

**Empathic Interaction:**  
**White Female Teachers and Their Black Male Students**

BY

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THESIS

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CAPGW

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. FALSE EMPATHY AND THE VICISSITUDES OF RACISM IN PUBLIC EDUCATION.....	1
A. Introduction.....	1
1. False Empathy.....	4
2. Researcher Positionality .....	8
B. Overcoming the Challenges of Being Ill-Prepared to Teach Black Students..	10
1. “Nice White Ladies”: Moving Away from the Paradigm of False Empathy.....	12
C. Multi-Theoretical Perspectives.....	13
D. Empathic Interaction: White Female Teachers and their Black Male Students.....	18
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	22
A. Understanding Race and Racism in Education.....	24
1. Critical Race Theory in Education.....	26
a) Centrality of Race and Racism and the Intersection with other Forms of Domination.....	29
b) Challenge to Dominant Ideology.....	31
c) Commitment to Social Justice.....	34
d) Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.....	35
e) Interdisciplinary Perspectives.....	36
2. Whiteness Studies in Education.....	38
a) What is Whiteness?.....	39
b) Whiteness and the Work of Teachers.....	42
B. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Framework for Teaching Students of Color.....	46
1. Overview of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP).....	47
2. Challenges for the Implementation of CRP.....	49
3. Social Constructions of Empathy by Scholars of CRP.....	54
C. Empathy.....	58
1. Defining Empathy.....	59
2. Sympathy versus Empathy.....	61
3. Mark H. Davis Multidimensional Framework of Empathy.....	62
4. The Empathy – Altruism Hypothesis.....	68
5. The Development of Empathy.....	70
6. Empathy in the Helping Professions.....	72
7. Empathy as A Tool of the Trade.....	74
8. Implications for Studying the Application of Empathy with Diverse Learners.....	78
a) What has the literature in this section taught us?.....	78
b) Challenges for the Application of Empathy.....	79
D. Summary and Conclusion.....	81

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
III. METHODOLOGY.....	87
A. Conflicts & Contradictions: A Pilot Study.....	89
B. Conceptual Framework.....	92
C. Research Questions.....	94
D. Qualitative Multi-Methods Design.....	95
E. Data Collection.....	96
1. Empathy Survey.....	97
2. Focus Group.....	100
3. Classroom Observation.....	102
4. Interviews.....	107
5. Setting.....	111
6. Sampling.....	112
F. Data Analysis.....	115
1. Qualitative Data.....	115
2. Quantitative Data.....	118
G. Summary and Conclusion.....	121
IV. FINDINGS – PART I – CONCEPTIONS OF EMPATHY.....	124
A. Empathy Survey Findings.....	126
B. Focus Group Findings.....	131
C. Teacher Narratives.....	135
1. Ms. Arnold.....	135
2. Ms. Babcock.....	140
3. Ms. Coleman.....	144
4. Ms. Dantley.....	149
D. Teacher Conceptions of Empathy.....	153
1. Definition of Empathy.....	154
2. Cultivating Empathy.....	155
3. Application of Empathy.....	157
4. Personal Examinations of Empathy’s Application in the Professional Context.....	158
5. Convergence of Teacher Conceptions with the Davis (1994) Model.....	161
6. Interpersonal Reactivity Index and Teacher Conceptions of Empathy.....	164
E. Summary and Conclusion.....	166
V. FINDINGS – PART II – EMPATHIC INTERACTION.....	170
A. Empathic Concern.....	172
B. Perspective Taking.....	178
C. Empathic Interaction: Interaction Narratives.....	183
1. Ms. Arnold.....	184

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
2. Ms. Babcock.....	192
3. Ms. Coleman.....	203
4. Ms. Dantley.....	213
D. Summary and Conclusion.....	222
VI. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	225
A. The Utility of Empathy: Framing Empathy’s Application to the Teaching Profession.....	226
1. Defining the Application of Empathy in the Professional Practice of Teachers.....	227
2. Defining Empathy’s Utility.....	230
B. Empathic Interaction: Utility of Empathy.....	231
1. Risk-Taking/Flexibility.....	235
2. Community & Trust Building.....	241
3. Proactive Interventions.....	247
C. Individual Differences Related to Empathy’s Application.....	253
1. Teacher Comfort with Student-Teacher Difference and Change.....	255
2. Intersecting Personality and the Application of Empathy.....	257
3. Challenges Associated with Empathy’s Utility: Critical Race Perspectives.....	259
D. Empathic Interaction: Implications for K – 12 Education and Teacher Preparation.....	270
1. Becoming a “Down” Teacher.....	271
2. Empathy as Agency.....	274
3. Making the Personal, Professional: How Schools Support the Application of Empathy.....	276
4. Perspective Divergence.....	280
5. Teacher Preparation.....	283
E. Future Research.....	289
F. Conclusion.....	291
REFERENCES.....	294
APPENDICES.....	328
Appendix A: Empathy Survey.....	328
Appendix B: Teacher Initial Interview Protocol.....	334
Appendix C: Teacher Exit Interview Protocol.....	336
Appendix D: School Administrator Interview Protocol.....	337
Appendix E: Student Focus Group Protocol.....	340
Appendix F: Classroom Observation Protocol.....	342
Appendix G: Empathy Rating Scale.....	344
Appendix H: Empathy Survey Recruitment Script.....	345

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Appendix I: School Administrator Recruitment Script.....	346
Appendix J: Student Recruitment Procedure and Script.....	349
Appendix K: Teacher Recruitment Procedure and Script.....	351
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTS.....	352
Teacher.....	352
Administrator.....	354
Students 18 and Over.....	356
Parent.....	358
Online.....	360
Student Assent Form.....	361
VITA.....	362



## LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. DAVIS (1994) EMPATHY PROCESS ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL...	64
II. FRAMEWORK FOR DOCUMENTING THE PROCESS OF EMPATHY BASED ON DAVIS (1994) EMPATHY PROCESS ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL.....	106
III. OVERVIEW OF THE METHOD OF INQUIRY.....	114
IV. TEACHER EMPATHY RATINGS FOR EMPATHIC CONCERN AND PERSPECTIVE TAKING.....	118
V. QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER CONCEPTIONS EXCERPTED FROM THE EMPATHY SURVEY.....	129
VI. FREQUENCIES OF THE APPLICATION OF EMPATHY TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF TEACHING BLACK MALE STUDENTS.....	131
VII. TEACHER-STUDENT CLASSROOM INTERACTION TYPES.....	232

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. The application of empathy in interactions with students.....	231
2. Domains of empathy's utility.....	235

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AI	Academic Interactions
BI	Behavioral Interactions
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CRP	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
CTB	Community/Trust Building
PI	Proactive Interventions
RTF	Risk-Taking/Flexibility
SRI	Social/Relational Interactions

## SUMMARY

Empathy is thought to benefit practitioners in the range of helping professions including nursing, counseling, and psychotherapy. Scholars in the field of multicultural education theorize that empathy improves a teacher's ability to maintain high academic expectations, develop productive relationships with students, and acquire socially and culturally accurate perspectives of students and student experiences. Still the literature in education lacks a cohesive, empirically grounded understanding of empathy's application for individuals teaching across various differences, namely race, class, and gender.

This dissertation study is an examination of empathy's utility for improving student-teacher interactions. The author inquires of a small cohort of White female teachers selected for being perceived as effective teachers of Black male students to ascertain a) how these teachers conceive of empathy; and b) how their conceptions of empathy alongside a more established definition of empathy in social psychology is applied in interaction with their Black male students. Methods of inquiry include interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations.

Findings suggest that empathy is most useful or beneficial for helping teachers to become risk-takers in interaction with their students. The four teacher participants demonstrate a significant degree of flexibility in their academic, behavioral, and social/relational interactions with youth. Also, the results of this research imply that the application of empathy supports each teacher's building and maintenance of positive classroom community and trusting relationships with students. Finally, the data suggests that empathy facilitates the teacher's ability to find or create interventions that minimize adverse student outcome.

## **Chapter 1 – False Empathy and the Vicissitudes of Racism in Public Education**

### **Introduction**

My concern with the failure of public education to adequately educate students of color, particularly Black males, begins with my own experiences prior to my first year of doctoral study. I have generally fond memories of the White teachers I encountered in my own K-12 education career. I was also a self-motivated student who did not necessarily enjoy collaboration with others or required much of my teacher's attention. It wasn't until I read the work of Eileen O'Brien (2003) in an article entitled "The Political Is Personal: The Influence of White Supremacy on White Antiracists' Personal Relationships" in my first doctoral-level course that something clicked internally. O'Brien claimed that White anti-racists had significant difficulty building productive relationships with the individuals they were trying to help because they thought of themselves as more empathetic than they really were. She uses Delgado's (1996) notion of *false empathy* (I'll expound on this in the next section) to explain her position.

