should learn and be better at what we do.

**Interviewer:** ok, so {Pause} you think {Pause} let me get this right. I'm hearing you say like the other teachers weren't trying and it was mostly their fault even though I figured out as I got older that I could do some stuff myself, right?

**Jasmine:** yes

**Interviewer:** ok so the way that you're going now, you grew a lot in your first year at (THIS SCHOOL) - what do you think that you can do that's different that you didn't think that you were going to be able to do with an education from your other school?

**Jasmine:** read better

# Appendix D: Teacher Interview: Mr. Martin

**Interviewer**: Thank you for coming to talk with me about your classroom.

**Mr. Martin**: Not a problem.

**Interviewer**: Today I'm going to be asking you questions about what I saw when I videotaped you teaching your small group as well as your opinions based on your experience as a teacher. This is not an evaluative interview, so there are no right or wrong answers. I'm asking questions in order to better understand your experience for this study.

**Mr. Martin**: Ok

**Interviewer**: I may ask you to explain more about what you say, or kind of drill down based on your answers. If I do that its because I want more information – not that you are in anyway being unclear. If you don't want to answer a question, you definitely don't have to. alright ummm, (pause) now I'm going to give this to you because this is what you actually did with the kids and there was a lot of those so… [hands student materials to Mr. Martin that he created from the videotaped lesson].

**Mr. Martin**: right, right.

**Interviewer**: that stuff is there if you need to use to kinda jog your memory. You can feel free to use this space up here on the table too. It's fine.

**Mr. Martin**: ok, ok.

**Interviewer**: When I videotaped you, you were working with some sixth grade students about making inferences. Is there anything else?

**Mr. Martin:** break down a current event topic. I wanted them to connect really with the main character in the article.

**Interviewer:** why was it important to have that objective?

**Mr. Martin:** Throughout the year, students struggled to make inferences and take them to a higher level - what is exactly is happening in this story, or in this event.

**Interviewer:** So, was it based inside the class that students were lacking or from some other origin?

**Mr. Martin:** a combination of things. These students usually struggle in the classroom – with both classwork and [homework]. They struggle specifically in reading and writing about what they read.

**Interviewer:** did you confer with the reading and writing teacher to structure what you should be working on in this small group?

**Mr. Martin:** yeah, it was focused on the inference and comprehension. Then I took that when we started focusing on the [annual state test] and built on that.

**Interviewer:** what kind of objectives were they struggling with in social studies when you realized this was a problem because they don't have inferencing skills?

**Mr. Martin:** Analyzing texts. Breaking things down into different parts and I wanted them to be able to infer from a particular part of the text that was broken down.

**Interviewer**: so when you have a small group like this, do you talk about what the long lasting effects are of learning the skill that you're teaching?

**Mr. Martin**: I feel like the conversations were very meaningful. When I talked about why this was important and how this applies in different areas of their lives, kids were able to receive it and they express how they were able to use it in different areas of their lives. If I wanted to relate this to a person in the text, the kids were able to see that oh well, because of the choices that this person made or what have you, then they can see how it affected the outcome for that person or persons in the text. If I am able to think along those lines in my own life, then I can see how that can maybe change the outcomes in my life that may happen.

**Interviewer**: the packet is a classwork packet that they started in class and finished in the small group.

**Mr. Martin**: this was a like a continuation of the lesson. It allows the students to have several opportunities at the objectives. The students were to demonstrate to me that they were competent, that they really understood the focus of the lesson. I wanted to pull them out and really key in what, looking at different facets of the topic.

**Interviewer**: for Lance, he participated a lot. He raised his hand a lot. Is that typical of Lance?

**Mr. Martin**: He often displays behaviors that show he is uninterested in class, like he is talkative with his neighbors. I think he is just lost in the larger group. He doesn't pay attention. Then if I ask him a question, he withdraws in a larger group setting.

**Interviewer**: in a larger class he may not feel that kind of connection with the teacher. What about Jasmine?

**Mr. Martin**: she is a young lady who struggles with keeping up and comprehending. But, I will have to say, she ever gives up. I keep her in my small groups to give her that attention. She is always present in the lesson and participates in the lesson, despite the struggles he has. She is a bit more of a go-getter in the small group.

**Interviewer**: how often do you pull your small group

**Mr. Martin**: 3 or 4 days a week

**Interviewer**: does your small group always focus on making sure that they understood what happened in the class period before?

**Mr. Martin**: Sometimes with a different spin, but yes.

**Interviewer**: do the kids have any say in how the conversation moves?

**Mr. Martin**: absolutely. I want to get the kids to come up with some other opinions. Ones that may not be popular or ones that challenge even their own personal opinions, or family traditions or beliefs. Just so they can understand that these topics are not always neat.

