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Cultural Gap? Connections and Bridges between Teachers and Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Benjamin Gaines

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2015
The Dissertation of Benjamin Gaines is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2015
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page ........................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ iv

List of Figures ........................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables ........................................................................................................... viii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. ix

Vita ........................................................................................................................... x

Abstract of the Dissertation ................................................................................... xi

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................... 1

Research Questions ................................................................................................ 4

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature ..................................................................... 7

Problem Summary ................................................................................................... 7

Demographic Imperative ......................................................................................... 7

Student Connectedness Defined .......................................................................... 10

Student Connectedness and Success ................................................................. 11

Student-Teacher Relationships .......................................................................... 12

Student Connectedness in Middle School ......................................................... 15

School Connectedness and Race .......................................................................... 17

Effects of a Non-Culturally Responsive Teacher ........................................... 18

Active Teacher Effects on Student Success ....................................................... 19
Shared Stories ............................................................................................................. 60

Personal Understanding ............................................................................................. 66

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Summary .................................................................. 69

Summary of the Study ................................................................................................. 69

Trust as an Implied Factor ....................................................................................... 70

Theme 1: Caring Relationships ................................................................................. 72

Theme 2: Shared Stories ............................................................................................. 75

Pedagogical Implications ......................................................................................... 77

Theme 3: Personal Understanding ........................................................................... 78

Implications and Findings ......................................................................................... 80

Limitations of this Study ........................................................................................... 84

Recommendations for Future Research ................................................................. 84

Summary and Conclusion ......................................................................................... 85

Appendix .................................................................................................................... 87

Appendix A. Teacher Interview Protocol ............................................................... 87

Appendix B. Student Focus Group Protocol ........................................................... 90

Appendix C. Observation Protocol ........................................................................ 91

References ................................................................................................................ 92
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Pyramid Connecting Literature .................................................. 33

Figure 4.1: Pyramid Themes ......................................................................... 50

Figure 4.2: Pyramid Caring Relationships .................................................... 51

Figure 4.3: Pyramid Shared Stories ............................................................... 60

Figure 4.4: Pyramid Personal Understanding ............................................... 66

Figure 5.1: Pyramid Findings ....................................................................... 70
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Participant Selection ................................................................. 40
Table 4.1: Participant Experience ............................................................... 46
Table 4.2: Availability .................................................................................. 52
Table 4.3: Caring Relationships ................................................................. 53
Table 4.4: Student Relationships ............................................................... 54
Table 4.5: Building Relationships .............................................................. 55
Table 4.6: Student Connection ................................................................. 55
Table 4.7: Genuine Interest ......................................................................... 56
Table 4.8: Belonging .................................................................................. 57
Table 4.9: Building Trust ........................................................................... 58
Table 4.10: Teacher Perceptions on Trust .................................................. 58
Table 4.11: Observed Interactions .............................................................. 59
Table 4.12: Questioning ............................................................................. 61
Table 4.13: Shared Strengths ...................................................................... 64
Table 4.14: Observed Interactions Sharing ................................................ 65
Table 4.15: Observed Interactions Mutual Respect .................................. 68
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultural Gap? Connections and Bridges between Teachers and Students

by

Benjamin Gaines

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2015

California State University, San Marcos, 2015

Professor Patricia Prado-Olmos, Chair

There is a significant cultural gap between white educators and ethnic and linguistic minority students in our nation’s school system. The face of our nation’s school children is changing as the United States becomes more and more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. Research in this area converges on the importance of race in student-teacher interaction and subsequent impact on a student’s overall outcomes. However, there is little evidence on the presumed effects of such relationships on student academic achievement. This dissertation defines and explores
student connectedness as related to teacher race, as well as both active and passive teacher effects on minority student connectedness as it relates to the mismatch in teacher to student race. Findings indicated three main themes: caring relationships, shared stories, and personal understanding as important factors impacting student connectedness amidst the cultural gap. Areas for future research are suggested and detailed for a study of successful white teachers of minority students.
Chapter 1: Introduction

In the last decade, a major focus in education amongst educators, school and district leaders, as well as policy makers has revolved around closing gaps in education-achievement gaps, funding gaps, school-readiness gaps. However, there is a major gap that is often overlooked that stands as a barrier between students and successful student outcomes. The gap is a cultural gap that exists between the current population of students and our nation’s teaching force. Most of the nation’s teachers are white, middle-class, monolingual-English speakers. Increasingly, the same profile does not hold true for our students. The cultural make-up of our schools is transforming into diverse centers made-up of multicultural students. Often, teachers stand before their classrooms facing an audience of students who do not look like them. Many teachers often reach out and try to bridge the gap by teaching students according to their own Anglo-values and beliefs with very little training on culturally proficient teaching practices. Such culturally proficient teaching practices are pedagogical approaches teachers can take to foster connections between students of different cultures. Teacher created practices not founded on culturally proficient practices have created the problem we now face, a cultural gap dividing students and teachers in our nation’s schools.

Moreover, teachers’ understanding of culture is often limited to holiday traditions, recipes and specific months dedicated to appreciation of such cultures. Students from diverse and ethnic backgrounds enter our nation’s schools and often fall victim to teaching practices centered on the values and cultural understanding of the
teacher. In turn, values of students are often overlooked and misunderstood by teachers. In order to truly engage all students from all cultures, teachers must examine the cultural assumptions and stereotypes brought into the classroom daily and reach out to the students in ways that are culturally responsive.

The racial composition of students in the United States of America is swiftly changing. At the beginning of the 20th century, one in eight Americans was of a minority race. By the year 2000, that number was one in four Americans (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The percent of minority students from culturally and racially diverse groups in our nation’s schools is 45% and growing (Amatea, Cholewa, & Mixon, 2012). According to the Pew Hispanic Center, school-aged children will increase by 5.4 million by 2020, and all of the growth will be made up of children of immigrants (Fry, 2008). In contrast, our nation’s educators are lacking in diversity, as white educators comprise nearly 83% of our teacher force (Amatea, et al., 2012).

The demographic and racial mismatch between minority students and teachers in our nation’s school systems and their impacts on student connectedness can be seen as a possible contributing factor to the educational status of students throughout our nation’s schools (Amatea, et al., 2012; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). For example, while overall high school graduation rates are on the rise, graduation rates among minority students still lag behind their white peers. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2014), approximately 79% of all of our nation’s high school students graduated. In comparison, only 71% of Latino and 67% of African American students graduated. Furthermore, the dropout rate for Hispanic students between the ages of 16 and 24 years old who immigrated to the United States was
reported at 44.2 percent in 2012. This is in comparison to the national dropout rate for white students, ages 16 to 24, reported at five percent in 2011 (NCES, 2014).

An additional example of the effects of the cultural gap may be seen in the rate of suspensions and expulsions for minority students. Minority students experience twice as many discipline referrals as white students, on average, throughout our nation’s school systems (Losen & Martinez, 2013). A recent study by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) compiled data representing 49 million students across all 16,500 school districts in the nation. The data collection shined a clear, unbiased light on the racial disparities in school discipline. The light is particularly revealing around the discipline for our nation’s young men and boys of color, who are disproportionately affected by suspensions in schools. The study revealed the disparities begin as early as preschool. While Black students represent 18% of preschool enrollment, 42% of Black students were suspended once during their enrollment in preschool (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Limited empirical research has examined the effects of the growing cultural gap between white teachers and minority students (Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Hale, Snow-Gerono & Morales, 2007; Lowstein, 2012; Picower, 2009), although some have focused on the effects of teacher race on the academic achievement of students (Dee, 2004; Taylor, 1979). The evidence in the literature suggests there is little association between student academic achievement and racial match between students and teachers. Instead, greater focus has been given to the effects of a teacher to student racial match on several other factors, including both passive teacher effects and active teacher effects (Dee, 2004; Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013).
Even though the direct connection between teacher race and student achievement may be limited, benefits exist for students who share the same race as their teacher. An example can be found in students with the opportunity to have same race role models. For example, students may trust and respect someone with whom they share a salient characteristic, making learning come more easily. Likewise, a teacher of the same race may serve as a more effective role model, boosting students' confidence and enthusiasm for learning (Dee, 2004).

**Research Questions**

Our increasingly diverse population of students presents challenges that must be addressed. There is a dearth of research that focuses on the demographic imperative and the importance for educators to fill the gaps between the racial differences between teachers and students (Atwater, Freeman, Butler, & Draper-Morris, 2010; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Hale et al., 2007; Lowstein, 2012; Picower, 2009). As a Caucasian administrator of a middle school that consists of over 85% minority students, I have found much of the scholarly research validates my own observations of the academic, social-emotional challenges, as well as many successes on the part of my students and teachers. I have the privilege of working on designing a school culture that will embrace diversity and treat every child as a champion. My interests lie in determining what factors, at the school site, contribute to teachers having a lasting impact on connecting minority students to school, a connection that impacts student performance, discipline
and engagement. In finding such factors, the goal is to duplicate those experiences for future students.

In order to identify the behaviors, skills and dispositions demonstrated by teachers who successfully bridge the cultural gap and effectively connect with minority students, the study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What factors create positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race?
(a) How do students describe the social and learning environments in classrooms taught by teachers of a different race?
(b) How do teachers describe the social and learning environments in classrooms with students of a different race?

The purpose of the following literature review is to explore the literature specific to the demographic imperative that our nation’s schools are facing. It begins by examining our nation’s K-12 teachers and the nation’s changing demographic of minority students. This review also examines both passive and active teacher effects on student academic achievement, as well as overall positive student outcomes.

Furthermore, it presents the effects of teachers’ inexperience in multicultural education and how this contributes to the achievement gap. This review will discuss how the field can build cultural competency amongst educators through culturally responsive teaching and the importance of providing our students with culturally responsive classrooms.

In the absence of substantial empirical evidence to measure the effect on student achievement, this review will look at literature pertinent to student
connectedness and the cultural gap that exists between our nation’s teacher force and diverse student body. School connectedness will be reviewed through the lens of defining connectedness as students have meaningful relationships with adults within a given school, are engaged in the school, and feel a sense of belonging to the school. In Chapter 2, the review will examine the concept of teacher-student relationships and its effect on school connectedness. Next, literature pertaining to the cultural gap will be discussed, examining both passive and active effects on student connectedness by teachers whose race is different from their students. The paper will then look at teacher preparation and its effect on the teacher’s ability to offer culturally responsive teaching. Chapter 3 will describe a proposed ethnographic study to examine factors that create positive student-teacher relationships and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race. Chapter 4 will lay out the analysis of data, followed by chapter 5, concluding this study.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Problem Summary

Low academic achievement and high dropout rates in our nation’s schools have challenged the education field for many years. Too many students are disconnected from school and failing to achieve (Blum, 2005). In other words, students show tenuous effort to engage in learning or find value in school. Meanwhile, our nation’s student population further diversifies through a rapid growth of minority students. As we head toward a minority majority in our schools, the gap of student connectedness between minority students and schools also continues to grow. Minority students in our nation’s school systems top the charts for suspensions, drop-outs and overall disconnectedness.

This literature review explores the possible disconnect between teachers and students who do not share the same race and its impact on school connectedness. The literature review will look at two contributing themes to student disconnectedness, which may in turn have an effect on the achievement gap: (1) Student-Teacher Relationships, (2) School Connectedness and Race. In order to develop a robust review, this in-depth review of current literature will lay the foundation for the study on the impact of teachers’ racial differences on student connectedness and success.

Demographic Imperative

A major issue facing our nation is the cultural gap. Such gap is the mismatch between the United States’ teaching force and the K-12 student population, which is
growing significantly more diverse (Banks, 1993; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Hale et al., 2007; Lowstein, 2012; Picower, 2009). As the disconnect between teachers and students grows along racial lines, it may continue to negatively affect minority students across the nation who are already at-risk for many reasons. The term "demographic imperative" aptly describes the racial and cultural gap between white teachers and minority student populations (Banks, 1993).