O'Brien's commentary resonated with me as I reflected on the many experiences I had with White female teachers between the predominately White teacher preparation program where I earned my bachelor's, through my years as a school administrator. I contemplated how these teacher's conceptions of their own empathy toward me, and young men who looked like me, guided their subsequent interactions. After reading the article, I remember reflecting on this notion of false empathy and wondering was this the missing link that could explain why so many of my White female colleagues failed at building productive relationships with their Black male students. I pondered whether the lack of authentic empathy for my experiences as a race and gender minority at a

predominately White institution had anything to do with the many awkward interactions I'd had with White women at my university. O'Brien's description of the White antiracist's lack of authentic empathy for the marginalized groups they purported to "help" is the first building block for the line of inquiry to be discussed in the coming chapters.

After five years of undergrad at a predominately White university in the middle of the cornfields, I had no intentions on pursuing any further higher education. On the contrary, my strong desire to relocate from Chicago coupled with the benefits of keeping student loans in forbearance made doctoral study quite attractive. I was one semester from earning the Illinois state administrator licensure. I enjoyed the flexibility of teaching without the challenges associated with running a school. I spent my career as a math teacher on the south and west sides of Chicago. I began the PhD while still working everyday as a classroom teacher and school administrator. My work as a practitioner was an important lens for understanding the implications of the research I digested as a doctoral student. It is through my professional experiences as a preservice teacher, professional classroom teacher, and school administrator that frame the current research study.

During the fall of 2007 as I prepared doctoral applications, I ran across the work of Pedro Noguera (2003) of New York University. An article he wrote entitled, *The Trouble with Black Boys* resonated with me. Here I am, a Black male teacher and founding math teacher of Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men in Chicago, the nation's first all-boys public high school serving 100% Black male students. Reading Dr. Noguera's article was the first time I remember hearing an explanation of Black male

school underperformance that didn't pathologize Black boys or Black families. From that time to the present day, I committed myself to producing research that takes an asset-based approach to studying Black male school success. The language of Black male academic underachievement should center on the practice of the institution(s) and the teachers charged with educating them. Similarly, as a former K-12 practitioner, I locate student failure as more of my failure as the adult, the failure of my colleagues, and the failure of the institution to adequately educate, rather than the failure of the student.

The more I read and reflected in that Critical Race Theory of Education course my first semester of graduate school, the more frustrated and discouraged I became. After first reading Bell's (1988) *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* and internalizing his contention that racism is endemic to U.S. society, I became increasingly perplexed by my role in alleviating the challenges racism poses for students of color. By most people's account, I had *made* it. I trumped the odds in pursuit of a post-secondary education and was thriving in my career as a teacher and school administrator. The more I reflected on my experiences as a student and professional the more I lamented the teacher's role in either propagating or disrupting the effects of racism on student outcomes. White female teachers, like all education institution stakeholders to some degree, have a significant role in unknowingly and unintentionally perpetuating a racist school system that continues to oppress its non-White constituents. For the first time, the language of false empathy gave me an explanatory framework by which to better understand the nature of White people's psychology in their work with underserved student populations.

In the first section of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the O'Brien article and the theory of false empathy. Richard Delgado is an early champion of critical race

theory. His writings significantly shape the critical race movement. The section to follow expounds on how I am positioned in this scholarship and my personal stake in the project. The section also addresses why I deem the application of empathy an important variable for improving teacher dispositions, beliefs, and attitudes about their service of Black male students. The chapter closes with a discussion of the multi-theoretical perspectives shaping this research project. The section includes a framing of the problem. The section concludes with an explanation of why understanding empathy as a professional disposition is beneficial for improving how *all* teachers are better prepared to effectively communicate and respond to students in a multicultural classroom setting.

### **False Empathy**

Eileen O'Brien (2003) argues that just because Whites make a righteous commitment to antiracism and improving the conditions of people of color, it doesn't mean that they are truly empathetic individuals. An individual's conception of empathy drives how they build and maintain interpersonal relationships with the people they intend to help. The empathy an individual *believes* he or she possesses will dictate how that individual approaches their interactions, and ultimately the parameters of the relationship they build with others.

O'Brien provides several examples of White men and women who become offended by the rejection they experience from the Black people they attempt to collaborate with, or support. O'Brien describes the frustration of these White antiracists resulting from the explicit disapproval and/or disengagement they receive from the people they are trying to serve—after all, they just want to help.



This theme of helping has a long history in public education. It underlies the reason many White teachers decide to teach dating back to the earliest attempts at mass public schooling (Anderson, 1988). I found from my pilot study including four White female teacher participants that they became teachers to “help” poor Black and Latino children (Warren, 2011). Saying things like “teaching was a matter of social justice” suggests that when a person decides to help, he or she believes strongly they have the competence and have skills needed to provide the help. If they didn’t believe this, they likely wouldn’t engage trying to help in the first place. One would also reasonably expect that the intentions of the help being provided are good.

Findings from the article suggest that even in situations when White people have good intentions, the privilege and power blind spots associated with their Whiteness limit their ability to see how their helping may be oppressive. In fact, O’Brien insists that the White antiracist’s efforts are unconscious attempts to indoctrinate others with their own dominant beliefs, norms, views, agendas, and perspectives. O’Brien asserts that White antiracist’s perspectives are steeped in a history of White supremacy. Without the antiracist’s honest acknowledgment of this fact and his or her critical reflection, these perspectives stay intact when they attempt to negotiate building relationships with people of color. These White people think that they are being empathetic, but instead the perspectives they have of the *other* perpetuate racist indignation. White people have the privilege of growing up in a White world replete with affirming images, narratives, and perspectives with little reference to race and racism (Leonardo, 2009; Roediger, 1991). People of color on the contrary have also grown up in a White world with a very different view of what is normal and what is valuable. Their lives are laced with the reality of race

difference and racism. Some or all of which may become inhibiting factors to the person's intellectual, social, and/or behavioral development. This view is consistent with Patricia Hinchey's (2006) admonition to White educators that privilege is all around them and that if they are not careful, unconscious forms of racism will frequently create dissent in student-teacher interactions with students of color.

O'Brien uses Richard Delgado's (1996) concept of False Empathy to explain the disconnect between the perceptions these White antiracists have with the Black and Latino individuals with whom they attempt partnership. Rodrigo, one of Delgado's Black students, asserts that White people's social consciousness comes in the form of false empathy. Rodrigo explains, "Whites believe he or she is identifying with a person of color, but in fact is doing so only in a slight, superficial way" (p. 70). He makes the case that at the core of White people's intention is a self-serving motivation. They rarely subject themselves to the perspectives and experiences of people of color. Rodrigo maintains that it is not enough to *feel for* a person of color, but that the individual who is empathizing must make every effort to *put on* the perspectives of that person.

Rodrigo accuses White people of having a false consciousness as it relates to race work. Not being "racist" is one thing. Dismantling and discarding racist perspectives is an entirely different issue altogether. The latter implies action while the former requires little more than "good intentions" and good intentions simply aren't enough (Milner, 2007). Part of the challenge is recognizing that racism is not isolated acts of violence, but rather a system of privilege that values specific epistemologies and social norms while simultaneously denigrating others (Tatum, 1997).

Delgado tells Rodrigo's *counterstory*—a narrative that opposes majoritarian or mainstream stories told by members of a marginalized group (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Rodrigo's analysis of White people's empathy is a valid observation that resonates with my own personal experiences. It is Rodrigo's social construction of empathy in Delgado's volume that spurns my interest in better understanding how a teacher's conception of empathy informs his or her work with Black boys like the main character in Delgado's article (Rodrigo). Rodrigo doesn't make any scientific, biological, or psychological claims in his definition of empathy. His observation begs the question of empathy's utility when differences abound, namely race, class, and gender. After reading this work, I too became interested in not only understanding how White teachers conceive of empathy, but how empathy as a professional disposition could improve the types of interactions teachers have with Black male students, like myself or Rodrigo.

This study focuses on the work of *high-functioning* White female teachers. These are teachers who distinguish themselves as exemplary based on the recommendation of school stakeholders including school administration and a group of their present and former Black male students. These are teachers who the school administrators believe demonstrates evidence of cultural response based on several indicators from the literature. Also, the White female teachers selected for the study are described by students as exceptional examples of teachers who truly “understand” them on their terms, and without harsh judgment. I am most interested to understand how these teachers' conceptions of empathy translate into actual practice with students. It is my assumption that White female teachers can a) be expected to be effective teachers of Black male students; and b) there is evidence of empathy in their work, even if they don't

call it empathy. At the very least, telling their stories of success and chronicling the process may yield valuable insight for preparing teachers to engage in twenty-first century culturally responsive teaching praxis.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I bring to this project many years of experience as a student and about a decade of professional experience working in several public and charter schools. I have been a Black male student to many White female teachers, classmate to many pre-service White female undergraduates and graduate students, a colleague, and supervisor to many others. I know how it feels to be rejected, misunderstood, disengaged, frustrated, at odds, and to have my actions misinterpreted. This narrative is by no means a statement of victimhood. I have sustained an impactful professional and academic career. I've had considerable success despite coming up through the ranks as a gender and race minority in the field of education.