**Interviewer:** What are the costs and the benefits of having a small group structure for the kid? For example, some kids who are pulled out of study hall for a small group lose that independent practice time before they get home.

**Mr. Martin:** It was more on lines of the latter. I wanted an opportunity to see clearly are you able to satisfy what I thought was appropriate as far as your understanding of the objectives.

**Interviewer**: how do you know it was successful?

**Mr. Martin**: The way I designed my questions were more base level and then more specific, more evaluative type questions. It puts the kids in the position where they have to address the real event, the social ramifications of the topic. It's my hope and my intention to allow the space to take something like this and bring them into the next class period. Trying to find an opportunity to trigger that. They want to then show that they are being successful in the small group. I think the small group was critical. They were able to gain a sense of accomplishment and being comfortable with social studies, which I think will translate into confidence next year. I think it was essential that we had that small group time.

**Interviewer**: when you do pull-out groups, do you expect them to come into the classroom and expect them to do that more, or should they just focus on spending this time with you?

**Mr. Martin:** It's my hope and my intention to allow the space to take something like this and bring them into the next class period. I spend small group time trying to find an opportunity to trigger that. They want to then show that they are being successful in the small group in the regular classroom where they are unfocused because of peers or not getting they help that they need. … I choose kids that are kinda floating. Really anyone who needs it. … that will continue to push hard.

**Interviewer:** If Lance has a really bad day, and then you brought him up to small group and then he continues.

**Mr. Martin:** I rarely send kids back downstairs because I feel like that this small group is kinda like a last resort for these kids. I try to find something and disguise it towards the things they are interested in. I want to have kids say, "I have a place." For example, Lance likes to share information with the whole class so I encourage him in small group to identify things he can point out so that he can use that skill in class.

**Interviewer**: if they never had another small group, do you think as they move on to higher grades and more complex texts, more complex situations like current events, that they will still be able to use those same thought skills.

**Mr. Martin**: I do. And especially with Jasmine and [another student], they will check their own thinking in class. They will go back into the text. In particular, how I guided them to having clear understanding of information.

**Interviewer**: do you think it would be possible if they didn't have a small group opportunity?

**Mr. Martin**: I don't think it would be possible. I think the small group was critical. They were able to gain a sense of accomplishment and being comfortable with social studies, which I think will translate into confidence next year. I think it was essential that we had that small group time.

**Interviewer**: Tell me what costs and benefits students have when they get pulled for your small group.

**Mr. Martin**: The kids I pull needed a more focused approach to remediation. Bad things: unfocused because of peers or not getting they help that they need. Sometimes you have a room full of kids that need help with [homework]. A kid can get more out of the lesson in a small group.

**Interviewer**: Do you only pull kids that don't go to reading, writing, or math small groups.

**Mr. Martin**: Yeah, I get the kids that are kinda [sic] floating. Really anyone who needs it. Groups change slightly. I try to grab kids that will continue to push hard.

**Interviewer**: those are the kids that demonstrate in class that they are still focusing; they might not give up, on the fence. How do you ID that in a student?

**Mr. Martin**: I usually pay attention to their body language during class. For example, with Lance he sometimes seems apprehensive about participating in a larger group so that just means I need to loop back around to him during small group.

**Interviewer**: Let's say that Lance has a really bad day in class, and then you brought him up to small group, and then he continues to not participate or act up. What do you do?

**Mr. Martin**: I rarely send kids back downstairs because I feel like that this small group is kinda like a last resort for these kids. I try to find something and disguise it towards the things they are interested in. For him, talking translates to the skill of being an expert. So I put that in his mind and then move him towards that in small group.

# Appendix E: Teacher Interview: Ms. Pinky

**Interviewer**: First thank you for meeting with me.

**Ms. Pinky**: You're welcome

**Interviewer**: I'm basically going to be asking you questions about a few different things. Some of them will be able what I saw when I videotaped you. then we will talk about your opinions based on your experience as a teacher. This is not in any way evaluative so there are no right or wrong answers. I'm really just asking for your opinion as a teacher.

**Ms. Pinky**: Ok

**Interviewer**: This is all based off of your experiences. I don't have the same experiences, so I want to make sure that I understand what is going on. If I'm asking about your views, and definitely your opinions, so feel free to expound as much as you want. There is no time limit.

**Ms. Pinky**: Ok.

**Interviewer**: If I have questions about what you say, Its not because I'm trying to challenge you or anything like that. Its because I want to fully understand. If you don't want to answer a question, you definitely don't have to.

**Ms. Pinky**: ok

**Interviewer**: and if you have any questions about anything I ask you, feel free to ask me to clarify. Ok?

**Ms. Pinky:** Ok.

**Interviewer**: I'm going to be writing stuff down, but sometimes I won't write anything at all so there may be pauses between me asking you questions or you answering the question. If you have more to say, feel free to do that. The reason that I'm videotaping you is so I don't have to try to write down every word that you say. Don't base anything off of me writing or not writing anything down. So we'll start with what I saw when I videoed you. I videoed on two separate occasions. One group was with (other students) and read a book called Our Crazy Class Election. The second time you had [another student] and Peter. Then your read a story called The Blackbird.