Our nation’s student population is vastly changing. At the current rate, approximately 45% of the student population is made up of minority students from racially and culturally diverse groups. Minority students now make up more than half the student population in Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, New Mexico, Nevada and Texas. It is projected that by 2035, students of color will be the majority in the United States school system (Amatea et al., 2012; Banks, 1993).

In contrast, white educators account for 83% of the teacher workforce nationwide. The White European American teachers are typically women from middle-class backgrounds and speak only English (Banks, 1993; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Hale et al., 2007; Lowstein, 2012; Picower, 2009). Such teachers historically have had little or no preparation in working with children of another cultural background, thus bring little cross-cultural knowledge or experience to the classroom (Lowstein, 2009).

The cultural gap that exists between our nation’s schools and students is clear. The Wall Street Journal (2010) reported that the United States is moving toward a “minority majority” (Griner & Stewart, 2012). The educational community is facing a major shift in student populations, growing daily as our schools are serving students of diverse backgrounds. This premise has been labeled the “cultural gap” theory.
Buenning and Toffleson (2006) defined the cultural gap theory as the cultural difference between diverse and ethnic groups, Mexican-American and Anglo-American educators. However, such a theory can be applied to the difference between all diverse ethnic groups and white educators. The theory suggests that Mexican-American students and their parents have different attitudes toward traditional school values and field independent behavior than Anglo-American students, their parents and teachers. The difference in values, behaviors and beliefs between the two cultural groups presents a defined idea of the cultural gap. Such a cultural gap does not exist solely between Mexican-American students and their teachers nor African American students and their teachers. America’s changing face has transformed race relations from the traditional divide of black and white to a more complex mix of race and culture (Dougherty, 2010). Such a cultural divide between teachers and students presents possible contributing factors to the staggering statistics of educational status amongst minority students in the United States.

Much effort has been made to close the achievement gap, which plagues minority students across the nation through many programs and initiatives. One important factor to student overall success that is frequently missed is the positive relationships connecting students to school (Blum, 2005). In order to understand the possible benefit of positive school connectedness, it is important to have a well-defined understanding of the concept.
Student Connectedness Defined

There has been a vast amount of research focused on increasing student achievement and closing the educational gap between minority children and peers (Aronson, 2004). For many years, low-income and minority children have dropped below their white peers in their academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Often overlooked in attempting to close the achievement gap and improve the academic outcomes for students is the key of building positive relationships and fostering a sense of connectedness with students (Blum, 2005). Student connectedness and the connection youth have to their school continues to be an enormous concern to parents and educators. School connectedness has been found to be highly related to school success, decreased dropout rates, and decreased behavior problems (Brown & Evans, 2005).

Student connectedness, which refers to a school culture in which students have meaningful relationships with adults within a given school, are engaged in the school, and feel a sense of belonging to the school, correlates directly with low instances of student dropout and high academic achievement (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Klem &Connell, 2004). There have been many terms used to describe school connectedness including: school bonding, school climate, and teacher support and student engagement. Improving school connectedness is critical at all educational levels; however, it is particularly urgent in middle school because the roots of alienation begin to take hold during the middle years (Finn, 1993).
Student Connectedness and Success

By high school, many students may not believe that the adults in the school genuinely care about their learning or about them as individuals. Klem and Connell (2004) provided a startling statistic in this regard, stating, “By high school, as many as 40 to 60 percent of all students—urban, suburban and rural—are chronically disengaged from school (p. 262). This idea of school connectedness has been examined from many different fields including medicine, education, psychology and sociology. Because of the breadth of the many related concepts, such research does not provide a strong empirical base; however, there is a weight of evidence that supports how school connectedness can have a substantial impact on the measures of student achievement and behavior.

When students feel connected to school, they feel they belong and their teachers care about them and their learning. Furthermore, students who feel connected to school are less likely to use substances, exhibit emotional distress, demonstrate violent or deviant behavior, experience suicidal thoughts or attempt suicide, and become pregnant (McNeeley, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002). In addition, when students feel connected to school, they are less likely to skip school or be involved in fighting, bullying and vandalism (Schapps, 2003; Wilson & Elliott, 2003). In fact, researchers have found that these students are more likely to succeed academically and graduate (Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow & Usinger, 1995).


**Student-Teacher Relationships**

Relationships, whether positive or negative in nature, have proven to have profound effects on quality of life. Landsford, Antonucci, Akiyama and Takahashi (2005) found that well-being is directly tied to personal relationships. Furthermore, Vanzetti and Duck (1996) found that benefits to relationships include physical support, a sense of belonging, reassurance of worth and validation, and support for the way we do things, and interpret experience. Conversely, the literature indicated that lack of high quality relationships results in negative effects including depression, anxiety and poor health (Landsford, et al., 2005).

Given the importance of relationships in the well-being of human life, it is important to consider the impact of relationships on student connectedness leading to successful outcomes. There has been increasing empirical attention focused on the teacher-student relationship, which has been identified in the literature as a significant factor influencing academic and behavioral success in school. Fay and Funk (1995) found that students who do not feel they enjoy positive relationships with their teachers are more disruptive, less likely to be academically engaged, and are more likely to drop out. Furthermore, the literature reported increased academic improvement, motivation to learn, and significant behavioral improvements when students enjoy caring and supportive relationships with teachers (Eccles, 1993; Baker, Terry, Bridger & Windsor, 1997; Steinberg, Brown & Dornbusch, 1996).

Undoubtedly, one of the attributes to successful teaching is the ability of teachers to connect and cultivate relationships with students. This connection is defined...
by Pianta (1999) as “Emotions-based experiences that emerge out of teachers’ on-going interactions with students.”(pg. 49). The teaching profession is not solely about understanding and conveying the content; it is about being emotional, passionate beings who connect with students and fill work and classes with pleasure, creativity, challenges and joy (Hargreaves, 1994).

Creating environments where students are connected and thrive begins with the culture of the school setting. Danielson (2002) suggested the culture of a school is defined by the norms and values that prevail in the school setting. Moreover, an overarching influence on school culture is through the norms and values that are espoused and put into action through the teachers on the site. Positive teacher relationships with students are a crucial part of building a solid school culture at a school site, which is critical to the success and connectedness of students. Teachers have the power to build students up or tear them down (James, 1994). Myers (2007) agreed that teachers have a direct effect on the attitudes of students in the classroom. Teachers can nurture or negate the innate curiosity students bring to the classroom. As teachers have the most contact with students in a school day, it is up to the teacher whether the students see school as a place to thrive or a place to be feared.

Effective teachers know their students and their unique needs and have a proactive plan to address those needs (Stronge, 2002). Different cultural norms affect students’ perceptions of time, authority, group work and importance in education. Teachers must recognize the differences and be able to address such.

Many students disconnect from school and expend little positive energy towards academics when they are not connected through positive relationships with their
teachers. In order to develop positive relationships, teachers must first understand their students before they can expect their students to understand them. Understanding the needs and beliefs of students is crucial to finding ways to increase motivation to learn (Jones & Jones, 1981). In the empirical study by Roeser, Midgley and Urdan (1996), it was found that students who reported more positive student-teacher relationships also reported greater feelings of belonging, thus felt more academic efficaciousness and less self-consciousness.

Of all the factors that promote student success in the classroom, student-teacher relationships have emerged as one of the most important contributing factors. Pianta (1994) stated that teacher-student relationships are influential on students’ success in school. Students who develop strong positive relationships with their teachers have a greater connection and are more apt to engage. When trust exists between teachers and students, students work harder (Lee, 2007; Noddings, 1992). Pianta (1994) further supported the claim of the importance of student-teacher relationships in school connection, as it was found that relationships are related to children’s social and emotional development.

In their investigation on the impact of student-teacher relationships with students, Murray and Greenberg (2001) concurred with previous findings that suggested supportive student-teacher relationships in the classroom are associated with social, emotional and school-related adjustment. Findings from the quantitative analysis suggested links between students’ relationships with teachers and their bonds with school. Several factors contribute to the success of students in our nation’s school
systems; the literature is conclusive that an important factor in students engaging in the school environment is student-teacher relationships.

**Student Connectedness in Middle School**

At the middle school level, there has been much attention focused on the need for student connectedness. School connectedness correlates directly with low attrition and improved academic achievement (Blum & Libbey, 2004b; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004). A strong, meaningful relationship with an adult at school is the cornerstone of connectedness.

A major contributing factor to the high dropout phenomena, especially amongst minority students, is a lack of connection to the school. A student’s sense of belonging to a school community decreases as they progress through primary and secondary schools (Marks, 2000). In fact, approximately half of students are chronically disengaged from school by the time they reach high school (Klem & Connell, 2004). Furthermore, chronic school disengagement contributes to the dropout rates, as 21% of US students do not graduate from high school (Editorial Project Research Center, 2011).

Student connectedness correlates directly with low instances of student dropout and high academic achievement (Blum & Libbey, 2004). Schools can be a positive or negative force in the life of a child. A meaningful relationship with an adult is one determining factor between connectedness and disconnectedness. In Blum’s (2005)
research, it was concluded that students connect and build relationships with individuals before they connect with an institution.

Libbey (2004) provided nine terms, constructs and measuring tools in defining student connectedness and engagement. Such terms included: positive orientation to school, school attachment, school bonding, school climate, school context, school engagement, school involvement, student satisfaction with school, and student identification with school and teacher support (Libbey, 2004). The most common theme or term identified by Libbey was teacher support.

Teacher support was the center of a study conducted by Ryan and Patrick (2001), where 223 eighth grade students’ perceptions of their environment and motivation were based on such. It was found that teachers who promoted interactions and mutual respect were related to positive change in students’ motivation and engagement. It can be concluded that support from a teacher has a significant impact on the success and failure of students.

By high school, as many as 40 to 60 percent of all students-urban, suburban, and rural-are chronically disengaged from school (Klem & Connell, 2004 p. 262). The middle school years have become very important years for student connectedness. According to the California Healthy Kids Survey, there is a steady decline of caring relationships with adults between grades 5 to 11 (WestEd & California Department of Education, 2005).

Connecting students to school is especially crucial during the adolescent, middle school years. In a study looking for the association between participation and academic achievement in middle school students, Finn (1993) examined 15,737 eight graders
using the NELS: 88 surveys. Based on the study, Finn concluded that engagement in the middle school level has a direct relationship with academic achievement. The study found that 23 percent of eighth graders were non-participants, which made them more likely to drop out. Similarly, Klem and Connell (2004) found that middle school students with high levels of engagement were 75% more likely to perform well on the academic index.

**School Connectedness and Race**

Caring relationships that lead to school connectedness are very important in school settings; however, these components are critically important to minority students. According to the California Healthy Kids Survey, African American students reported the lowest level of engagement in school connectedness. Likewise, Latino students were very low for grades and school attendance (WestEd & California Department of Education, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1994) studied effective teachers of African-American students and found that the students thrived in environments where they felt comfortable and supported.

School connectedness has been found to be beneficial in a variety of contexts; researchers have historically reported lower levels of school connectedness among Black youth in large, diverse, school-aged samples (Bonny et al., 2000). There have been mixed results with research on racial congruence and school connectedness in specific school contexts. In an ongoing representative study of adolescents in grades 7-12, Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001) found a positive relationship between racial
congruence and school connectedness, with students in schools with a higher percentage of same-race peers feeling more attached to their schools.

**Effects of a Non-Culturally Responsive Teacher**

Beyond successful student-teacher relationships and school connectedness as contributing factors to successful outcomes of minority students in schools, one must consider how students are treated in classes in both a culturally responsive and non-culturally responsive classroom and its impact on minority students’ outcomes. This literature review will now review existing literature on the effects of non-culturally responsive teachers on minority students.