The White female teachers I've encountered over the years have sincere intentions for providing quality learning experiences for all children. Their genuine desire to help is commendable, but does not compensate for the damage their professional shortcomings cause. The psychological and emotional abuse caused to students of color in schools over time—an abuse invisible to the naked eye—in part due to their downright rejection of the social and cultural capital students bring to school. These are the byproducts of a teacher's practice that are not so easy to quantify in a teacher evaluation.

From my experience on both sides of the teacher desk, the effects of such abuse manifests in extremes for many Black males that I've come across. Some will work hard (i.e., overachieve) to be academically excellent. They are hypersensitive of how they

present themselves, always being careful to avoid being the embodiment of the many damaging stereotypes others may hold about them—creating many of the hurtful effects Steele and Aronson (1995) describe are the result of “stereotype threat”. This most closely resembled my personal experience and the experiences of many other Black male associates of mine during my undergraduate years at the state’s predominately White flagship university. I developed an internal compulsion to indemnify my instructor or White classmate’s negative perspectives about me (see Warren, in press).

Alternately, in too many other cases from my experience, Black male students become frustrated and they acquiesce to the pressure of being who they’re not. Not only have I had to contend with the oversaturation of negative images of Black men and youth portrayed in popular media and mainstream news sources—images that in no way represent my working/middle class upbringing—but I also have had to find a way to actually fit into spaces not created for my success. It became more apparent to me when I attended college away from the comforts of my predominately Black community that I now had to engage for the first time, many of the perceptions (or misperceptions) of those charged with creating “equal-opportunity”, racially sensitive schooling experiences for me. Having to be the Black voice in class, or being on campus going an entire day and possibly not seeing one Black was emotionally, intellectually, and physically taxing to say the least. There are innumerable consequences for students when teachers don’t understand the extent of this socialization process in schools and their roles in the process (Stevenson, 2004).

Ironically enough, my experience with many White colleagues demonstrates that what they don’t know ends up hurting the child, much more than it hurts them. They

may hurt in the moment, but they eventually move on. They may leave the school or the profession altogether. Their disappointment and discouragement can't compare to the student, especially when the student perceives that their teacher struggles to interact with them meaningfully.

### **Overcoming the Challenges of Being Ill-Prepared to Teach Black Students**

There was little expectation during my professional teacher preparation that I actually learn to adopt multicultural perspectives and then use those perspectives to organize my teaching practice. It was more theoretical. We needed to know that multicultural understandings and perspectives existed and that we should appreciate the diversity students brought to our classrooms. We weren't trained as to what to actually do with that diversity including how that diversity might reframe how we think about our teacher identities in relationship to the work of educating diverse students.

Reading Ladson-Billings' (1994) *Dreamkeepers* or Perry and Delpit's (1997) *The Real Ebonics Debate* in one course is not enough to develop the in-depth knowledge needed to adequately educate traditionally underserved student populations. The reflections I wrote as a preservice teacher were self-centered. They were about how hard it was to be a teacher, rather than how my life history impaired my ability to meet students where they were socially and intellectually. My colleagues and I were trained to manage student behavior, not to negotiate meaningful human interaction with them. For many of my White female classmates teaching was an option among many, most desirable for the flexible schedule compatible with raising a family.

Early in my career, I became founding math teacher of what the world knows now as the Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men. The school opened in the fall of

2006 welcoming in its' inaugural class of 100% Black male students from Englewood and other similarly economically distressed neighborhoods in Chicago. I naively assumed teaching all Black males in a Black school (all of the faculty were Black males except two) situated in a Black community, that I was automatically privy to certain privileges, insights, and knowledge. After all, I was a Black male teaching Black males. The opposite was true. There was a lot I didn't know that, at times, put me at odds with the youth who sat in my Algebra I course. My upbringing was very different from my students and the knowledge I had of them was constructed as an outsider. I had to earn their trust and respect by listening and holding them accountable to rigorous performance standards. I had to stop assuming and ask questions to inquire of the social and cultural norms that governed how they saw the schooling process. By doing so, I developed a rapport with each student that made him comfortable to be himself in my classroom. I had been trained to create boxes for which to place my students, because after all, good students look one particular way, or so I thought. I learned to value the reflexivity of knowledge, which meant that I couldn't always be in control. I learned to treat students as cultural experts and the lessons they shared with me were invaluable to the maturity of my urban pedagogy.

I share this to say that though I looked like the students who I taught, our experiences varied widely. The lenses these young men used to interpret and make meaning of the world around them were vastly different from my own. I had to come to terms with that reality. Hence, it could be argued that coming into the classroom that I operated with some degree of false empathy as well. The same and more can be said of the droves of White female teachers entering public education. I just wonder how many

of them mature into understanding how their own difference can support or damage interactions with youth. Consider the possibilities if more White female teachers developed this awareness sooner in their careers, perhaps before leaving the profession and becoming frustrated with their failure to educate Black boys.

### **“Nice White Ladies”: Moving Away from the Paradigm of *False Empathy***

In closing, it was after reading O’Brien’s article that, for the first time, I was able to name my frustration with the “nice White lady” conundrum (Jones & Salzman, 1995). I asked myself how so many “nice” White women using all the right words, genuinely caring, armed with Ivy League credentials and pearls, like those worn by the main character of *Freedom Writers* (Devito, Shamberg, Sher, & LaGravenese, 2007), could consistently become so miserable, so disengaged, and so antagonistic to Black boys. I applaud Hilary Swank’s character Mrs. Gruwell for what she was able to accomplish with her students of color. It took great loss and sacrifice on her behalf, which in some cases can produce lower teacher efficacy and burnout. This is not a good outcome either. Nonetheless, when she discovered the power of student voice and student perspective, it changed how she framed her practice with the students she served. In essence, she learned to surrender power in her classroom, advocate for her students against the oppressive institutional norms, and take relevant action to ameliorate inequity in her school, or at least in her classroom. It all began with having some critical knowledge of the complexity of the social, political, and historical context from which her students emerge.

I reason from my experience as a teacher, tutor, and mentor to many Black boys that they are authentically themselves whether we (the adults that interact with them



including parents, neighbors, youth workers, teachers, tutors, researchers, etc.) like it or not. Also, I contend there are glimmers of hope in the practice of White female teachers who are effective educators of Black males. We can learn from their work.

The greatest resource available for improving Black male school success is the adult's ability to actively observe and listen to them. By doing so, we are more apt to make culturally appropriate meaning of their home lives, their social lives, and the impressions they have of the schooling process. I find from my experience as a practitioner turned researcher that teachers, much like the researcher, is the instrument of inquiry. He or she has a responsibility to be particularly critical of the social and cultural perspectives or lenses that mediate the information students give us about themselves. The most sophisticated of processes include the adoption of student social and cultural perspectives, followed by learning to leverage those perspectives in order to effectively navigate the interactions we have with them. This is the place where empathy becomes of particular interest as teachers begin to wrestle with the social enterprise of the pedagogical process. In the next section, I will discuss problem by describing the multi-theoretical perspectives guiding this research. Finally, I will expound on how these perspectives address the problem of a teacher's ability to adequately educate Black male students, and the role empathy for supporting this task.

### **Multi-Theoretical Perspectives**

Empathy in several helping professions, including counseling, psychotherapy, nursing, social work, etc., significantly improves the practitioner's ability to adopt the social and cultural perspectives of diverse clientele. The application of empathy to client-practitioner interaction maximizes outcomes of the helping relationship (Berman, 2004;

Katz, 1963; LaMonica et.al., 1987; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Truax & Carkhuff, 1976). Likewise, teachers of culturally diverse students believe empathy is an especially important behavioral disposition for teachers of culturally diverse students (McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Morgan, 1984; Warren, 2011). Leading scholars in multicultural education assert that empathy supports a teacher's ability to organize high-quality, culturally responsive learning experiences for students of color (Gay, 2000/2010; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010).

Empathy has also been argued to improve the expression of care and concern for Black students by non-Black teachers (Howard, 2006; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Stevens, 1967). Teachers who demonstrate highly empathetic dispositions are thought to be stronger advocates for culturally diverse students and better skilled at responding to and communicating with these students. This literature, however, is absent of a clear and operable understanding of empathy's application by teachers teaching across various student-teacher differences. The current research project addresses this problem by examining how teachers conceive of empathy, how their conceptions converge with a definition of empathy appropriate to the study of social interactions like those between teachers and students, and finally the utility of empathy for helping teachers negotiate productive interactions with Black males.