**Ms. Pinky**: we also reread how the bear lost its tail.

**Interviewer**: we'll start with the group from [another student], Jasmine, and [another student]. What was your objective from that lesson?

**Ms. Pinky**: always to work with comprehension. A book that's at their level. And to revise it and grow some schema. Able to answer inferential, critical thinking questions about the text.

**Interviewer**: why those objectives?

**Ms. Pinky**: that was there weakness as compared to fluency and accuracy in reading.

**Interviewer**: how often did you meet with that group?

**Ms. Pinky**: once maybe twice a week. Not enough.

**Interviewer**: when did you start meeting with them?

**Ms. Pinky**: not until late April, so I only had a month with them. It wasn't enough time but it was better than nothing.

**Interviewer**: not enough time?

**Ms. Pinky**: comprehension is much more challenging thing to make growth in and seek gains in especially at this age level because its really about building scheme using background knowledge that they don't have as much information about and that takes time. I didn't get to measure to see if they made it was any growth.

**Interviewer**: how did you decide that it was comprehension?

**Ms. Pinky**: when [general reading teacher] identified her lowest readers, I "stepped" those readers with the UFC step assessment.

**Interviewer:** What was the goal of pulling those students into the small group?

**Ms. Pinky*:*** They needs to pass tests in the curriculum. The whole point is to help them increase in their instructional level. For the test on each level, students have to have 80% of questions answered correctly. If they start at a Level N, then they would move up to an O leveled book the next time we meet.

**Interviewer**: what was more important - understanding those particular books you were reading to build their schema so they can use it when reading other texts, or was it more like you were trying to make sure that they knew the process of what comprehension looks and feels like so they can use it later?

**Ms. Pinky**: I think it was probably a little of both. We talked mostly about strategies - if we are not understanding, what are the strategies that we can use while we are reading, and building up the background knowledge about the text before reading the text as well. I don't think one is more important than the other.

**Interviewer**: so what kind of background knowledge did they need?

**Ms. Pinky**: some of the vocabulary. Campaigning and candidates and election politician and what a poll is. They did understand what an election was.

**Interviewer**: [looking at the book itself] a level N - what grade level was that?

**Ms. Pinky**: third grade

**Interviewer**: so are these books geared toward hi-low or would you expect a third grader to have that same background knowledge?

**Ms. Pinky**: you would expect a third grader to have that background knowledge.

**Interviewer**: This one is from the Guided Reading Program from Scholastic. Are these books geared towards the grade level that matches the letter or are they the hi/low readers?

**Ms. Pinky**: you saw two different programs. Scholastic does a better job of being high interesting. The other is a Leveled literacy intervention text that we were reading - a lot of those books are not at the interest level of a sixth grader.

**Interviewer**: even though you didn't have a chance to formally assess them, do you think they met the goals of that lesson?

**Ms. Pinky**: in guided reading, there is not necessarily a goal for each lesson. They met the goals that they are supposed to. Jasmine needed the most pushing.

**Interviewer**: you also sit in the larger class with them.

**Ms. Pinky**: It is hard for a single teacher to teach while dealing with management of 30 students. I generally pull 10 of the kids out of 30 for the class period with me and [general reading teacher].

**Interviewer**: is there a way that you get to all students throughout the week or do you have a focus?

**Ms. Pinky**: mine is SPED. Then get the lower level students. We don't hit the high-level students as much because we assume they are comprehending [sic] books that they are reading.

**Interviewer**: so you said that classroom management is an issue in a whole class. In particular with Jasmine, do you see a difference in how she participates in reading actively between the whole class and in the small group with you?

**Ms. Pinky**: they feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing. I make it very clear that if there is any making fun of, then they are out. All of us need to continue to grow and do that throughout the rest of our lives.

**Interviewer**: how do you message to them the reasons why they are in the small group?

**Ms. Pinky**: when we do the step testing, I conference with them one on one. This is what you did really well. Then I'll get to their weaknesses. And we will all be working on this together.

**Interviewer**: how do you think Jasmine reacted to that?

**Ms. Pinky**: she was excited about that. There are some kids that aren't necessarily excited. Peter came in, in a bad place. He feels very picked on and insecure. His partner [another student] reads faster than he does. I used to have them read silently until I cued them in to me. But I found out that Peter was actually just skimming, so I had them both read out loud to me. He definitely has a hard time conferences and hearing that he needs to work on things.