The seminal literature in the area of racial match between minority students and teachers suggested there are two types of general explanations regarding the teacher’s influence on student achievement and connectedness. One type of explanation is the teacher’s active effect on student achievement (Dee, 2004), which is defined as a teacher’s effect enacted by racial presence. In particular, this may be the way a teacher allocates time in the classroom, interacts with students, or designs classroom procedures and materials. A second explanation is the teacher’s passive effect, which is defined as race-specific patterns of behavior among teachers. These effects are simply triggered by a teacher’s racial presence, not through explicit teacher behaviors. These are discussed in turn.
Active Teacher Effects on Student Success

Active effects on student achievement and connectedness are explored throughout the literature. Dee (2004) defined an active effect as a teacher’s effect enacted by their racial presence. As a teacher’s race is mismatched with the increasing diverse student populations, race-specific patterns of behavior are present, creating challenges for minority students to achieve positive outcomes. Such examples of active teacher effects on students are patterns of behavior, which in turn are tangible ways teachers can positively or negatively affect students. An example of a teacher’s pattern of behavior may be the way they design classroom procedures or materials. In particular, this may be the time a teacher allocates for certain classroom activities or attention given to specific classes of students.

In a time where the demographics of our nation’s schools are increasingly diverse, a key question to consider is, to what extent do active teacher effects have a negative impact on student success? A number of theories explain ways in which an assignment to a teacher of ones’ own race might influence a student’s achievement. However, there is tenuous research that neither confirms nor denies that students experience positive educational outcomes attributed to academic achievement when they are matched with teachers sharing their same race. The majority of empirical studies focused on specific effects teachers have on minority students’ subjective treatment (Dee, 2004; Taylor 1979).

In her 1979 lab study, Taylor (1979) found that teachers provided less coaching, less positive feedback and spent less time with students of a different race, in particular,
black students. The lab study focused on teacher behaviors on expectations of student abilities in relation to their race. Taylor concluded that black students with white teachers receive less attention, are praised less and are scolded more often than their white counterparts (Dee, 2004; Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, Brewer, 1994; Garcia, Arias & Murri, 2010; Taylor, 1979).

Some studies have examined the impact of teachers who are the same race as a student (own-race) and student achievement. The most rigorous evidence to date has suggested that a teacher of the same race can increase elementary student performance in reading and mathematics (Dee, 2004). In this study, furthering the research of Taylor, Dee examined data from Tennessee’s well-known Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) that initially examined reducing class size. He analyzed over 23,000 K-3 student observations with math and reading scores to measure the cumulative effects of exposure over a number of years to a teacher of one’s own race. The experimental research design effectively compared the performance of students assigned to teachers of the same race as compared to the performance of students assigned to teacher of a different race.

The results of the study indicated that having a same-race teacher creates an increase of performance among students. In this study, there was a three to five percent increase in math scores with a student who had a same race teacher. Furthermore, it was found that there was a three to six percent increase in reading with the same-race environment. Overall, removing all external factors, including teacher ability, it was concluded that on average, students’ performance improved by two to three percent during the first year of being with a teacher of their own race.
Whether or not a teacher’s race has a direct impact on student achievement is yet to sufficiently be addressed. Little empirical evidence can adequately confirm or negate the racial pairings on student achievement (Dee, 2004; Ehrenberg et al., 1994; Garcia et al., 2010; Taylor, 1979). There is little evidence on the relationship between student achievement and a teacher’s race for older students. Ehrenberg et al. (1995) demonstrated evidence of test score improvements for black students with black teachers; however, the study lacked sufficient evidence to conclude the racial congruence affected achievement.

In the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS), researchers matched individual students to teachers to analyze the effects of race, gender and ethnicity. Based on the NELS data, Ehrenberg et al. (1994) found that the match between teacher race and student race had little to do with student academic outcomes. However, the research suggested that in many instances, the cultural gap had a significant role in the teacher’s subjective evaluations of students. The study provided empirical evidence that teachers’ race, gender, and ethnicity are much more likely to influence the passive teacher effects on minority students including the subjective treatment of such students. (Dee, 2004; Ehrenberg et al., 1994)

**Passive Teacher Effects on Student Achievement**

The literature offers a second explanation for why pairings of students and teachers of the same race may have a positive impact on student achievement. Dee (2004) suggested that a teacher’s racial presence and not explicit teacher behaviors may
influence outcomes for minority students. Such effects on student achievement were referred to as passive teacher effects.

There is a body of literature that has suggested a teacher’s race may influence student’s classroom behaviors, scholastic aptitude, and subjective evaluations of students not of the same race through passive teacher effects. Such theories include stereotype threat, deficit thinking, color-blindness and unbiased influences that may have an additional effect on overall student achievement. Each of these is discussed in turn.

**Stereotype threat.** Steele (1997) defined stereotype threat as being at risk of self-confirming a negative stereotype of one’s group. Such threat implies that in situations where students perceive stereotypes might be present, apprehension sets in that slows their academic identification and subsequent achievement. Steele raised the possibility that culturally-shared stereotypes suggesting poor performance of certain groups, when made salient in a context of involving the stereotype, can disrupt the performance of an individual who identifies with that group. In this context, students who may fall in a grouping with negative stereotypes may be subject to the stereotype, thus negatively impacting their own success.

The presence of a teacher of the same race may reduce racially-based stereotype threat and boost a minority student’s confidence (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In their research, Steele and Aronson explored the role a racially-based stereotype plays on the intellectual test performance of African American students. In a series of experiments at Stanford University, it was concluded that there was an existence of stereotype threats amongst students while taking the Graduate Records Examination (GRE) when
told beforehand the test was diagnostic of ability. In the stereotype threat condition, students were told their performance on the test would be a good indicator of their underlying intellectual abilities. Furthermore, in the non-threat condition, they were told the test was simply a problem solving exercise and was not diagnostic of ability. African American participants did not perform as well as their white counterparts in the stereotype threat condition, but in the non-threat condition, their performance was equal to that of their white counterparts. In the second experiment, a replication of this effect was provided, but also showed that African Americans both completed fewer test items and had less success in correctly answering items under stereotype threat. In the third experiment, African-American and White undergraduates completed a task that was described either as assessing or not assessing intellectual ability. When the task supposedly measured ability, African-American participants performed more poorly. The test indicated that a stereotype threat was triggered for black students merely by introducing a pretest demographic questionnaire. Based on these series of experiments, Steele and Aronson (1997) concluded that such threat exists amongst African American students, which can negatively impact student success.

**Unconscious racial bias and teacher subjectivity.** Another relevant type of passive teacher effect is a teacher’s subjective evaluation of a student of different race. The literature suggested that white teachers tend to subjectively treat minority students differently than students of their own race. The subjective treatment includes evaluations in grading, tolerance for behavior, and interactions between students and teachers. Such subjective evaluations may have an impact on the retention of minority students, self-esteem and overall positive outcomes.
In a study on the relationship between teacher race and academic outcomes, Ehrenberg et. al (1995) also focused on teacher’s subjective evaluations of students. Such evaluations included the actual grading of tests by teachers. The study found little evidence on student academic performance; however, it did reveal that teachers tended to give higher subjective evaluations to students of the same race. Furthermore, teachers were more likely to give higher grades to students who were the same race as themselves (Dee 2004; Ehrenberg et al., 1995; Taylor, 1979).

Similarly, Downey and Pribesh (2004) examined whether or not white teachers unconsciously rated black students as exhibiting poorer classroom behavior and as being less academically engaged than white students. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten class of 1998-99 (ECLS), as well as data from the 8th graders in the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 NELS, the researchers examined if such bias occurred in both the lower and upper level of education. The study used multiple measures of the two data sets to gauge teachers’ subjective evaluations of classroom behavior. Results of the study indicated that across all dependent variables, black students were typically rated as poorer citizens than white students. Teachers rated black students as exhibiting more problem behaviors than white students. This data indicated that students of a different race than the teacher were generally rated as having poorer behavior. There is further empirical evidence indicating that white teachers evaluate black students’ behavior and academic potential more negatively than those of white students. More specifically, research has shown a correlation between race and academic success in that there is greater academic potential attributed to white students than black students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013).
An additional passive teacher effect that may negatively affect students is an unconscious racial bias of teachers. This bias is defined as unconsciously setting lower expectations for students of color. Such unconscious racial bias of teachers has been attributed to lead to lower achievement for students of color (Castro-Atwater, 2008). In a study of teacher’s beliefs about African American students, Natesan and Kieftenbeld (2013) used a multilevel quantitative analysis of teacher’s cultural awareness and beliefs. During a Houston metropolitan school district professional development on culturally responsive teaching, a psychometric inventory was administered to 1,253 volunteers. The measure used the factor of teacher beliefs across European American, African American and Hispanic American teachers. The 5-factor analysis found that teachers were most likely to agree they experienced difficulties involving African American families in education, and African American students had more behavioral problems than other students. The literature suggested a possible impact on the performance of minority students may be the teacher beliefs about students of color. The research provided empirical evidence to the unintended biases and thoughts of teachers towards students of different races (Castro-Atwater, 2008; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Rist 2009; Tenenbaum & Ruch, 2007).

Four quantitative meta-analyses supported the idea that unconscious racial bias exists. Tenenbaum (2007) examined whether teachers’ expectations, referrals, and positive and neutral speech differed toward ethnic minority students. Using a quantitative meta-analysis, a total of 39 group samples examined differences in teachers’ expectations based on children’s ethnic backgrounds. There was an overall effect for the measure of students’ ethnic backgrounds in the findings. It was found that
teachers held more positive expectations about European American children compared to Latino children and African American children. In contrast, teachers held significantly more positive expectations for Asian American children. In the study, African American, Asian American and Latino students were compared to European American students. The study found through three out of four analyses, in general, teachers comprised of mostly European American teachers favored European American students over the minority students. The meta-analysis suggested that teachers’ expectations vary with students of ethnic backgrounds (Tenenbaum, 2007).

**Culturally deficit thinking.** The final and perhaps most prominent passive teacher effect on minority students is what is referred to as Culturally Deficit Thinking. There is a wealth of literature that has explored this idea and demonstrated that individuals and systems negatively impact minority students through such thinking. The phenomenon of Culturally Deficit Thinking can be understood as one forming low expectations of an individual, with a narrow focus on the weakness, which obscures the view of one’s abilities (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ulluci & Battey, 2011; Weiner, 2006). According to this theory, the difficulties of diverse students are socio-cultural rather than genetic. It is thought that deficiencies in the family life, such as a disorganized family life, inadequate sensory stimulation, or inadequate child rearing practices, deprive culturally diverse students of the experiences they need to excel academically. This ill-informed notion assumes that students cannot achieve because of their culture, ethnicity, language or race. In other words, the students’ home cultures are deficient in some way that hinders them from succeeding in school settings.
Educational practices can be limiting when the experiences of students of color are delegitimized, cultural practices are framed as deficient, and home language is forced to stay home. There is much literature that indicated how deficit views result in poorer educational experiences for students of color (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Ulluci & Battey, 2011; Weiner, 2006). As teachers passively enact a deficit view of minority students, the student enters the classroom at a disadvantage. Although not intended, teachers may hold limited views of such students and their potential, which may limit their academic performance in the class.

Valencia (1997) referred to deficit thinking as the dominant paradigm that shapes U.S. educators’ explanations for widespread and persistent school failure among children from families of color and low-income homes. Such deficit thinking is often used as an explanation or, rather, excuse for student performance in diverse school settings. Garcia and Guerra (2004) presented a conceptual framework for the deconstruction of deficit thinking through staff development. Through staff development, deficit thinking can be challenged and reframed. Garcia and Guerra (2004) suggested through staff development, participants are forced to grapple with and often reject their previously held deficit views and acknowledge their personal role in student success.

Furthermore, because of such deficit thinking, a vast majority of educators, including superintendents, view the broad-scale underperformance of children of color as inevitable, something that is not within their power to change (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Deficit thinking continues to be used to explain poor performance of minority
students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich 2001; Ulluci & Battey, 2011; Weiner, 2006).

**Color Blindness.** In addition to deficit thinking, many teachers struggle with “color blindness” as it relates to students of diversity in an educational setting. Color blindness is rooted in the belief that race and race-based differences should not be a factor when decisions are made (Apfelbaum, Norton & Sommers, 2012; Ullucci & Battey, 2011). As noted by Ullucci and Battey (2011), “Teachers cannot see racial inequities if they position race as insignificant in schooling and see racism as a historic artifact” (p.1196). Ullucci and Battey (2011) stated that color blindness manifests itself in different forms. Such manifestations range from the unchallenged hiring practices based on race to accepting as appropriate the omissions of people of color from the curriculum. Furthermore, color blindness can further be seen through teachers in where they send their children to school, where they live, their daycare, doctor, lawyer or others with whom they associate on a regular basis. Such unconscious color blindness carries over into the classroom.