The failure of U.S. public schools to meet the social and intellectual needs of Black male students is well documented in the literature. Scholars identify numerous social and contextual challenges Black males face to achieve academically (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Polite & Davis, 1999; Noguera, 2003b, 2008). Scholars chart Black male's disproportionate representation in special education (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Milofsky,

1974; National Research Council, 2002; Noguera, 2003b; Oswald et al, 1999; Oswald et al, 2003) and the excessive use of exclusionary discipline measures (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Noguera, 2003a; Skiba, 2000). Ford (1998), Ford and Harris (2007), and Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) note Black boys continue to be largely underrepresented in gifted programs, advanced placement, and honors courses. Nationally low high school graduation rates (Schott Foundation, 2010) are yet another dismal reminder of the urgent need for more research to examine the various factors shaping the failure of public schools to educate Black male students. Unfortunately, too little education research examines the intersections of race, class, and gender on the schooling experiences of Black male students (Davis, 2003; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). The present school vulnerability of Black boys makes this particular student population of particular interest for inclusion in the study.

Moreover, current U.S. teacher and student demographics add to the significance of this research and further shape the problem. In urban spaces throughout the U.S., a growing majority of students are non-white and working class or poor (Fry, 2007; Snyder, 2008; Yasin, 2000) while their teachers continue to be largely White, middle to upper-class females (Hodgkinson, 2002; Landsman & Lewis, 2006). Women make up about 74% of all educators (school leaders included) and White women represent over 80% of professionals in the field of education, primarily as teachers (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2011a, 2011b). It is likely that Black boys will have majority White female teachers throughout their K-12 education career. This project assumes that the intersections of race, class, and gender do shape the quality of student-teacher interaction

and that these subjective identities make up the socio-cultural context for teaching and learning.

Black males care deeply about education (Harper & Davis, 2012; Noguera, 2003) despite how they may be perceived by practitioners. Teachers and other school stakeholders too often misunderstand Black males and misinterpret their actions in school. Research and theory support that teacher beliefs, dispositions, lack of cultural knowledge, and low expectations are potential causes for the underperformance of Black males (Milner, 2010a; Noguera, 2008; Polite & Davis, 1999; Zamani-Gallaher & Polite, 2010). To understand this phenomenon of Black male school failure more fully, then, we must have a deeper account of the nature of the interaction between students and their teacher (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Labov, 1972). This deeper account requires in-depth investigation of the values, dispositions, and behaviors that White female teachers bring into the teacher-student interactions.

Given the data of Black male school underperformance, the reality that the vast majority of their teachers will be middle to upper class White females is of serious consequence. The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) by White female teachers is a promising construction for alleviating the tradition of public school's failure to educate Black boys. Gay (2002) emphasizes that specific professional competencies are required of teachers to become effective culturally responsive pedagogues. One such competency is the teacher's ability to develop and cultivate valid social and cultural perspectives of the diverse students he or she teaches (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2010). Teachers also bring with them into the classroom a set of social and cultural norms, expectations, and perspectives that don't align with those

of the culturally diverse students they are teaching. The social and cultural perspective divergence between White female teachers and Black male students poses a threat to the quality of student-teacher interactions.

The effects of whiteness characterized by privilege and power can unconsciously shade the social and cultural perspectives of White teachers (Marx, 2008). White people have a propensity to posit colorblind philosophies that limit his or her ability to recognize the role of race and racism in their professional practice (Hinchey, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Marx, 2006). These philosophies then provide the context for meritocracy, equal opportunity, and race neutrality. The misalignment of social and cultural perspective between teacher and student prevents the teacher from being as culturally responsive as he or she thinks they are being. A White teacher who does not recognize the implications of race, class, and gender in education on her interactions with students most likely does not account for how these differences may also reproduce inequity in her own teaching practice (Bell, 2002). A White teacher who has never had to think about the challenges of race and racism may have significant difficulty recognizing their own racism (Marx, 2006) until a person of color points it out to them (Allen, 2004). Teachers must routinely critique how their own racial identity development facilitates their capacity to support, nurture, communicate, and appropriately respond to members of diverse student racial groups.

Without understanding students' social and cultural frames of reference, White teachers are left to their personal experiences and popular media to inform what they know about Black males. This research attempts to describe how successful teachers of Black males acquire these frames and how an application of the knowledge based on their

understanding of student perspectives informs negotiation of various types of interactions with Black males. It is the assumption of this project that a way to deal with the problem of public school's failure to educate Black males is to study what teachers do in interaction with them. Studying student-teacher interaction by focusing in on the teacher is crucial for getting a sense of the attitudes, intentions, and priorities influencing the teacher's decision-making. Gaining a more detailed understanding of Black males, their coping strategies, their view(s) of schooling and schooling processes must be a priority for teachers if he or she is to "alter academic trends among" them (Noguera, 2003b, p. 455). The actual spaces in a teacher's professional practice where they acquire perspective matters and how they use that perspective to inform their moment-by-moment classroom decision making is equally important. At present, we do not have a sufficient empirical literature base that points us in the right direction.

### **Empathic Interaction: White Female Teachers and their Black Male Students**

I have chosen to investigate the problem of Black male school underachievement by examining the nature and influence of student-teacher interactions. The literature suggests that the abundance of White female teachers educating Black males in today's urban classrooms bring vastly different social and cultural perspectives from those of their Black male students to interactions with them. These perspectives are shaped by each teacher's subjective identities including but not limited to her race, gender, and class status. The invisible benefits of Whiteness, unearned class and race privilege, and the norms associated with being a White female may directly impact *how* she negotiates interactions with her Black male students. This is likely a major proponent of Black male school failure.

Literature in culturally responsive teaching is helpful for grounding how White teachers go about building on student cultural expertise in order to arrange relevant, engaging learning experiences for students of color. It is expected that culturally responsive teachers adopt social and cultural perspectives of student's social, racial, and cultural selves. This literature is scant for explaining how White teachers actually go about adopting student perspectives and then leveraging those perspectives to support how they negotiate academic, behavioral, and social interactions with students. The perspective divergence, or difference in social and cultural perspective had between teacher and student may lead to disjointed expectations and actions by the teacher that do not adequately cater to the intellectual and social needs of Black male students. The mismatch in perspective may cause the White teacher to further engage in unconscious acts of racism and oppression. A teacher's professional practice inconsiderate of the social and cultural norms and interaction preferences of Black male students, similar to the actions taken by the antiracists mentioned in the O'Brien (2003) article, can greatly diminish the quality of the learning experience for Black male students. In other words, teacher-student interactions need more scrutiny for how individuals teaching across difference acquire and incorporate the social and cultural frames of reference useful for producing positive student outcomes for Black males.

Empathy is theorized in multicultural education as useful for helping teachers: build personal relationships with students; develop productive partnerships with parents; support high academic expectations; and frame professionally informed perspectives of youth, their families, and their community. Yet, the empirical literature in education, unlike other helping professions (i.e., nursing, therapy, counseling), is virtually

nonexistent. The field needs a better understanding of how a teacher's attitude, behavior, and intention influence their understanding and application of empathy. The mismatch of social and cultural perspectives teachers and students bring to school can significantly impair how teachers effectively communicate with and respond to the needs of Black male students. Given the voluminous literature in education documenting Black male school failure, it is the intention of this research to explore how empathy connects White female teacher's good intentions to actions that facilitate more efficacious schooling experiences for Black males.

By studying the interaction of high-functioning White female teachers—teachers with a history of success with underserved populations—I hope to describe how empathy may be applied in multicultural classroom settings. That is, focusing a critical lens on a) how teachers conceive of empathy and b) how their conceptions of empathy network with the interactions these teachers have with their students. Teacher-student interaction is a complicated unit of analysis, partly due to the challenges race, class, and gender difference pose for effectively communicating between the two parties. The dissonance in perspective between the two makes understanding the nature of their interaction particularly useful in describing the utility of empathy.

It will also be of interest to explore how different teachers conceive empathy, its importance in their teaching practice with Black boys, and their actual scores on an established empathy assessment. This work further supports theory development of empathy's application in multicultural classroom settings by providing a canvas of thought that marries social constructions of empathy, a firm framework of empathy as a stand-alone concept to the classroom realities of real teachers with real students. This



research is not an attempt to ascertain the level of empathy any one teacher possesses. Nor is it my intention to be able to argue definitively the depth or breadth of empathy's application. Rather, this study is an attempt to describe, ponder, and further explore empathy's pragmatism for improving the quality of Black males schooling experiences. The next chapter describes in detail the various literature influencing this research's early development, design, and implementation.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

I draw on three bodies of research to frame this research project. Taken together, these literatures help us to understand how one's subjective identities such as race, class, and gender, limit a White teacher's ability to effectively interpret, communicate, and respond to the needs of Black youth in culturally responsive ways. This literature is prescriptive as there are promising approaches and strategies to address this issue. Critical race theory and whiteness in education literature centers race and its intersection with other oppressions to explain how members of the dominant race unconsciously subordinate youth in schools. The unconscious subordination I refer to is a consequence of the teacher's application of the hegemonic perspectives filtering the information transmitted in interaction with these youth. Literature in the field of multicultural education and, more specifically, Culturally Responsive Teaching is significant for supporting how White teachers go about mitigating the effects of racial subordination of youth. This body of research, however, doesn't go far enough in its explanation of an important and too often overlooked tenet. That is, the acquisition and subsequent application of student social and cultural perspectives used to organize high quality, culturally rich and affirming learning opportunities.