**Interviewer**: when he is having a hard time, does he have an option to not participate, or take a break? Or how do you get him back into doing his work in excellence?

**Ms. Pinky**: A lot of positive motivation throughout the reading and conferencing after with [Lance]. His struggles are sounding out words and pronouncing blends, but he comprehends very well. He may have one bad day in a week. I try not to let him get out of it, because I want him to work through it. Some days he doesn't give me his 100% and there is nothing that I can do about it because I have other students there too that I want to read with. Students don't choose any of this so it's hard. Jasmine would just jump back into it. The other girls that were there were also very positive too – "come on Jasmine you can do it!" If she didn't understand the question, I would have to break it down more and more, and then the other girls would try to help because they all knew the answer. She would get over it much more quickly than Peter would. But it's a challenge to keep kids motivated. 7th is too far gone. They have to trust in the process. At this age, they lose trust and faith in adults

**Interviewer**: do the students choose the book or the focus?

**Ms. Pinky**: no.

**Interviewer**: if your small group objective focus based on what you see in your small group, or does it include what you see in class with them?

**Ms. Pinky**: its really based on the assessments that I give them. When I listen, that's when I decide what the focus of the day is.

**Interviewer**: how the bear lost its tail. With Peter and [another student]. Level j is what grade level?

**Ms. Pinky**: 2nd.

**Interviewer**: different programs. [another student] & Peter's are not hi/o books.

**Ms. Pinky**: they dislike that they have to read the book twice.

**Interviewer**: where you looking for anything in particular? Like something that they worked on the first time that they read the book and making sure that they fixed that.

**Ms. Pinky**: accuracy is where they both need to work on. Peter interchanges words - he says small when it says little. Large when it says big. Then giving him strategies. So yeah. We might read a single page again.

**Interviewer**: how have you communicated to Peter that it is important to keep the same word, even though he is using a synonym basically?

**Ms. Pinky**: I also base it on their level - if you wanna [sic] grow a level,... In order to grow, he has to change those habits.

**Interviewer**: talk more about your overall small group structure. What is it that kids can get in a small group that they can't get in class?

**Ms. Pinky**: conferencing. Day to day conferencing. Having discussions about the book. Making small corrections that they would never correct themselves on a day-to-day basis. You start seeing significant changes in their reading behaviors and their ability to correct their own when you are teaching strategies of how to make those corrections.

**Interviewer**: would you expect the things that you teach in the small groups to translate in the classroom or even reading outside of school?

**Ms. Pinky**: yes

**Interviewer**: are you able to see that or is what they are doing in the classroom totally different?

**Ms. Pinky**: no. It's harder to see with comprehension whether your strategies are working and they are actually comprehending the text. But you can hear it when they read aloud.

**Interviewer**: is this essential for every child or is this something we have to use at [this school] because the schedule and the classes are so large?

**Ms. Pinky**: I think its essential for k through 4 -5 level kids. Once you know that kids are comprehending at a 6th grade level I don't see the need for it anymore. It benefits every kid no matter the level.

**Interviewer**: should it span k12?

**Ms. Pinky**: I don't think it’s ever pointless. When we conference, you listen to make sure that they understand the text and making sure they are making the connections they need to make. But I don't think it needs to be done in a small group - it just has to happen in every grade level.

**Interviewer**: are the skills to make them more independent?

**Ms. Pinky**: yeah, if they are making corrections, they we know that they are monitoring their reading.

**Interviewer**: is that the overall goal of a reading program?

**Ms. Pinky**: yeah, kids to be able to read independently and monitor their reading.

**Interviewer**: never got another reading group. After graduating high school, do you think it is possible for them to be on grade level in reading?

**Ms. Pinky**: no.

**Interviewer**: why

**Ms. Pinky**: Without it, Peter is going to continue reading books that are above his level. Most of his errors come out when he is reading out loud. He will continue to not monitor himself. Jasmine needs a lot of pushing on how to be inferential and connect texts to her own life and to the world. That takes a lot of work from a teacher. She won't get that kind of attention when there are 30 kids around that need that kind of help. The goal is to get kids to be able to read independently.

**Interviewer**: let's rewind time. It would still depend on 1-on-1 word, but when they were younger. Now they are just playing the catch-up game. Is there anything else that you want to add?

**Ms. Pinky**: challenge to keep kids motivated. 7th is too far gone. They have to trust in the process. At this age, they lose trust and faith.

**Interviewer**: how do you message that to them?

**Ms. Pinky**: There is a lot of going back and looking at where they were when they started with me. So they can see how much growth they made. They still feel like they are so far back from where they are supposed to be, even though they have made two years of growth.

**Interviewer**: how long have you been working with Peter?

**Ms. Pinky**: Peter grew 5 levels, almost two years. Starting in October or November. At beginning Peter was all gung ho about it. It slowed down a bit later on in the year.