The literature indicated that research findings in the area of teacher expectations are that teachers do hold race and ethnicity-based expectations for their students. Empirical evidence suggested that white teachers have unintended negative racial bias towards students of color. The literature and research clearly pointed to a correlation between student and teacher race and its impact on student achievement (Castro-Atwater, 2008; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013; Skrla & Scheurich 2001; Rist, 2009; Tenenbaum & Ruch, 2007; Ulluci & Battey, 2011; Weiner, 2006). In a survey article, Ferguson (1998) concluded that the racial differences
between students and teachers did appear to influence educational outcomes. Minority students may face challenges when paired with a white teacher in a classroom.

The research indicated that cultural deficit thinking passively affects student outcomes in our nation’s schools (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ulluci & Battey, 2011; Weiner, 2006). The racial influence of white teachers on minority students has been seen through the literature in both active and passive teacher effects. Such effects have been proven to negatively impact overall student outcomes through several empirical studies. As our nation continues to experience a growth in diversity, a focus on teacher preparation is important. The following section will focus on how preservice white educators are prepared to educate minority students to minimize negative active and passive teacher effects.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

There is a body of research that has highlighted the necessity of meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of culturally diverse and underserved students in order to close the achievement gap. The majority of the teaching force is not prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds (Crosby, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2012). With the changing demographics of public schools, it is imperative for teachers to develop a set of skills and knowledge to provide engaging learning opportunities for students of all races. The cultural experiences of students significantly impact how they respond to classroom experiences (Ginsberg, 1995).
Culturally proficient teaching, also known as culturally responsive teaching, is based on the premise that students learn best when the academic skills and content are situated within the students’ frames of reference and lived experiences (Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as “Using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 218). Culturally responsive teaching enables teachers to articulate a vision of teaching and learning in a diverse society to systematically guide the infusion of multicultural issues through the curriculum (Villegas & Lucas, 2012). In culturally responsive classrooms, gaining students’ cooperation involves establishing a classroom atmosphere in which teachers are aware of and address students’ cultural and ethnic needs, as well as their social, emotional and cognitive needs (Brown, 2004). As a result, Gay (2002) suggested the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters.

Ginsberg (1995) suggested that any educational or training system that ignores the history or perspective of its learners or does not attempt to adjust its teaching practices to benefit all its learners is contributing to inequality of opportunity. Effective teaching requires mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Gay (2000) provided a framework for understanding teachers who possess such knowledge and skills, known as culturally responsive teachers (CRT). Gay (2002) suggested that effective culturally responsive teachers have the ability to apply both knowledge of student populations and subject matter. Gay (2000) further defined culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and
performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students. Part of this knowledge includes understanding cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups.

Teachers are underprepared to adequately provide a learning environment that is culturally responsive. The problem rests with that fact that most teachers of diverse students are inexperienced middle-class European Americans, especially in urban schools as Crosby (1999) indicated:

The teacher turnover rate in the urban schools is much higher than suburban schools. The result is that urban schools, especially those in inner cities, are often staffed by newly hired or uncertified teachers. These teachers, who were trained to teach students from middle class families and who come from middle class families themselves, now find themselves engulfed by minority students, immigrants and other students from low income families-whose values and experiences are different from their own (p.302).

The knowledge that teachers need to be prepared to teach culturally diverse groups of students goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that such groups have different values (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching involves purposely responding to the needs of the culturally and ethnically diverse students in their classrooms. CRT acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school realities, and includes a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles. Culturally responsive teachers incorporate multicultural information, resources and materials in what they teach.
Sleeter (2008), in her study of preservice preparation of teachers, found that many teachers were underprepared to teach students of diverse and ethnic populations. They lacked adequate skills to provide such strategies as defined by Gay (2000). Teachers were underprepared to address the diverse needs of a multiethnic classroom. The study found that both at the state level and federal level, education’s definition of “highly qualified teachers” was not adequate in serving the diverse populations in our nation. Such teachers only became highly qualified through completing a credential program. Sleeter (2008) suggested that “highly qualified teachers” should be given substance, including strong teacher preparation for teaching diverse populations. It can be concluded that in order to engage all students in learning in our nation’s classrooms, a focus on preparing culturally responsive teachers equipped to serve the needs of the diverse student groups in our nation’s schools is of importance.

To engage diverse learners, teachers must first see students as capable learners. Villegas and Lucas (2002) outlined the skillset that effective culturally responsive teachers possess to engage diverse learners. Successful teachers first understand how learners construct knowledge, knowing that prior knowledge may be different per learner. Culturally responsive teachers learn about their students’ lives in meaningful ways. They are socioculturally conscious, as the person’s worldview is not universal, but profoundly influenced by life experiences. Teachers hold affirming views of students, use appropriate instructional strategies, and advocate for their students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).
Summary

Figure 1.1 illustrates the connections in the literature and two essential factors of student connectedness in classrooms taught by teachers of a different race. The figure summarizes the literature reviewed.

The research literature established two possible contributing elements that mediate a sense of connectedness to school: (1) Student-Teacher Relationships and (2) Culturally responsive teaching. Each factor impacts the degree to which minority
students may or may not connect to school, thus impeding their behavioral and academic success.

**Student-Teacher Relationships.** When students feel connected to school, they have a sense of belonging, knowing their teachers care about them and their learning. The research reviewed emphasized the importance of student-teacher relationships and its impact on student connectedness. Much attention has been given to the student-teacher relationships having a significant impact on influencing academic and behavioral success in school.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** With the changing demographics in our nation’s schools, it is important for teachers to have a skillset to provide engaging opportunities for students of all races. The literature reviewed provided an understanding of culturally responsive teaching and its importance on the success of minority students. Furthermore, the literature reviewed the negative effects of non-culturally responsive teaching.

**Cultural Gap.** The literature reviewed also suggested that a cultural gap exists between white teachers and the increasing minority population in our nation’s schools. The review provided a base for the need to further explore effective teaching practices for students of a different race than their teacher. Through the expansive review of literature on the connections between students and teachers of a different race, this dissertation will expand on the existing literature through a study of the impact of learning outcomes and student connectedness by teachers of a different race. This review provides the framework for the proposed study that will examine the following guiding questions:
(1) What factors create positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race?

(a) How do students describe the social and learning environments in classrooms taught by teachers of a different race?

(b) How do teachers describe the social and learning environments in classrooms with students of a different race?

The research questions will add to the literature through researching effective white educators who have demonstrated culturally responsive teaching practices in the ability to bridge the cultural gap and provide positive learning experiences for their students. The questions lend themselves to explore what qualities, actions and experiences such effective white teachers provide to connect with minority students in the classroom setting and its impact on such student. Furthermore, the questions will add to the literature on preservice teachers and their preparation for a diverse field of students in our nation’s schools. Such research questions will further the current practices and add, from minority student’s perspective, the qualities and actions that help them connect to school.

The review of literature and the research questions lend themselves to an in-depth study through ethnographic methods. Creswell (2012) defined an ethnographic study as a study of a culture or group. The ethnographic study examined the culture of white teachers who were identified as effective teachers who demonstrated culturally responsive teaching and had an impact on minority students. For the purpose of this study, the term “effective teachers of a different race” encompassed the skillset defined by Villegas & Lucas (2002):
• Teacher understands how diverse learners construct knowledge
• Genuinely learn about diverse students’ lives
• Have sociocultural awareness
• Hold affirming views about diversity
• Use appropriate instructional strategies
• Advocate for all students

In order to address the research questions, this study examined the experiences of teachers who fit the definition above and minority students in their classrooms to aggregate data as to what such effective teachers do in order to successfully connect with minority students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Problem and Purpose

As our nation’s student population grows increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and languages, challenges regarding student achievement remain a top priority for the nation’s educators. One challenge is the persistent cultural gap between the minority students and our nation’s predominantly white teacher force. Minority students in our nation’s school systems top the charts for suspensions and drop outs. The literature showed that one possible contributing factor to the poor educational outcomes of minority students is a cultural gap between the majority of the nation’s teacher force and the growing population of minority students in our nation’s schools. While demographic forecasts indicate there are no major changes expected with regards to the demographics in teaching population, California recently reached a demographic milestone becoming a minority majority in both general population and student population. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to understand the pedagogical steps teachers take to bridge the cultural gap between teachers and students of a different race. This study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What factors create positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race?

(a) How do students describe the social and learning environments in classrooms taught by teachers of a different race?
(b) How do teachers describe the social and learning environments in classrooms with students of a different race?

**Ethnographic Study Methodology**

A qualitative inquiry study with ethnographic tools served as the primary methodology for this study. Ethnographic researchers take an in-depth look at one group of individuals, examining the group where they live or work and developing a portrait of how they interact (Creswell, 2012). Practiced by early anthropologists as a form of fieldwork, ethnography stands alone from other methodologies, as it emphasizes a focus on culture and the revelation of what happens in that culture.

Ethnographic research involves ongoing attempts to understand specific cultures, groups, individuals, events and phenomena in deep and meaningful ways. In order to achieve an in-depth understanding, ethnographies are limited to a single setting, an organization or a group of people (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This qualitative study deeply examined the white middle school teacher culture in a school of predominantly minority students in North San Diego County. This study examined the culture of the classrooms of teachers who demonstrate culturally responsive teaching practices by meeting pedagogical criterion as outlined by Gay (2000). In order to understand the culture of specific classrooms of white culturally responsive teachers, data was collected through three qualitative research methods. Structured interviews, student focus groups, and two sets of classroom observations were the methods used in
this study. Data analysis included coding interviews and focus group transcripts, as well as observation notes to explore data trends.

**Sample and Population**

**Site Selection.** Creswell (2012) defined purposeful sampling as a method to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn about the central phenomenon. The site selected for this study was a middle school in Vista. Vista is a city approximately 40 miles North of San Diego, located in the area of San Diego known as North County. At the time of the study, the middle school served a population of 726 students, 87% Hispanic, 4% White, 2% Black. The teacher population of the site was approximately 35 teachers on staff, comprised of 82% White, 15% Hispanic and 3% Asian.

The school was a federally funded Title I school and was in Program Improvement as defined under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (California Department of Education, 2015). A school receives Title I federal dollars from the U.S. Department of Education to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged students. Program Improvement is defined as a Title I funded school that does not make its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). As a result of being in program improvement, the school had to undergo several provisions to improve achievement and involve the community. Such provisions included creating intervention programs for underperforming students, parent outreach programs, and other outreach efforts to help improve academic achievement. Furthermore, as a result of being in program
improvement, students were able to transfer to non-PI schools and receive transportation at the cost of the district.

This school site was selected due to the demographic divide between the teachers and students. There was an enormous gap between the percentage of Hispanic students (76%) and the percentage of Hispanic teachers (15%). The divide between the minority students and their predominantly white teachers provided the researcher with an opportunity to closely examine the research questions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 – Julie</td>
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<td>1- Semi-Structured Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2- Classroom Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2- Jessa</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1- Semi-Structured Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2- Classroom Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3- Molly</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1- Semi-Structured Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2- Classroom Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Focus Group 1</td>
<td>All Participants Minority students</td>
<td>1- Lunchtime Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) 6th Grade Students</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Focus Group 2</td>
<td>All Participants Minority students</td>
<td>1- Lunchtime Focus Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>(7) 7th/8th Grade Students</td>
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There were two phases of participant selection in the qualitative study. The first phase involved selecting 3 teachers from the selected middle school. Teachers were selected based on the school site principal’s identification of teachers who had strong
teacher-student relationships and met the criteria of a culturally responsive teacher by Villegas and Lucas (2002). Teachers who were selected were invited to attend a semi-formal interview and underwent two separate (30 minute) classroom observations. Each participant received a gift card for their participation.