Similarly, brief mentions of empathy in multicultural education literature, including culturally responsive teaching, fails to adequately a) operationalize empathy as a professional disposition of teachers in multicultural classrooms settings and b) provide an empirically grounded definition of empathy useful for individuals teaching across difference. As a result, I look to literature outside of the field of education for models and a definition of empathy appropriate to the analysis of social interactions in

professional service contexts. Each body of literature is important in some form to the research framing, design, analysis, and interpretation of the study's findings.

The first section of the literature review, *Race and Racism in Education*, is foundational for understanding how race and racism intersect the practice of social institutions such as schools. Critical race theory in education provides the analytic tools necessary to isolate race and racism in reproducing and maintaining White supremacy in schools. This section also discusses how the privilege and power associated with whiteness usurps teacher agency for appropriately interpreting student behavior as well as limits his or her ability to develop asset-based understandings of culture. As I argue in this section, racial identity significantly influences the perception and perspectives White teachers have of students of color. This literature is a reminder of the imperative for White teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators to critically address how White teachers are prepared to teach students of color. This literature does not fully account for the specific pedagogical strategies for bridging the perspective divergence caused by race, class, and gender difference between teachers and students. The literature in the next section picks up on this point.

The second section is a brief review of the contributions of *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* to shaping what the field knows about organizing culturally affirming learning experiences for students of color. This literature reinforces the need for teachers to acknowledge culture when preparing to teach students of color. Culture encompasses but is not limited to racial identity. This literature provides empirical support for how teachers can build on student cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Challenges associated with the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy are also explored. These

challenges include teacher preparation for culturally responsive teaching and the difficulty of managing multiple aspects of a culturally responsive classroom. Extant literature in multicultural education makes reference to and introduces empathy's utility for improving how teachers organize culturally affirming, academically rigorous, student-centered classroom. This literature, however, is scant and limited in a full, robust explanation of empathy's application to a teacher's professional practice and the dimensions of its personal expression by individual teachers.

The third and final section of this literature review includes contemporary definitions of *Empathy* and its implications for the range of helping professions including teaching. I draw from literature in folk psychology, social neuroscience, psychotherapy, and social psychology. The key differences between sympathy and empathy, implications of the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis (Batson, 1991) as well as the development and assessment of empathy are discussed. Additionally, Davis's (1994) multidimensional framework of empathy is described. Davis's work represents the primary theoretical and analytical framework used to examine the application of empathy by the teachers in this study. Davis emphasizes the dichotomy between the emotional and intellectual dimensions of empathy based on a century of literature in psychology. Finally, this section catalogs how empathy has been operationalized in other helping professions and reasserts the necessity for empathy's continued study in the field of education.

### **Understanding Race & Racism in Education**

This section includes a review of literature in both whiteness studies in education and critical race theory in education. First, I will start by expounding on the importance

of understanding race and racism in education. In his timely book *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms*, Tyrone Howard (2010) insists that race and culture indeed impact how teachers teach and how students learn. The data Howard draws on suggests, like Amanda Lewis (2006), that schools are “race-making” institutions. Howard demonstrates how race and racism influence curriculum, school funding, student-teacher interactions, and various other aspects of education. Fifteen years earlier, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) published a seminal work formally introducing critical race theory to the field of education. These scholars emphasize that, “although both class and gender can and do intersect with race, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between whites and students of color” (p. 51). Race has been under-analyzed in connection to the ways schools reproduce inequity while the literature implicating gender and class subordination has a longer history of being theorized in education literature. Ladson-Billings and Tate insist race and racism must be further investigated to explain how institutions of education continue to oppress students of color.

Ladson-Billings and Tate begin by explicating the relevance of Derrick Bell’s (1987) notion of property rights and its relationship to power and privilege in the U.S. Their work names the multiple consequences of whiteness as property rights that include invisibly racist social constructions such as race neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy. Ladson-Billings and Tate also concede the limitations of multicultural education to be necessarily critical of race in the schooling experiences of traditionally marginalized students. There are many pitfalls in multiculturalism rhetoric. Without a

critical examination of race, this literature fails to disrupt public schools' maintenance of White supremacy. In the section to follow, I briefly discuss the influence of critical race theory on teaching and learning. The critical race literature is voluminous, but its application to education has several implications for better understanding how racism manifests itself in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. The chapter then transitions to show more specifically the role of whiteness for maintaining racism's covert operation and the implications of whiteness on the work of White teachers.

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

The history of critical race theory has been documented numerous times (see Chapman, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 1998). This section is to give a brief overview of critical race theory, particularly as it relates to the education of people of color in the U.S. Critical race theory (CRT) in education scholarship is a fairly recent, pointed critique of the multiple ways racism inhibits the intellectual and social development and achievement of racially diverse students. Yosso (2005) argues that CRT is useful for challenging the oppressive nature of racism and its effects on “educational structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 74). CRT agrees with Tatum's (1997) definition of race as systemic, institutional, and widespread. Racism is not limited to individual acts and people. On the contrary, it is ingrained and deeply embedded within the political, social and economic structures of American society. CRT adds that race and racism are permanent in each of these structures as manifested in the social and cultural norms, ideologies, and perspectives of individuals. Tate (1997) concludes in his critical review of the history and utility of critical race theory, that CRT is necessary for uncovering the debilitating factors of race and racism for students of color. CRT in

education examines how schools as a social institution manufacture and perpetuate racism. These include manifestations of racism at the global structural level (i.e., school policy or governance), as well as instances of racist ideology enacted at the local, interpersonal level. Solórzano (1997) succinctly outlines five specific tenets of CRT particularly important in the field of education. They are as follows:

- 1) ***The centrality of race and racism and its intersection with other forms of privilege and subordination***: CRT scholars such as Derrick Bell (1993) argue that race is endemic and permanent to the fabric of U.S. society. Critical race theorists insist race intersects with multiple forms of subordination and oppression in America and that those intersections are valuable for exposing the debilitating power of racism (Crenshaw, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
- 2) ***The challenge to dominant ideology***: CRT posits that meritocracy, colorblindness, equal opportunity, race-neutrality/objectivity, and post-racialism (Lynn et.al., 2010) are ideologies masking the hegemonic interests of the dominant group. Scholars identify how these ideologies disguise the power and privilege associated with being a member of the dominant group. Critical race theorists argue for their deconstruction. The dismantling of these racist ideologies is necessary to understand the multiple ways racism persists in oppressing people of color in the U.S. (Bell, 1987; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993)
- 3) ***The commitment to social justice***: Critical race theory takes an activist orientation by reemphasizing the necessity for theory to make meaningful

contributions to practice. Champions of critical race theory maintain CRT's pertinence for not *only* discussing and thinking critically about racism in America, but also developing concrete strategies for its abolition at every level. The elimination of racism is the foundation for the eradication of other "isms" such as sexism, classism, and heterosexism (Bell, 1984, 1985, 1987; Matsuda, 1989).

- 4) ***The centrality of experiential knowledge***: Critical race theory legitimates the relevance of personal experience in understanding, critiquing, and unpacking the reality of racism. CRT actively supports the vocal expression of the lived realities associated with being a member of a traditionally marginalized group (e.g., person of color, woman, LGBTTQ, etc.). Those perspectives and stories provide the counter-narrative useful for dismantling dominant schools of thought perpetuated by the mainstream of American life (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1988; Crenshaw, 1993).
- 5) ***The interdisciplinary perspective***: Critical race theory acknowledges the critical analysis of race and racism requires tools of inquiry acquired from multiple disciplines. The methodologies employed must be inclusive of intellectual paradigms specific to areas such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history. These methods applied collectively more effectively examines the challenge(s) race and racism pose to the forward progress of people of color in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).



Solórzano's article argues for the abolition of cultural deficit theories in teacher education. He offers critical race theory as a theoretical framework useful for trying to "develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education and [one that] works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education" (p. 7). I will use these five tenets to discuss the various ways CRT has been theorized and operationalized in relevant education literature.

### **Centrality of Race and Racism and the intersection with other forms of Domination**

Scholars of critical race theory in education declare the necessity to isolate race when analyzing inequity in school. They do caution that race is not its own private category of oppression. Multiple oppressions exist in school regarding class, sexual orientation, disability, and language difference for example. CRT also recognizes the need to address race's intersection with these other forms of subordination (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

Education scholars have long critiqued various inequities in public education posed by class reproduction (Apple, 1994; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), gender and sexual orientation (Lugg, 2003; Mayo, 2010), disability (Baker, 2002; Ware, 2010), neoliberalism, school privatization, and globalization (Boyles, 1998; Lipman, 2004, 2011; Watkins, 2011) to name a few. These literatures fail to substantively address the central role of race in mediating inequity. CRT maintains that a critique of social structures must also include a critical analysis of the central role and influence of race. For example, understanding feminism or queer theory does not assume

that one understands or has accounted for racism in the analysis of the effects of this particular oppression. CRT does not attempt to stratify oppressions giving greater priority of race over other forms of domination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). On the contrary, critical race scholars argue that these oppressions are better understood when combined with an analysis of the performance race and racism. The subsequent analysis is more complete and positions the field to have greater insight for how these oppressions intersect. These literatures make many meaningful contributions to our knowledge of how schools reproduce inequity and facilitate inequality. CRT helps to explain how inequality is experienced differently among various ethnic and racial groups.

Critical race theorists argue against the Black-White binary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Perea, 1995, 1998). Oppression is not limited to Black people by White people. Scholars assert that social injustice comes in multiple forms manifesting oppression differently for separate culture groups. The work of critical theorists such as Giroux (2001), McLaren (1998), and Apple (1995, 2004) have changed how the field understands power relations and a political economy supported by market values and capitalistic venture.

Additionally, the multicultural education movement pioneered by several leading scholars including James Banks and Cherry McGee-Banks (2009), Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant (2008), and Sonia Nieto (2000) make substantive contributions to understanding the importance of culture for mediating how students experience school. Their understanding of culture is not limited to just race and, as a result, is not as critical of the role racial identity contextualizes how students and teachers experience school. The intersections provide the most comprehensive picture of how schools may be better

organized to serve *all* students. The everyday relevance, widespread institutional proliferation, and pervasive social impact of racism should drive inquiry focused on school inequity. The implications are significant for developing a problem-solving orientation that grapples with the myriad of social problems facing U.S. schools. CRT in education centers various issues (e.g., gender, class, LGBTQ, immigration, etc.) on the performance of race and racism (Chapman, 2010). The benefits of such an approach to research on school inequality are virtually infinite.

### **Challenge to Dominant Ideology**

Lynn and Parker (2006) emphasize in their review of CRT as a qualitative research paradigm that critical race theory is particularly useful for “giv[ing] voice to students who would otherwise remain nameless and voiceless” (p. 277). CRT brings to light the stories of perseverance and resistance that are many times isolated and hidden within marginalized communities and amongst scholars of color. For example, without the counternarrative of Black male academic achievement provided by scholars like Ferguson (2001), Harper (2008, 2009), Harper and Davis (2012), and Milner (2007), these important stories may go unnoticed in education scholarship (Taylor, 1998).

CRT directly challenges dominant discourses by drawing heavily on counter-narratives like these. Critical race analyses provide alternate depictions of the multiple ways students of color are marginalized in and how they experience school (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Duncan, 2002; Stovall, 2006a, 2006b).

Furthermore, this literature is critical to debunking mainstream notions of meritocracy, colorblindness, and equal opportunity in education and education research (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker,

2006; Tate, 1997). CRT supplants notions of hard work and independent academic achievement with deeper explanations for how racism shades opportunity and “equal” access by troubling what it means to be equal. The literature unearths how school structures and dominant norms for teaching and learning privilege some while disadvantaging many others.

Michele Foster’s (1997) work dispels the myth of “equal-opportunity” legislation like *Brown v. Board* by demonstrating through her interviews how *Brown* hurt Black education professionals and students. These teachers described a side of school integration that is little acknowledged in mainstream rhetoric around *Brown v. Board*. These teachers discuss how school integration meant employment displacement for many Black professionals at the time. Teachers in Foster’s study also discuss how the all-Black schools where they taught catered to the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of Black children. Students took their education seriously and were academically successful despite less-than-acceptable academic resources. Each teacher’s professional teaching practice was not limited to transmitting arbitrary academic content. Instead, they were committed to developing the whole child. They did this by emphasizing and modeling racial pride—experiences that Black students lost when they integrated into White schools.

Jerome Morris’s (2006) work lends credence to the central theme of Foster’s work. He examines interviews of 21 Black educators in St. Louis using CRT as an analytic and “informative framework” (p. 133) to describe the impact of desegregation of St. Louis public schools. Like Foster, Morris finds that *Brown v. Board* held largely adversarial consequences for Black teachers and administrators. These teachers were

labeled incompetent and garnered substantially fewer opportunities for professional advancement or stability than they had pre-Brown. Each teacher's words and stories are examples of counter-narratives that challenge the traditional, mainstream rhetoric of equal opportunity.

Ladson-Billings, Tate, and Grant (1993) in their "mathematical" analysis of the Brown decision argue that the landmark ruling was less about responding to the inequity of separate schooling than it was a decision to create the illusion of equality. They maintain that Brown, like many school desegregation cases before, was done under the auspices of White self-interest. The scholars contend that this legislation was "restrictive" (Crenshaw, 1993) in nature, never focusing on actual tangible outcomes to positively benefit the Black education stakeholders that the law would impact.

This conjecture, along with Foster and Morris's research, is consistent with Bell's (1980) "interest convergence" principle. Interest convergence is birthed when the desires or needs of marginalized groups intersect the interests of the dominant group. The resulting action meant to advantage the marginalized group only does so pending the material benefit(s) for the dominant group. Interest convergence cloaks dominant ideology. It veils the intentions (both good and bad) of the dominant group preventing them from being easily noticed. Meanwhile, the dominant group continues to maintain their status of superiority in the very areas supposedly being made equal.

Critical race scholarship uncovers the hidden agenda and exposes the ways in which "equal opportunity" disproportionately privileges certain people while retarding the forward progression of many others. The counter perspectives of Brown are important for demonstrating how dominant discourse can completely obscure the truth.

Similarly speaking, this work also resituates our understanding of opportunity and pushes school stakeholders to be more critical of how White teachers frame what they call opportunity for Black and Latino youth in their classrooms.

### **Commitment to Social Justice**

In her recent article, Sabrina Ross (2009) argues CRT's relevance for improving critical thinking and the democratization of students in social justice-oriented college courses (e.g., courses that emphasize anti-racism, critical pedagogy, etc.). She maintains that the application of critical race pedagogy may significantly improve student resistance to academic capitalist knowledge (see Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). Critical race theorists insist that the work of centralizing racism in analyses of educational inequity must not be limited to theorizing racism's effects, but that CRT must also move us to action. Parker and Stovall (2004) assert that recognition of the various ways traditionally underserved groups are disenfranchised in schools should be the catalyst for subsequent action on behalf of the members of that group. This action can take multiple forms. Theory absent of pragmatic application renders critical race theory of little relevance to subordinated members of U.S. society.

Stovall (2006a) argues for CRT's relevance to engaging social justice projects in education. Stovall contends that, "by placing CRT and socialist critique on the ground, educators, activists, academics, and organizers are challenged to engage the often messy, muddled, and conflicting issues of race and racism" (p. 245). This social justice orientation concretizes race and racism by placing them in a context relevant to the actual work of improving social conditions for all people. There are numerous examples of the ways CRT has contributed to or substantiated social action among scholars and school

practitioners (Bartee et. al., 2000; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Lynn, 2002; Stovall 2006b). There appears to be much more literature theorizing the potential benefits of CRT for spurring social justice initiatives, rather than actual examples of individuals engaged in social activist-oriented projects. These examples exist, but not in the volume they should as compared to the volume of scholarship simply employing CRT as an analytic lens for examining how race and racism infiltrates the schooling process in America's schools. Nonetheless, critical race scholarship continues to challenge researchers to allow theory to drive activist work being done on behalf of public school's most vulnerable student populations (Stovall, 2006a). Activist work should disrupt the White hegemonic order in productive ways while also creating empirical models that sustain the social change being fought for.

### **Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**

Racialized personal narratives of people of color are necessary for supporting more equitable curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions (Baszile, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Yosso, 2005). "Naming one's reality" (Lynn & Parker, 2006) guarantees that critical social insight and individual social commentary are made available to teachers when they are making crucial instructional decisions. These realities provide alternative interpretations of social phenomena. Thus, storytelling is at the heart of acquiring experiential knowledge and this knowledge is central to how teachers interpret student actions, thoughts, and behaviors (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, 2002a).

It is equally necessary to explore how student voices are silenced in schools (Delpit, 1988). As Dixson and Rousseau (2005) argue, voice is central to acquiring

knowledge of students of color. These voices are a documentation of reality necessary for teachers to negotiate meaningful interactions with traditionally silenced students. As Delpit (1995) argues, silencing students is another way students of color are subordinated. Without inquiring of the student, his cultural background, and the social context from which he emerges, the teacher stands to inadvertently maintain dominant norms and discourses.

Additionally, when students are silenced about the ways they experience racism, it is likely the classrooms and campuses students attend will be sites for racial microaggression and racial battle fatigue (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Pérez Huber, 2011; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007; Sue, 2010). It is essential for educators and university administration to create space for students to speak freely and openly about their personal experience without fear of judgment. By doing so, teachers create an intellectual atmosphere where knowledge is reflexive—acknowledging contrasting viewpoints to “official” knowledge systems (Apple, 1994, 2000).

Storytelling is a fundamental benefit of critical race praxis in education. It gives life and breath to students whose experiences may otherwise be seen peripheral to the pedagogical process. Experiential knowledge is the first step for teachers to adopt the social and cultural perspectives they need to better meet the needs of diverse youth.