The second phase of participant selection consisted of two student focus groups. Students were selected by the site principal and community liaison to represent a broad base of students from highly connected students to students who struggle in school due to behavior, grades and attendance. Access to student’s grades and discipline records were required to assist in identifying possible candidates. From the list of possible participants, two groups of 5-7 students were selected. The selected students were sent an invitation to participate in a lunchtime focus group. Students were provided lunch for their participation.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data collection took place over a two-month period from February 2015 to March 2015. All data gathered from participant resources were collected with explicit permission from the participants (See Appendix) and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines.

**Semi-Structured interviews.** Participant teachers completed a semi-structured interview based on principles of Appreciative Inquiry. Such inquiry method is used as an entry point for individuals to participate in dialogs and share stories of strengths, achievements and high-point experiences in order to uncover the positive core of the
organization (Cooperrider, Whittney, & Starvos 2003). The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to uncover successful experiences of white teachers teaching students of different races.

The identified teachers were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes by a co-researcher, Josie Gomez. Interview protocols are included in Appendix (A).

**Focus group.** Two focus groups were comprised of students at the same middle school in North San Diego County based on principles of Appreciative Inquiry. The focus groups were conducted at lunch by co-researcher, Josie Gomez, in a group setting. To account for cultural differences between white teachers and minority students, this focus group consisted of minority students. These focus groups consisted of 7 student participants each. The focus group was held during lunchtime, and students received a free lunch. A focus group protocol is included in Appendix (B).

**Classroom observations.** Each teacher participant was observed by co-researcher, Josie Gomez, on two separate days for 30 minutes. The co-researcher recorded interactions and transcribed each observation to capture notes on the teacher-student relationships. An observation protocol was used in order to guide the observations. An observation protocol is included in Appendix (C). Each observation was completed during the two month window of the data collection. Observations took place at two different times of the school day to account for varied groups of students. Different subjects observed included English Language Arts 6, 7, 8, an elective class, as well as a reading intervention class titled Read 180. To account for consistency, at least 1 student from the focus groups was observed in each class.
Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the data that is accumulated to increase the researchers' understanding and enable the researcher to present the information to others. It involves systematically establishing and organizing the interviews, transcripts, and other collected data. Data analysis is dependent upon working and organizing data, arranging the data into manageable units, synthesizing the data, examining patterns, finding out what is important and what needs be learned, and determining what is worthy to tell others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

In order to analyze the researcher's data, the audiotapes from the focus groups and individual interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher. Transcripts from the 6 classroom observations were provided by co-researcher, Josie Gomez. Data received from the interviews, observations and the focus groups were organized and synthesized by the researcher. Once all the data was transcribed and organized, all the data were initially read through by the researcher. All data was also evaluated by NVivo, a software program that examines qualitative data and conducts an analysis to begin to look for patterns. Through the NVivo analysis, a general idea of themes was formed, which guided the following analysis through coding. The initial analysis included closely examining the data, noting themes that seemed to emerge. After an initial analysis, three overall themes emerged, thus further reading of the data involved highlighting themes and sub-themes based on color codes. All data was synthesized to identify patterns that may have been present in participants' responses during interviews, observations and focus groups. Once initial emergent themes were
identified by the researcher, the initial findings went through a more in depth analysis to test emerging themes through examining the triangulated data. Upon further refinement, the researcher concluded there were three emergent themes to be discussed in the following chapters.

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited in terms of generalizability because the data collection took place at only one site in North San Diego County. Likewise, since the study was conducted with Latino students, the results of the study may be generalized more appropriately to Latino students only, rather than minority students as a whole. A third limitation was that the research methodology called for student focus groups, whereby the data was dependent on the responses of middle-level students.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to uncover pedagogical steps teachers can take to better create connectedness amongst students in courses taught by teachers of a different race that may contribute to positive learning outcomes. Student connectedness was examined through a qualitative study to uncover the perceptions of both students and teachers in terms of social environment in courses where teachers do not share the same race as their students. Both teacher and student participants were asked about their social and academic experiences in courses taught by teachers of a different race. This chapter presents the analysis of the qualitative data that provided information from teacher interviews, student focus groups, and teacher observations.

Qualitative data was gathered through multiple classroom observations, interviews with each teacher, and two student focus groups with middle grade level student participants in grades 6 through 8. Interviews were followed by two separate classroom observations of each teacher during their instruction. This chapter will explore the themes that emerged as a result of the classroom observations, interviews and focus groups.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the questions related to:

(1) What factors create positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race?
(a) How do students describe the social and learning environments in classrooms taught by teachers of a different race?

(b) How do teachers describe the social and learning environments in classrooms with students of a different race?

In relation to answering these questions, data was gathered from three white teachers at a school in Vista California through interviews and observations.

Table 4.1 Participant Experience

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
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<td>Participant 1: Julie</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2: Jessa</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3: Molly</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, two student focus groups were conducted, comprised of students whose race was different from the teachers. Each teacher taught a different course and grade level. The students in the study were in grades 6, 7 and 8 and were both male and female.

The names of the participants have been changed to ensure anonymity. Additionally, a brief profile of each of the interviewees is presented first to offer further contextualization and understanding of the teacher in their relationship to the school and students.
Participant Profiles

Participant 1: Julie

Julie was a 7th grade English Language Arts teacher at Vista Middle School. She also taught two classes of 6th grade Academic Language and Literature, a course offered to English learners to support their language acquisition. Her teaching career began 18 years earlier as she entered the teaching field to further her passion for teaching English. The daughter of a teacher, Julie has been around education her whole life. Julie’s approach to teaching was reflective of a constructivist approach. She viewed her job as a teacher along the lines of a teammate, whereas she is part of a team and they move together. She believes that all members of the class, both students and teacher have something to bring to the experience, and they are going to join and do the journey together to learn from one another. Early in Julie’s career, she spent 10 years in Ecuador where she became a self-proclaimed “Latin at heart.” While working in Ecuador, she worked with all socioeconomic levels, from very wealthy to rather poor. Julie believed her cross-cultural teaching experience gave her a solid foundation for teaching in a multicultural environment.

Participant 2: Jessa

Jessa was a reading intervention teacher at Vista Middle School. She taught a reading intervention class that worked with students who were more than a year behind in reading. In her 10th year of education, Jessa had a variety of experiences. She spent
6 years as a guidance counselor in Boston. Since her experience in Boston, Jessa has been a middle school teacher. At an early age, Jessa always felt she had a natural rapport with anyone who was younger than her. She was always that person who everyone came to for advice. Jessa felt that she excelled in being able to break things down for people and help them understand. It is with this experience, that Jessa became an educator. Her philosophy in teaching was to hold students to high expectations and watch them rise to the challenge no matter who the student is. She believed that through loving students and caring for them, they can accomplish more than they ever thought they could. She strives to makes her students feel important every day which she attributed to being able to connect well with her multicultural students.

**Participant 3: Molly**

Molly was a 7th grade English Language Arts teacher, as well as an 8th grade Design Lab teacher at Vista Middle School. This was Molly’s first full-time teaching assignment. Prior to this year, Molly had been a student teacher at the same middle school the previous year. Molly grew up with amazing teachers and parents who were teachers. Growing up in such community, Molly decided she wanted to become a teacher. After her studies at UCSB, she began her teaching career in Vista. Molly’s approach to teaching was in development. However, she stated that she is very passionate about literature and very passionate about her students. She believed that finding the happy medium between love and support, being their advocate, and really
rooting for her multi-cultural students helped them to succeed. She believed with this approach, she is able to get her students excited about literature.

**Student Participants**

The 10 students selected for this study were middle school students from Vista, California. Vista is a city approximately 40 miles North of San Diego, located in the area of San Diego known as North County. All 10 middle-level students who participated ranged from grade 6 to grade 8. Student participants were selected by the school community liaison and principal to represent a broad range of student performance ranging from highly engaged to low achieving. Both focus groups contained 2 high performing, 2 low performing, and 1 middle of the road student. In total, 5 male and 5 female students were selected. All student participants were of Latino descent. Students participated in a 30 minute focus group during their lunch period.

**Results**

In analyzing the data, there were three categories that emerged, giving insight into the research questions. The three categories were: 1) empathy, 2) shared stories, and 3) understanding. All three categories were connected to trust. Without trust, each category would not exist; thus, trust serves as the foundation and result of the three categories. Using the lens of a culturally responsive teacher, it became apparent that
each participant in this study consistently enacted all three categories to successfully connect with students of a different race. See Figure 1.2.

![Figure 1.2: Pyramid Themes](image)

**Figure 4.1: Pyramid Themes**

The three teachers interviewed were very knowledgeable of the role each of these categories played on their ability to connect and sustain positive, productive relationships with their students. The teachers, ranging from new teacher to very seasoned veteran, provided a clear picture of pragmatic approaches teachers can take to create a classroom environment that supports student connectedness across all racial lines. The teachers spoke volumes about how they connect and provide a classroom where all ethnicities are embraced, and every student is provided the opportunity to connect and have positive learning experiences.

Within each of these three main thematic categories, a number of sub-themes emerged, which serve as pragmatic approaches in the teaching field. Many of the thematic categories are interrelated to each other.
Themes

Figure 4.2: Pyramid Caring Relationships

Caring Relationships

“They become a person instead of just a name.” (Julie)

“They don’t just teach, they get a relationship with us.” (Student 4)

Each of the teacher participants interviewed spoke volumes of how building genuine caring relationships with students who were of a different race was a factor in bridging the cultural gap. In their own unique ways, each teacher spoke of creating an environment that builds relationships to best connect with each student. Furthermore, through the classroom observations, their reports were confirmed. Last, in the student focus groups, it was evident that students felt that an environment where they felt the teacher genuinely cared and was available to them helped contribute to their sense of belonging.

Within this theme, the following sub-themes emerged in contributing to building genuine caring relationships: a) availability, b) family community, c) genuine interest,
and d) high expectations. Each of these sub-themes will be discussed to help define and support the idea of building genuine relationships with students of a different race.

**Availability.** An early theme that emerged with each participant was the availability of each teacher. It was evident that students felt comfortable approaching their teacher both during school and after. Teachers made themselves available for the students. In the focus group, students talked about how they felt cared about by their teachers. It was evident that teachers were intentional on spending time with the students to build relationships.

**Table 4.2: Availability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>“She just takes a lot of her time to put in for her students”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>“Even though it’s on their lunch period and they have things to do, they still make time to listen and try to help you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>“They listen to our family problems and problems we have”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked, the teacher participants discussed ways in which they build caring relationships through being available and approachable to students:
Table 4.3: Caring Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Julie</td>
<td>“I let them come to me and so one of the things we did, especially as they got really excited about narrative writing is I created a club so those kids that want to do find they can connect with me. I do my best to remember people’s interests and ask them.” “I have one little gal Morgan, she is a gifted writer. She has stories coming out of her head all over the place. They kind of spill out of her and she is so excited. She was just sharing like yesterday, she came in and sat and worked on her stories. Telling me about her relationship with her dad.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jessa</td>
<td>“They come to me with whatever they are dealing with. They can come in anytime. When they trust you, they come to you for what might be going on at home or what might be happening in their personal lives and they come to you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Molly</td>
<td>“Be really open because if you listen they will tell you…provide a lot of time for them to share their thoughts…being open and listening.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each teacher participant shared examples of how they connected to students of a different race. Within each example, it was evident that being open and available played a major factor in the teachers’ ability to connect with their students. Molly described setting up a club that enabled students to come after school and build relationships. She indicated that the additional time spent building relationships helped her build rapport with her students. Other teachers indicated similar occurrences in building relationships with students.
Table 4.4: Student Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>“I would just walk and talk with her, I asked her what were her goals and what she wanted.” [Julie talking about a positive interaction with a difficult student]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>“I have this one student, Evelyn. She is wonderful, such a driven smart student. She was really quiet at the beginning of the year, but when she started my stress relief club, we had this rapport, and she talks to me but she never talked in class” [Teacher continued to share story of how Evelyn opened up after school and said some profound statements that she would have never stated in class]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each participant shared, in common, the fact that they made themselves available to students. This in turn created a space for building strong, genuine caring relationships with students. As a result, the teachers were able to connect with students, creating classroom environments where students were able to thrive. Being available to students was an important sub-theme that contributed to building caring relationships with students of a different race.