### **Interdisciplinary Perspectives**

Prior to Critical Race Theory’s application to issues of education access and achievement for students of color, many theories examining matters of inequity of education failed to directly address racism’s implications (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Widely-used theoretical frameworks such as cultural capital theory (Bourdieu &



Passeron, 1990), social reproduction (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), and critical pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Giroux, 1988, 2001) are inadequate for identifying the central role of race and racism in subordinating people of color in school. The methodological tools employed in this research are borrowed from multiple social science disciplines and does inform how scholars think about education research critical of race. Critical race theorists in education have been known to draw on multiple theories and methodologies to strengthen and compliment their application of CRT to their analyses (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Tate, 1997). Improving approaches to theorizing race and racism's centrality to educational inequity greatly benefits from the application of these multi-disciplinary research tools and approaches (Lynn & Adams, Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1997).

Taylor (1998) argues that CRT will struggle for validity in the academy not "by the weakness of its constructs but by the degree that many whites will not accept its assumptions" (p. 124). Legal scholar Douglas Litowitz (2009) contends that CRT does little more than raise consciousness, and that it fails to address the "doctrinal, theoretical...and... constitutional arguments" fundamental to the law (p. 308). Litowitz's analysis attempts to poke holes in several of CRT's major tenets. Necessary for understanding CRT is the researcher's understanding of his or her own racial position in relationship to their critical race analysis. Litowitz does not account for the role white racial supremacy has in structuring social institutions to systemically favor whites in the first place. In essence, his critique of CRT does not account for how his own whiteness mitigates his ability to understand race and racism in the law. As Ladson-Billings (2009) claims, CRT is imperative for dismantling White supremacy and its effects. Litowitz's

isolated critique of CRT negates the collective purpose of CRT's tenets to dismantle racial hegemony on all fronts. He speaks very little about the challenges posed by white supremacy and the role CRT has in deconstructing the oppressive nature of whiteness.

Whiteness veils racial hegemony to the degree that the structural and institutional effects of racism go completely unnoticed by most White people (Tatum, 1997). In the next section, I will review literature relevant to the issue of passive racism, White privilege, and the prevalence of dominant cultural norms in schools. I will discuss the hidden consequences of whiteness and its implications for White teachers who fail to acknowledge its influence on their professional teaching practice. Finally, this section describes the complications whiteness may pose to understanding the lived experiences of students of color.

### **Whiteness Studies in Education**

Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts, "It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (p. 19). Ladson-Billings outlines how the unjust nature of whiteness in education discourse constitutes much of the disadvantage students of color experience in school. Studies of whiteness critique the role of race and White racism in the subjugation of people of color. This body of literature helps me to examine how whiteness may shade the interactions of the White female teachers in my study with their Black male students. Furthermore, whiteness studies helps to explain how White

teachers are socialized towards certain types of social and cultural norms and how those norms can oppress others.

Whiteness mediates the way that White people view and negotiate the world. It is a fair assumption that white teachers who are not critical of their whiteness, the privilege, and the power associated tend to overlook the implications of race in their work with students of color. Furthermore, these teachers are more apt to guard their positions of power by asserting a colorblind ideology—thereby, negating the raced realities of their students. Allen (2004) concurs that being White is synonymous with being American and it makes recognizing the oppressive nature of whiteness virtually invisible. Studies of whiteness enlighten us about the complicit nature of White teachers to subordinate students of color.

### **What is Whiteness?**

Whiteness is a social concept characterized by the intention of its white ethnic membership to maintain racial hegemony and social domination. It takes on multiple meanings, behaviors, and dispositions (Leonardo, 2009; McIntyre, 1997). Whiteness is fluid and flexible, changing with the context and/or the time period to adapt to the cultural needs of the dominant group (Roediger, 1994). Membership is marked by one's complicity in maintaining white people's social domination over other non-white groups. Silence is simple and much less threatening or confrontational than being an active anti-racist. Even those who choose to be anti-racist may find that if they are not careful, their dominant social and cultural perspectives will further oppress the individuals that they intended to help (O'Brien, 2003). These perspectives have to be supplanted with those of the group the anti-racists are attempting to serve.

It is common that white people will excuse themselves from the transgressions of white people of the past (Leonardo, 2002). Tatum (1997) argues that white people who are *not* actively interrogating and working to deconstruct the oppressive nature of their whiteness are maintaining the oppressive nature of whiteness. Becoming an anti-racist is a long process of self-discovery and transition (Leonardo, 2002). It is an intellectual, moral, and action-oriented commitment to relieving traditionally subordinated groups from the pressures of subjugation and compulsive conformity to norms antagonistic to their own.

Leonardo (2002) also contends, “Whiteness constructs history as separate racial details without coherence” (p. 40), but that “participation [in whiteness] is very much within the realm of choice and whites have been able to speak against the dehumanizing structures of racism even against their own immediate interests” (p. 35). For many white people growing up in a white world, their acceptance of whiteness is a consequence of their upbringing—never before having to be challenged by or confront the evils of racism. Once privilege is realized, participation is flexible and optional. When confronted, many white people have had the tendency to limit racism to individual acts of violence separate from their “personal” or “individual” preference or practice (Tatum, 1997). Privilege for individuals who believe this way does indeed need to be pointed out.

The contours of whiteness are expressed through a complicated set of ideals governing practice in various social institutions that make up U.S. society, including schools. These are the spaces where racism is hidden and virtually unrecognizable by Whites until pointed out by members of the marginalized group. Allen (1999) maintains, “Whites typically do not see how they are socially privileged because they do not know

much about the daily experiences of people of color” (p. 3). It is when a person of color points out evidence of racist ideology that Whites have to decide whether to address it head on or create excuses for their detachment from the problem. It is at this point when White people are most likely to limit racism to individual acts of violence, to espouse a colorblind ethos, and/or argue for the benefits of meritocracy (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2009; Tatum, 1997). Whiteness cloaks privilege and severely disadvantages people of color in part due to the tendency of whiteness to normalize and substantiate the dominant group’s social and cultural values as American (Allen, 2004).

The visages of power, privilege, and property free and unearned by those bearing White skin represent the pertinence of whiteness to teaching and learning (Chapman, 2010). Each virtue shapes the experience of White Americans and those who can pass for being White whether they choose to acknowledge it or not. It is white supremacy that dictates who gets access, the acquisition of social and cultural capital valuable in American society, and upward mobility in the globalized marketplace.

Cheryl Harris (1995) argues, “[P]roperty rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination” (p. 277). The property claims of whiteness permeate every facet of our society by excluding non-white culture groups in education, government, business, arts and entertainment, etc. Harris argues that the legitimization of White people’s power and control in the law drives their ability to dominate other non-white groups. Similarly, in education, an example of whiteness as property is the oversaturation of white images in textbooks offering very few instances of cultural affirming stories or images of people of color. The purpose and intention of education from the founding of mass public education was to stratify schoolchildren to occupy particular positions in society

(Anderson, 1988; Spring, 2004, 2009)—people of color at the bottom, indefinitely occupying the working class. Times have not changed very much in the last 150 years; the “White Architects” (Watkins, 2001) of public education continue to pass laws, drive policy-making, and strategically arrange schools for people of color that serve the interests of the dominant class.

### **Whiteness and the Work of Teachers**

The hidden nature of racism gives rise to the difficulty teachers have in recognizing the pernicious effects racism can have on their pedagogy. Parker and Lynn (2002) conclude in their review of critical race studies in education research that more work is needed to uncover “the hidden costs of racism” (p. 283). The scholars identify the need to interrogate the subtleties of racism and its impact on teaching and learning. Whiteness veils a White teacher’s ability to recognize the multiple ways their attitudes, beliefs, and cultural perceptions disadvantage students of color (Bell, 2002). Recognizing the effects of whiteness is an important beginning point for teachers interested in adopting the social and cultural perspectives of the students.

Classrooms are not culturally neutral territory (Banks & Banks, 2009). Many White Americans, however, have not had to think much about the effects of culture or race on their social mobility and educational attainment. As a result, racism in the schooling context and its effects are a blindspot for many White teachers (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Leonardo, 2009; Lewis, 2003; Marx, 2006). Boykin, Tyler, and Miller (2005) found in their assessment of student motivation and achievement in culturally themed scenarios that teachers preferred students who acquiesced to euro-dominant forms of teaching and learning. Each teacher identified themes most consistent

with Afro-cultural forms of learning as aberrant and less desirable forms of learning. This mismatch of perspectives complicates the types of interactions teachers have with students. Hinchey (2006) confirms in her book that, on becoming a critical educator, White teachers bring many biases and prejudices to their classroom teaching. She argues that poor students and students of color often have to overcome tremendous academic and social disadvantage when teachers refuse to consciously address and acknowledge how Whiteness and the privilege shapes their worldview.