**Family community.** Each of the teacher participants in this study described how building a sense of family community in the classroom environment was a factor in building relationships with their multicultural students. Additionally, students in the focus group spoke of how a community feel helped their sense of belonging, which in turn connected them with the school community.

Each teacher participant was asked about how they build relationships with their students.

They responded:
Table 4.5: Building Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Julie</td>
<td>“Very much more informal than the formal teacher up front and students over here, because I really try and make it like this is your class...building relationships, because my philosophy is without rapport and relationships you won’t get far.” “We all have something to bring to this experience, and we are going to join and do this journey together and learn from one another.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jessa</td>
<td>“The first 2 weeks is all about team building and making sure we are working together. I always set out TEAM, together everyone achieves more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Molly</td>
<td>“In the beginning of the year, it is a huge push to spend the first few weeks doing community building activities and building the classroom climate. One of the main things is spending the first weeks building the routines and procedures but also just doing all these kind of fun game activities so that everyone gets more comfortable. You are kind of starting from this point that you have to build trust and then you can learn.” “Having a sense of community is essential in succeeding.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked in the student focus group how the student participants felt teachers connect with them and make them feel connected to the school, students responded that having the sense of community and or family feel is essential.

Table 4.6: Student Connection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“They make you feel part of the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“It’s almost like you want them to be part of your family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“They are mostly like family. The relationship feels like our guardian”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“The teacher is our advance teacher and we are really close to her. She feels like family...I trust her.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is evident through the voices of both the students and teachers that building community is an essential component of a classroom environment with students of a different race.

**Genuine interest.** “They are understanding and they show that they really do care” (Student 8).

It is one thing to create a space for students to feel accepted, to create a community where students feel they belong, and a major factor in building caring relationships is showing a genuine interest in students. During the interviews, each teacher participant commented on how they showed genuine interest for their students of a different race.

### Table 4.7: Genuine Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Julie</td>
<td>“Have empathy and listen and take notes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jessa</td>
<td>“They love to be cared for, and they love to know that they can accomplish more than they ever thought they could. So I make sure they feel important”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They love to be cared for…so make sure they feel important.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Molly</td>
<td>“Be passionate about them (students).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have been gaining their trust and showing them that I genuinely do care about them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, during both student focus groups, students commented on how each of their teachers showed genuine interest in them, making each student feel a sense of belonging.
During the focus group, one of the students remarked about how he did not feel that any of his teachers cared for him. It is important to hear this side, which added to the data that genuine interest is of much importance. “My relationship with my teachers is a little shaky...I don’t feel like they really care…they just tell me to do my work.” (Student 9)

The absence of genuine interest in this student left him feeling like his teachers did not care about him. When asked, the teacher participants spoke about building relationships and showing an interest in their students.

It is seemingly evident that the popular saying, “They don’t care what you know until they know how much you care,” is backed with data through this study. Without a genuine interest in students, the relationship is tough to build.

**High expectations.** The last contributing factor found to be evident in building caring relationships with multi-cultural students was that teachers hold students to high
expectations. Through the interviews with both teachers and focus groups with students, all stakeholders suggested that expectations played a pivotal role in building a trusting, genuine relationship.

**Table 4.9: Building Trust**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>“He makes us first try...he wants us to be independent.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>“Even though you feel really close to them, they are not afraid to give you advice or constructive criticism. They are not going to just be nice with you- they will give you the criticism to get better.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.10: Teacher Perceptions on Trust**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 2 Jessa</th>
<th>“They love to be cared for and they love to know that they can accomplish more than they ever thought they could.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The expectations we hold them to really help them rise.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I hold them to high expectations and they rise to the challenge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3 Molly</td>
<td>“Have high expectations, but be flexible.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A crucial part of building a genuine caring relationship is to hold students to high expectations. Student data suggested they wanted to be held to high expectations.

Observation data confirmed the teachers’ self-reported beliefs and strategies obtained during interviews. The theme of caring relationships was observed in the classroom. Observation data are included in the table below. Each teacher, in her own
way, through interactions in the classroom demonstrated such relationships during the observations:

**Table 4.11: Observed Interactions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Observed Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant 1 Julie</strong></td>
<td>- Teacher says, “What happened to your finger?” Student shows teacher his finger and she asks, “Was it broken?” Student says, “Yes it was”. Student at same table says he forgot his iPad. Teacher says “I can loan you mine and gets her iPad to let him use”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Participant 2 Jessa** | - Teacher and students ask each other questions.  
- Teacher says good morning and smiles really big while she takes her tardy slip from a late student. Student smile back and goes to her seat. |
| **Participant 3 Molly** | - Students and teacher speak and interact with each other without hesitation and/or concern. She notices and asks him what he’s working on. He responds inappropriately and she re-directs him. She does not fall into arguing with him or anything to embarrass him. She simply reminds him of what he needs to be working on, tells him to start working on it, and lets him know that if he doesn’t start working on it, she will have him sit somewhere else where he is not distracted. He is quiet and seems to start working.  
- Close to the time the bell is going to ring, students get their things ready and wait. During this time, the students ask the teacher how their evening was and initiate and have small talk with her. She responds to them. Students and teacher have an obvious mutual respect for each other. |
Shared Stories

An emergent factor that creates connectedness in middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race is the power of the story. Each participant described the sharing of stories and how this impacted their relationship with their students. In the context of this study, story-telling is a factor that goes both ways between student and teacher. Both groups spoke to the importance of both students sharing stories and teachers sharing stories.

Within the thematic category of storytelling, it became apparent that there were 4 sub-themes that contribute to the power of stories. Such sub-themes are: a) Inquiry, b) shared interests, c) shared experiences, and d) shared struggles. Each of these sub-themes were interrelated to each other and formed a nuanced collective experience of shared story.
Inquiry. All participants used forms of inquiry with their multi-cultural students to gain a better understanding of their students. Each teacher spoke of the importance of telling stories, and intentionally set time aside and asked questions to get to know their students beyond their name. An evident sub-theme throughout the interviews and observations was the time dedicated to ask questions of the students’ lives. When asked how they get to know their students, all participants shared that it takes a form of questioning.

Table 4.12: Questioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Jessa</th>
<th>Molly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Participant 1 Julie**: “I invite them to share”
  - “Listen and take notes”
  - “I talk to them individually and see what’s going on.”

- **Participant 2 Jessa**: “I turn it back on them and find out what is going on with them.”

- **Participant 3 Molly**: “It is just as important for me to provide them with opportunities to talk about themselves.”
  - “If you listen, they will tell you.”

Indeed, inquiry was a common theme that emerged throughout each interview and focus group. As reported by a student, “They listen to our family problems and problems we have.” (Student 2)

Inquiries form the open door to students that helps build the foundation of trust. When teachers actively open the door of inquiry and provide time to ask questions, connectedness amongst students is built.
**Shared interests.** An additional sub-theme that emerged in the focus groups, interviews and observations was that both the teachers and students were sharing their interests with each other. Both the student and teacher were given the opportunity to share their interests, their culture and family. All three teacher participants described how they share bits and pieces about their personal lives and how they listen to their students. Julie indicated that she shares little tidbits about her life to add context to assignments. “I do little shares, and when we are doing an example, I might share something. I will be like, one “of my passions is Baby Bear. I will share pictures, fun things from Facebook.” Similarly, Jessa indicated that she shares little bits of information with her students, so they get to know her. “I share little bits and pieces every once in a while.”

In building a culture where students are able to share about themselves and their personal interests, participant 1 shared that she not only asks them about their interests, but shows a genuine passion for them. “Just asking them about what interests them and showing genuine passion,” Jessa also added, “They love to share with me stories and food items that they tried. And I get very excited.” When asked how participant 3 gets to know her students, she added, “We talk and share things. I tell them something cool that happened on my weekend or something bad.” Furthermore, participant 3 commented, “Every time they learn something new about me. I love learning new things and just embracing that.”

**Shared experiences.** A sub-theme that permeated this idea of storytelling is the real time stories of their experiences shared by both teacher and student. All three participants contributed to this sub theme throughout both their interview and classroom
observations. All three participants deliberately created space and time for students to share current experiences. Likewise, the teachers all noted they share their own real-time experiences throughout the year. Students feel validated when the teacher allows for the shared experiences to occur and genuinely listens to the experiences.

Participant 1, Julie, stated, “Just being real and remembering the little things.” Additionally, Participant 2, Jessa, added, “We are always having discussions about real life situations and making sure everyone is respectful and honoring each other’s creativity.” Participant 3, Molly, added, “Depending on the schedule, I have them talk about their high point and low point. We throw the ball around and snap with the people who have something cool to share about themselves. I feel like adults have a barrier, but kids will share things, like my aunt passed away yesterday, like really vulnerable things so it is kind of cool to keep up.” Throughout the focus group, students validated this sub theme. “You can just talk,” stated one of the students in the first focus group. “They explain their origin, their family, they make it fun” contributed a student in the second focus group.

**Shared struggles.** A final sub-theme that emerged within the theme of sharing stories was the vulnerability shared by both student and teacher participants through sharing their struggles. Demonstrating vulnerability is a factor that helps create connectedness amongst middle school students. In other words, when students feel they can share their difficult situations, they feel further connected.

Both teacher participants and students described vulnerable learning environments that helped bridge the cultural gap between teachers and students. The following excerpts from the interviews and focus groups demonstrate shared struggles:
Table 4.13: Shared Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 Julie     | “She was just sharing, like yesterday, she came in and sat and worked on her stories. Telling me about her relationship with her dad and how the only time they get to talk is when he drives her places.”  
“When they trust you, they come to you for what might be going on at home or what might be happening in their personal lives, and they come to you.”  
“Respect all backgrounds and understand that not everyone was raised the same way you were.” |
| 2 Jessa     | “They come to me with whatever they are dealing with.” |
| 3 Molly     | “If you listen, they will tell you, and the kids have told me things about their friends who were cutting themselves, and their dad hits them.” |
| Student 2   | “For some it’s the fun, for others it’s how they went through many struggles and how they got there, and it’s what they love.” |

During the classroom observations, opportunities for sharing were observed:
Table 4.14: Observed Interactions Sharing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Observed Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant 1 Julie</strong></td>
<td>● Student tells teacher about how busy her week is going to be and how she is worried she will not be able to finish. Teacher asks student to show her what she has so far.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Participant 2 Jessa** | ● So because I was born in Germany, I was born in an international location.  
● Student asks teacher, “How was your weekend?” Teacher says, “Thank you, Joselina, it was a little stressful. Moving lots of furniture.” Teacher is at back couch working with student to edit their work. |
| **Participant 3 Molly** | ● Teacher, “Ladies and gentlemen, I need your iPads turned off and your eyes up here.” “Ok, so I know that you’ve all been working so, so, so, [repeats several time] hard on your celebrations of learning.” Students echo, “Yes, yeah, etc.” Teacher, “Before we start talking about that, let’s check in how are we feeling, how are we doing, does anyone have anything special going on in their life that they want to share, raise your hand?”  
● Teacher asks [while looking to see who is raising their hand], “Who is next?” “Ok, Ricardo, and then Ivan. Ricardo says, “Ok, so what happened was well I had a really fun day Saturday. I went to this park called Dixon park (students laughed because of name) Teacher said, “We’re gonna try that again, we’re all super mature.” Student says, “We didn’t catch one fish, only sea weed.” Teacher asks, “Did you use bait on your hook?” Student says, “Yes, and nothing!” Teacher says, “Fishing is not just about catching fish it’s about hanging out.” Student says, “We went on a boat.” “We stayed at my aunt’s house, and we ate pizza. I played the video games most of the time.” |
The third theme that emerged through this study is described as personal understanding. This final theme or factor in creating positive learning and social classroom environments for students not sharing the same race as their teacher is the product of the first two themes. Once students feel they are in an empathetic environment, they may feel a sense of vulnerability through the shared stories. Once this is in place, it is evident from the data that a personal understanding is developed, contributing to the connectedness of such students. Two sub-themes emerged under personal understanding. When students feel that teachers who don’t share the same race appreciate their diversity, they feel more connected. Second, when students feel teachers are sensitive to cultural differences, they feel more connected.

When asked in the focus groups, if students felt their teachers cared about them, one particular participant had an opposing view of the other students. “I feel they don’t
actually care about me. They don’t understand.” It is through such statements that provide insight into how students feel when they are not understood. On the other hand, students remarked of their teachers: “He just gets us” (Student 4). “They build a relationship with us” (Student 7).

The participants described how they get to know their students and create such empathetic learning environments. Julie described how she sets the stage for understanding each other. “We do a lot of lessons on appreciating diversity.” She described being intentional about providing diversity lessons. Participant 2, Julie, described how she understands that her students have different backgrounds. “My students definitely have different priorities and that is ok. Know what you value and keep your integrity, and if you value Grandma’s birthday more than getting your essay written, that is why we have homework passes.” She also added, “I am here to meet you where you are.” When asked, what advice they would give a new teacher who is entering a diverse classroom setting, Participant 3, Molly, stated, “Respect all backgrounds. Understand that not everyone was raised in the same way you were.” When teachers who do not share the same race, backgrounds or upbringings as their students, the data showed that they must be intentional in building an understanding of their students.

Observation data confirmed the teachers’ self-reported beliefs and strategies obtained during interviews. Observation notes indicated there was a mutual respect evident in each class where students feel understood.
### Table 4.15:Observed Interactions Mutual Respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Observed Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>• Students and teacher have an obvious mutual respect for each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>• Teacher and students ask each other questions openly [seem to have a great rapport with one another. They jokingly ask questions and respond back respectfully to one another].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>• They follow routines and procedures, and the class is very orderly. There is mutual respect for one another.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Summary

This chapter discusses the conclusions for research questions based on data analysis of the qualitative study conducted. Chapter 5 also presents a discussion of the implications for educational practice, pedagogical teaching practices, study limitations, recommendations for future research and a closing summary.

Summary of the Study

Research has indicated there is a major gap that stands as a barrier between minority students and student engagement in our nation’s schools. The gap is a cultural gap that exists between the ever-increasing minority student population and our nation’s overwhelmingly white teacher force. As the face of our nation’s schools rapidly changes, most of the nation’s teachers are white, middle-class, monolingual-English speakers. This cultural gap places a dividing line between students and teachers, which impacts student engagement. In his study of 15,737 eighth graders, Finn (1993) concluded that engagement in the middle school level has a direct relationship with academic achievement. This study was focused on examining the connections between students and teachers.

The qualitative study focused on the following guiding questions:

(1) What factors create positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race?
(a) How do students describe the social and learning environments in classrooms taught by teachers of a different race?

(b) How do teachers describe the social and learning environments in classrooms with students of a different race?

The first phase of this study included the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The second phase of this study focused on the gathering of qualitative data through two separate student focus groups. Last, the third phase included (2) 30 minute classroom observations of each teacher participant. Data were analyzed and triangulated.

Several themes emerged from the results: trust, caring relationships, shared stories, and personal understanding.

**Trust as an Implied Factor**

![Pyramid Findings](image)

*Figure 5.1: Pyramid Findings*
As each major theme emerged in this study, an underlying assumption played an important role in the factors that create positive learning outcomes for students. Although not explicitly stated throughout, each factor was grounded on the foundation of trust. Trust played a cause and effect role in this study, as the absence of trust would prevent the foundational relationships. As evidenced in the reported data, teachers extended trust to their students first, which set the foundation for relationships. Once this was created, students felt the sense of security and returned the trust to the teacher.

Historical, political, scholarly and educational perspectives have attributed trust as a phenomenon bonding people together. Byrk and Schneider (2004) defined trust as the way people bond together and network. Trust is generally defined as people who share common cares and needs and who value trust in their relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Over the years, trust has been defined in many different ways. Although common in our everyday conversations, researchers have used many different definitions of trust. The essence of building, maintaining, and sustaining relational trust has been a significant challenge for people everywhere (Byrk & Schneider, 2004).

Byrk and Schneider (2004) stated that in a school setting, relational trust is viewed as a bonding agent between school members that is necessary to encourage educational support, student success, change and reform. Teachers and students develop and nurture social exchanges, as well as the willingness to be vulnerable toward one another’s expectations and intentions (Byrk & Schneider 2004, Putnam, 2000). Sandel (2009) argued that educators need to use their moral compass in order to
cultivate relational trust with students. Furthermore, teachers need to consider other factors, such as race, culture, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status in order to best connect with students (Sandel, 2009).

In this study, the three emergent themes included actions and behaviors that contributed to building trust. Trust was a product of the three themes that emerged. As each theme is discussed below, it was evident that trust was a major factor in the relationship between teachers and students. Trust was the result of teacher actions. As well, trust enhanced the depth of impact that resulted from the teachers actions. In other words, trust supports connections and connections support the deepening of trust.

Theme 1: Caring Relationships

In the context of answering the research questions, one contributing factor to creating positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race is caring relationships. The major theme of caring relationships was the first theme that emerged after careful and deep analysis of the interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. The data suggested that being available, building a community atmosphere, showing a genuine interest in the lives of students, and holding students to high expectations were all contributing factors in building positive caring relationships with students of a different race. Both student and teacher participants described the social and learning environments as places of genuine care and relationships. In the words of one of the teacher participants, Julie, “without rapport and relationships, you won’t get very far.”
The existing literature indicated that of all the factors that promote student success in the classroom, student-teacher relationships have emerged as one of the most important contributing factors to student success in classrooms. Student-teacher relationships are factors that impact students’ success in schools (Pianta, 1994). When students connect with their teachers, and a trusting relationship is developed, students are more apt to engage. When trust exists between teachers and students, students work harder. Results of this study indicated each of the teachers’ had genuine caring relationships with students, specifically with students of a different race. Each teacher noted that building a caring environment creates a sense of engagement and connectedness. As described in the data analysis, the classroom observations noted the evident relationships were present within each teacher-student interaction. Students felt they had a sense of belonging in classrooms where they felt the teacher genuinely cared.

The subthemes that emerged can serve as pedagogical strategies one can use to build relationships and sustain relationships with students of a different race. The subthemes and resulting pedagogical strategies will be discussed.

*Pedagogical Implications*

**Building genuine relationships by being available.** The findings indicated that each teacher participant was available at many times throughout the day for the students. In exchange, students took advantage of this availability and approached their teachers for assistance to complete schoolwork or to just talk. Each teacher was intentional in making themselves available for the students. As well, students reported
that teacher availability throughout the day made the students feel welcomed and as if they belonged.

**Building genuine relationships by creating a family community.** A second sub-theme in building genuine relationships with students was that each teacher built a sense of family community. Students spoke volumes of how the family community feel helped their sense of belonging. Many comments from the student focus groups stated they “make you feel like family.” A sense of community was intentionally developed by the teachers. They treated their students with the same degree of respect and care as they would their own family. The teachers took time, asked questions, and showed empathy to students, thus, demonstrating genuine care and interest in each student. The teachers invested particular care to connect with those students that didn’t share their racial background, since they knew there might be more distance to bridge to a trusting relationship.

**Building genuine relationships by showing genuine interest.** Another contributing factor in building genuine relationships was that teachers took a genuine interest in their students. “They are understanding and they show you that they really care,” stated a student participant. As teachers connected with students in the class, they listened. The teachers made students feel like they mattered. This was achieved through listening attentively, remembering students as individuals, and engaging with each student. Students engage when they feel that, even though their teachers may not share the same race, their teachers are human and take a personal interest in students beyond the content of their classroom. As remarked by one of the participants, they treated their teachers as part of the school family, not merely a number.
Building genuine relationships by holding high expectations. Findings of this study indicated that part of building genuine relationships involved teachers holding their students to high expectations. Students felt that their teachers care and hold them to high expectations at the same time. Students appreciated when teachers made them try. Likewise, teacher participants commented on how they held students to their high expectations, and each time, students rose to the occasion. It is a necessary balance that teachers show genuine interest, listen, and hold their students to high expectations.

This study indicated that when teachers build close caring relationships with their students, especially when they do not share the same race as their teacher, students feel a sense of belonging. More specifically, when teachers make themselves available, create a learning community that resembles a family, demonstrate genuine interest, and hold students to high expectations, students respond positively and engage with their teacher for the purpose of learning.

Theme 2: Shared Stories

The major theme of shared stories proved to be an important factor in connecting teachers and students of a different race. A common trend woven throughout the data was that sharing stories played a role in building relationships and breaking down barriers between the student-teacher relationships. As a result, students and teachers felt a sense of trust within the classroom. Through the analysis of the data, trends additionally indicated that the stories went both ways between students and teachers.
Telling stories is one of the oldest and most powerful forms of communication known. Stories are a means of gaining new perspectives, exploring moral choices, and gaining insight into character (Killick & Boffey, 2012). Historically speaking, it is not known how humans started telling stories; however, oral storytelling has been an important social experience. Using stories is a powerful way of helping children develop a coherent and positive story of themselves (Killick & Boffey, 2012).

Results from this study demonstrated the power of a story as a profound factor that creates positive learning outcomes and connectedness amongst middle-level students in courses taught by teachers of a different race. Teachers and student participants both commented on how stories have helped them build a sense of connectedness. Stories have helped students and teachers alike cross cultural lines and gain a better understanding of each other. As the literature stated, storytelling is a form of communication, therapy and a means to build positive connections with students.

An important element in this idea of storytelling is that the act of communication goes both ways. In this study, both student and teacher shared stories. Such stories built relationships, trust and a sense of connectedness. Teachers gained valuable insight into students’ traditions, cultural, ethnic, social, socio economic backgrounds, which helped them develop a respect for the student. Likewise, students developed a sense of respect for the teachers, as each participant, in their own way, shared personal stories with the students.

Within the theme of storytelling, there were four sub-themes: inquiry, shared interests, shared experiences, and shared struggles. Each of the sub-themes serve as
pedagogical steps one can take to help connect with students of a different race in the context of a middle-level classroom.

**Pedagogical Implications.**

**Share stories through inquiry.** Each of the participants described their use of stories as a way to connect with students. Each participant indicated that they used a form of inquiry to get their students telling stories. They got to know their students by encouraging their students to share stories. Each teacher invited their students to share in their own way. Observation data confirmed the self-reported data that teachers provided opportunities for students to share, using an inquiry approach, and allowing time for students to share. In the context of a classroom, providing this time and space to share stories through such inquiry strategies has been demonstrated to be important for creating a productive learning environment for students.

**Shared stories through sharing interests.** In the context of a classroom, teachers must encourage students to share their interests as a means to build relationships. Equally, teachers should share bits of information on their interests to build a mutual understanding. There was a two-way dialog with students-teachers that was evident in each of the participants in this study. Students were freely given the opportunity and space to share about what interested them. Teachers shared bits and pieces of their own interests in their own way, which opened the door to humanize both the student and teacher. Each participant shared in the findings how they shared pieces of their own stories with their students. There were many different levels, some teachers shared little while others were much more open. In the end, the teachers shared their interests and allowed the students to do the same.
Shared stories through sharing experiences. Each participating teacher shared that they deliberately created a space and time for students to share their experiences. This helped bridge the cultural gap where teachers may not know specific life experiences of their students. Teachers in this study commented that they encouraged students to share about their life experiences, cultures and values. A greater understanding and respect for each student was built through this sharing, according to the teachers. They dedicated time in class to share; one class spent time each week sharing; others started the class with a sharing time. In order to build relationships, connect students, and truly build positive relationships, a time for sharing experiences is necessary.

Shared stories through sharing struggles. The last sub-theme within storytelling is the space for students and teachers alike to share their struggles. Creating an environment that allows and respects vulnerability with students and teachers is a true contributing factor in building connectedness. In the findings, many students commented that when they shared their struggles with their teachers, they felt validated. This was an important factor in connecting them to school. Creating a culture of respect and trust where such vulnerability exists is crucial to bridging the gap and connecting students and teachers who do not share the same race.

Theme 3: Personal Understanding

A product of the first two themes was the personal understanding developed as a necessary means to connect students in course taught by teachers who do not share the
same race. This theme emerged as the product of building genuine relationships and providing the space for students to share their stories. Within the findings of personal understanding, two sub-themes emerged. When students felt that their teachers who didn’t share their race appreciated their culture/diversity, they felt more connected. Second, when students felt teachers were sensitive to cultural differences, they felt more connected. Each of these sub-themes were interconnected as they were similar in nature.

Students feel connected when their teacher appreciates their culture. Many of the responses to questions in the focus groups identified teachers really knowing their students as a factor that made them feel connected. Data pointed to teachers deliberately creating opportunities not only for students to share, but opportunities to appreciate the diversity in the classroom. Teachers explained how they worked to understand the culture and were even invited to celebrate in one’s Quinceanera. Data collected pointed to teachers developing an understanding that when assignments were late, there may be extenuating factors that could explain.

Students feel connected when their teacher is sensitive to their culture. When students feel that their teachers are culturally sensitive, a greater connection can be made. The findings took an opposite approach and told the story of why a student did not feel connected to school and in fact, had a negative view of his relationships. The frustration, according to the participant, was framed around the teacher not knowing him, not getting to know him, and in the end, not understanding him. On the contrary, several participants in the focus group said their teachers understood them. Thus, they feel connected. When students feel their teachers
understand them, they feel connected. It is through this connection that positive learning outcomes are possible, as students feel connected.

**Pedagogical Implications.** In order to create positive learning outcomes and connectedness in middle-level students in classes taught by teachers of a different race, a teacher should create an environment that is built on cultural appreciation. Teachers should seek to truly know their students, their cultures, backgrounds, traditions and values. As provided by the teacher participants who were identified as successful teachers in diverse settings, teachers need to allow space for sharing, be intentional in asking about cultures, allow students to tell stories about their background, and genuinely listen. Remembering small things about students will carry the connection a long way. In providing a social classroom environment where students who don’t share their teachers’ race can thrive, such pedagogical steps are necessary.

**Implications and Findings**

Based on the discussion of the major themes discovered in this study, the following series of implications can serve as lessons learned to assist pre-service teachers, teachers, school officials, district level officials and teacher educators to close the cultural gap for middle-level students who do not share the same race as their teachers. The multifaceted implications address the cultural gap that may prevent students from connecting to schools, potentially resulting in high levels of discipline, disengagement, and school dropouts (Blum, 2005). The intent of this study was to find pedagogical steps teachers can take to better connect to their students, who don’t share
the same race as their students. Furthermore, this study sought to find how students and teachers described the social and learning environments taught in mismatched classrooms. The pedagogical strategies that were highlighted in this study were:

1. Build Caring Relationships
2. Story-Telling
3. Develop a Personal Understanding

**Building Caring Relationships.** The findings from this study and the research literature base reinforced how inextricably linked caring relationships are to the success of students in school (Eccles, 1993; Baker, Terry, Bridger & Windsor, 1997; Steinberg, Brown & Dornbusch, 1996). Both teacher participants and student focus groups concluded that when teachers build caring relationships with their students, students feel connected and engaged. This comes from an intentional approach that begins on the first day of school and continues through the entire year. In order to build caring relationships, this study found 4 strategies that teachers can take to achieve this factor:

1) Be available. In order to create the space for relationships to grow, one must be intentional to be available for students; 2) Build a family community. A family community is created by creating trust, empathy and treating students as their own children. Teachers can create this environment through creating empathetic relationships where both students and teacher can be transparent, honest and feel a true sense of trust; 3) Show genuine interest. Teachers can create genuine interest through listening to their students, remembering specific details about each student that makes them unique; and 4) Maintain high expectations. This can be achieved through holding students to high standards at the same time building the relational trust. Students need
to know they are capable, and it is the teacher who can give them this belief in themselves.

**Storytelling as a means to student connection.** Often, the belief is held that students are to remain silent in the classroom. As educators, we should build relationships with students by providing opportunities to talk through sharing stories and learning about their backgrounds, challenges and thoughts. Likewise, students want to know about their teacher. Each of the interviewed participants had their own unique way of sharing their stories. In order to create a classroom environment where stories are shared both ways between students and teachers, this study found the following pedagogical approaches:

1. Create the space for mutual storytelling between teacher and student.
2. Encourage sharing of interests
3. Encourage sharing of experiences
4. Encourage vulnerability through sharing of struggles

**Teachers develop an understanding.** One can know a lot about something, yet not truly understand it. This is true for educators and students. As an educator, it is important to not only get to know your students, but truly seek to develop a deep understanding of each unique individual. Findings suggested that the teachers involved in this study understood their students through taking practical steps. Teachers listened to cultural differences, took an interest in the diversity through listening, inquiring and appreciating. Teacher participants went beyond their knowledge of the diverse cultures in their classrooms and sought to understand each individual’s unique story. Participants commented on how they valued each unique story and appreciated
the diversity the classroom brought. Through this appreciation and sensitivity was developed through building empathetic relationships and embracing each other’s culture. Understanding students brings a sense of caring that students feel. When students first feel a sense of caring, they will begin to engage and take an interest. This study found some practical ways to seek to understand students:

1. Listen
2. Demonstrate an Appreciation for Diversity
3. Demonstrate a Sensitivity to Cultural Differences

Ladison-Billings (1995) conducted a 6 year study of excellent teachers of African American Students to find what teachers do to help improve academic performance, given the poor academic performance of many African American students. The findings of the study were rather simple, resulting in the title of the article, “But That’s Just Good Teaching.” The findings of this particular study, similar to the findings of this dissertation, outline pedagogical strategies all teachers can do with all students; however, it is of utmost importance that these strategies are used in classrooms populated by Latino students.

As educators, administrators, district leaders, and teacher education faculty, we must stand in the cultural gap that so often separates our students from our campuses. Schools need to be caring institutions with souls where students feel a sense of belonging. The problem of student disengagement will only continue to grow if we do not take pragmatic steps to fill the cultural gap. This study has offered relevant steps through the eyes of both successful teachers and students who do not share the same race. We must put such steps into practice in the classroom, teach future teachers in our
nation’s teacher prep programs, and build a culture of connection with all leaders from the top to the bottom in our nation’s school systems.

**Limitations of this Study**

The findings of this study are limited in terms of generalizability, because the data collection took place at only one site in North San Diego County. Likewise, since the study was conducted with Latino students, the results of the study may be generalized more appropriately to Latino students only, rather than minority students as a whole. A third limitation was that the research methodology called for student focus groups, whereby the data was dependent on the responses of middle-level students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results and conclusions drawn from this study have resulted in three recommendations for future research. Through this research, various subtopics emerged that led to future research recommendations. Each recommendation will add to the body of research on the nation’s cultural gap. The research in each recommendation will serve as a means to help close the gap we face. The following are three recommendations:

1. The first recommendation for future research is to focus on pragmatic skill sets that prepare teachers to work in socioeconomic disadvantaged schools.
2. An additional recommendation for future research is the circumstances that are preventing a more diverse group of educators as our nation grows in
diversity. Why are only 17% of our nation’s teachers minorities, while over 45% of our nation’s students are of a minority race (Banks, 1993; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Hale et al., 2007; Lowstein, 2012; Picower, 2009)?

3. A final recommendation for future research is to investigate the circumstances and characteristics that differentiate students, high achieving minority students with those who are low achieving. In the absence of relevant achievement data over the past three years, these findings would help paint the picture to create schools that embrace all students and push them to high levels of academic achievement.

Summary and Conclusion

This qualitative study informed, through the lenses of teacher voice, student voice and observation, the pragmatic strategies teachers can use in classrooms to help bridge the cultural gap that we face in our nation. During the spring of 2015, interviews were conducted with each teacher, student focus groups were conducted, and observations were made of each teacher interacting with students. The data from the interviews, focus groups and observations were analyzed, coded, and organized and presented in chapter 4 and 5.

Many studies exist in the literature concerning the importance of student-teacher relationships, as well studies that focus on factors negatively impacting minority students in our nation’s schools. Prior to this study, pragmatic strategies that help connect minority students to teachers not sharing the same race were not apparent. This
study added to the current body of literature through uncovering a pedagogical strategy that can be taught to pre-service teachers, current teachers and administrators. This study is a practical dissertation that can be used to influence practitioners in the classroom.

As an administrator, this study resonates with me as I, too, often see the disconnection between white teachers and minority students. I see the miscommunications, ill-informed assumptions, and negative interactions that further distance minority students in our nation’s classrooms. I see teachers afraid to enter the very neighborhoods where their students live due to fear and uncertainty.

As a result of this study, I have strategies that now can be taught to teachers, shared with administrators, and developed for professional development for educators around the country. These pragmatic strategies are simple, yet often so easily overlooked. This study has made me a better leader, as I have reflected on my actions with students and put the findings into practice. I have seen a difference in my interactions with students and have been able to connect on a deeper level with many students at my site. If we, as educators, can scale these findings and put these pragmatic strategies into action, we will begin to build a bridge over the cultural gap that so easily distances our minority students in classrooms across the country.
Appendix

Appendix A. Teacher Interview Protocol

Opening

1. Could you tell me your name and your role here at Vista Middle School?

2. How long have you been teaching?

3. What led you to the career of teaching?

4. How would you describe your approach to teaching? Or a philosophy of teaching?

5. How do you describe yourself as related to your ethnicity and or ethnic background?

6. Tell me about your school.

7. How would you describe the ethnic diversity of your school?

8. What other factors make your school diverse?

Teacher Student Relationships

1. How would you describe your relationship with your students?

2. Tell me some of the ways that you get to know your students in the beginning of the school year?

3. How do they get to know you?

4. How do you keep up with their lives as the year progresses?
5. How do you know when you’ve “connected” to a student? Tell me about a good relationship you’ve had with a student.

6. How do you handle it when you haven’t “connected” to a student? Tell me about a relationship that wasn’t the best, or wasn’t what you wanted it to be.

Academic Impact of the Student-Teacher Relationships

1. In assessing the value of the student-teacher relationships, I wonder if it has an academic impact. What do you think?

2. Do you have a sense of how the students in your classes are doing academically overall?

3. How do you support struggling students?

4. How do you support students who are doing well academically?

5. If one of your students is struggling in another teacher’s class, do you get involved? If so, what would that look like?

Teacher-Student Interactions and Race

1. How would you describe the relationship between you and the minority students at your school?

2. Tell me about a positive interaction you have had in working with a minority student in your classroom.

3. Tell me about a negative interaction.

4. Tell me ways in which you connect to the minority students in your classroom?
5. How might your students describe you in terms of your cross-cultural abilities to connect with minority students?

6. What advice would you give a new teacher who is entering a diverse classroom setting?

7. As a teacher whose race is different than the majority of your students, tell me about some of the things you do to connect with students outside of your culture.

Teacher-Student Interactions on Discipline

1. What is your first level of intervention when a student misbehaves in class?

Closure

1. How do you think I could figure out if students at your middle school feel connected to school?

2. Is there anything else you would like to share with regards to your experience working in this diverse setting?
Appendix B. Student Focus Group Protocol

1. Could you tell me your name and grade?
2. What do you enjoy about Vista Middle School?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers?
4. Think about your teachers who really care about you. Who are they?
5. What makes you feel that the teacher really cares?
6. How would you describe the relationship between you and that teacher(s)?
7. What kinds of activities do those teachers do to give you a sense of caring?
8. Do your teachers help you academically? How?
9. In what ways, if any, do your teachers who care about you help you feel connected to school?
10. You have some teachers who are a different race than you. Tell me about what it is like having a teacher of a different race?
11. Tell me about how your teachers who are of a different race try to understand you?
12. What do those teachers (the teachers of a different race) do to cause you to want to learn?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share?
Appendix C. Observation Protocol

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<td>• Teacher’s Teaching Style</td>
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