A noteworthy consequence of whiteness in schools is the hidden and passive racism experienced by traditionally marginalized students and families (Leonardo, 2002, 2009; Marx, 2006). White people do not easily recognize how their actions are racist because they perceive their beliefs, values, and dispositions to be *normal*. Essentially, this lack of recognition makes the cultural and social norms of other groups abnormal or anti-American. Allen (2004) argues, “The white person needs to unlearn a lifetime of problematic white subjectivity, ideology, and behavior. He needs to learn how to see the world through new eyes, reveal the complexities and problematics of whiteness” (p. 130). Whiteness is a racial discourse, a way of being if you will, that is cultivated over a lifetime.

Landsman (2009) discusses explicitly her upbringing in a white world. She discusses that she grew up in a household where the language of power was spoken regularly. Through her teaching Landsman came to understand the difficulty students of color must overcome to acquire the language of power. Her contention became preparing students to be successful contributors to mainstream society without “whitening” their language, behavior, and the cultural values derived from the richness of their home

culture (p. 102). Landsman had to be intentional about recognizing how her privilege as a white woman masked institutional racism. When she recognized the multiple ways racism infiltrated her practice, she took action to limit its effects on the schooling outcomes of culturally diverse youth she taught.

Gary Howard (2006) is a White educator talking candidly about the assumptions many White educators hold entering diverse classrooms. He outlines the danger those assumptions impose on the schooling experiences of students. His commentary includes the danger of euro-centric social arrangements in the classroom. White educators must see “through the eyes of those who’ve been marginalized by [traditional schooling practices]” (p. 79). Howard implores teachers, especially White teachers, to pay more attention to the perspective they use to make judgments about the youth that they are teaching.

The pre-service White female teachers in Sherry Marx’s (2006) study confirm that they’ve never had to think about race. Although the four teachers in Marx’s study came from varying socioeconomic backgrounds, not one of the young White women had any significant interaction with people of color prior to their pre-service teaching field experiences. As a result, Marx found that these future teachers were engaged in a rather invisible, passive racism. Their racist ideology became undisguised by the numerous ways they thought about, approached, discussed, and interacted with the Mexican and African-American students they tutored for the university course they were enrolled in. The teachers in Marx’s study admit to not recognizing how their whiteness was the precursor for racist tendencies and deficit perspectives of the children they taught—perspectives that Marx pointed out to them after her observations of the tutoring sessions



the teachers facilitated. Taking Tatum's (1997) definition of racism as a system of advantage institutionalized to benefit members of the dominant group while systematically disadvantaging non-members, White teachers interviewed in Picower (2009), Lewis (2006), and Marx's study limit racism to individual acts of violence. These teachers, like many others, fail to recognize how schools reproduce inequity and the complicit role their beliefs about schooling and perceptions of youth play in the subordination process.

White privilege and the massive benefits of whiteness have no prerequisite other than one must bear White skin, much like the privilege associated with being male is a product of one's sex (McIntosh, 1992/2004). Reaping the benefits of whiteness does not require the acknowledgement of privilege. Negligence in acknowledging privilege does not keep White people from enjoying its' benefits. This fact doesn't preclude White men and women from being excellent and capable teachers of Black and Latino students. Still, this research reminds us of the imperative for teachers to be aware of how the cultural norms they've developed over time may impede their ability to effectively communicate and respond to students of color. Whether or not the teacher agrees that color matters in the interactions had with students, schools are race-making institutions (Lewis, 2003). In other words, schools teach kids implicitly where they belong in the social hierarchy. Subsequently, there is a racial socialization that happens. Messages about race are regularly transmitted through the actions of educators, the practices, policies, and ethos of a school. Furthermore, students of color notice race (even when their teachers claim not to) and are socialized to negotiate race relations by their parents at an early age (O'Brien Caughy et.al., 2002; Quintana & Vera, 1999; Quintana, 1998).

This point alone should compel teachers and school stakeholders to be more aware of how racism infiltrates institutional practice. White teachers must be sober of the way race—both their own racial identity and the racial identity of the students he or she teaches—facilitates their ability to organize culturally responsive learning experiences for all students. The literature in culturally responsive teaching will be explored further for its plausibility as a framework for understanding how teachers might go about improving the types of learning experiences they offer children.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Framework for Teaching Students of Color**

Geneva Gay (2002, 2010), noted scholar of culturally responsive teaching, contends that teachers have to become skilled at recognizing, acknowledging, and capitalizing on the multi-dimensionality of student's various cultural identities. Gay emphasizes that this knowledge supports all aspects of instructional planning and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive pedagogy is first about acquiring knowledge of students' personal, ethnic, racial, and linguistic identities and then using that knowledge to organize instruction. Preceding the acquisition of such knowledge is the development of the culturally valid and appropriate frames teachers will use to interpret how the knowledge should actually be applied to their practice. I'm defining *culturally valid* as the teacher's ability to correctly assign meaning to student lived experiences and *culturally appropriate* as the teacher's capacity to accurately judge and/or interpret student actions and behavior. This is the location of a teacher's development as culturally responsive where cultivation of an empathetic disposition may be of greatest importance. Teacher perspectives of youth and the perspectives youth have of themselves must converge. The intersection provides teachers with the professional

cultural knowledge necessary to effectively build on and extend the culture students bring to school.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) assumes race and culture do matter in schools and that schools are social institutions rooted in racism. CRP also confirms that students bring culture to school, that culture is valuable, and that culture is inclusive of multiple identities. Teachers better educate students of color when teachers allow culture to inform their teaching. Critical race theory and studies of whiteness in education isolate race as significant to understanding the ways in which educational institutions veil the vicissitudes of racism and race subordination. CRP literature provides a platform for teachers to further scrutinize race's influence in their work with students in order to overcome the challenges difference may pose to the teaching and learning process.

### **Overview of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

As a branch of multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy is a multidisciplinary body of literature that draws from empirical studies in fields that include sociology, psychology, anthropology, and communications (Gay, 2002). Cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995), and most recently, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) taken together form a knowledge base that grounds a framework for effectively teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. These literatures represent current day understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy. They each confirm that students of color can achieve at high levels when their teachers, regardless of race, strategically organize learning experiences that account for the richness and variety of student culture in their teaching.

According to multicultural education scholar Geneva Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching is succinctly described as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 2001). Tyrone Howard (2010) adds, “[C]ulturally responsive pedagogy is a professional, political, ethical, and ideological disposition that recognizes the richness of the culture that students bring to school” (p. 67). CRP is not an isolated set of strategies that teachers use to integrate color into the curriculum. Instead, CRP is a professional disposition that ensures classroom-learning activities build on, extend, and incorporate the value of the cultural expertise students bring to school. The application of CRP is an intellectual, ideological, moral, and ethical imperative teachers possess. Their commitment is to prioritize the cultural expertise of students of color in every aspect of their professional teaching practice.

Additionally, culturally responsive pedagogy is meant to hold teachers accountable to demonstrating care and concern for students, effectively communicating across cultural difference, implementing a representative curriculum, and being critical of what constitutes knowledge and knowledge systems (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2010). Students of culturally responsive teachers are academically successful. Culturally responsive teachers are also adept at mapping the relevance of classroom activities to a greater social and political awareness for students. Finally, culturally responsive pedagogy is facilitated by teachers with a high level of cultural competence informed by an acute understanding of each student, their community, and the cultural tradition(s) that they represent.

CRP is rooted in the teacher's ability to esteem and value the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), expertise, perspective, and experience of students in all aspects of their professional practice (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010). To be culturally responsive is to know how to account for racial, gender, and class difference when negotiating interactions with students. The multidimensionality of culture requires that teachers see students beyond the confines of the teacher's own personal experiences.

Finally, the application of culturally responsive pedagogy requires constant attention to the development of one's ability to communicate effectively with youth. It is when teachers situate learning within the cultural context of students that instruction is maximized (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Hollins 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). The content being covered in class, the examples used, and the activities students participate in need to have relevance to their real lives. Teachers must arrange learning experiences that reference the dimensions of the child's culture that they can readily connect to.

### **Challenges for the Implementation of CRP**

Scholars agree that teacher preparation needs to account for diversity and multiculturalism by integrating pertinent learning experiences for teacher candidates throughout the entire pre-service teacher training experience (Gay & Howard, 2000; Grant, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Young, 2010). Villegas and Lucas (2002) emphasize that teacher educators must make a commitment to be critical of the teacher education curriculum and that they must articulate a vision of multicultural education that ensures issues of diversity and multiculturalism remain "central rather than peripheral" to teacher training (p. 21). Making culture central to the teacher preparation curriculum

requires more than just one course on multiculturalism, which is the sad and unfortunate case for many teacher preparation programs in this country. Those courses are not always required, which makes preparation to become culturally responsive optional. This, in effect is largely problematic when you consider the cultural mismatch between the nation's growing public school population and the trend that public school teachers will continue to be mostly White, female, and middle class (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2011a, 2011b).

Secondly, teachers and administrators don't have a firm grasp of exactly what culturally responsive teaching is and/or they underestimate how much work it is to establish a truly culturally responsive classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Young, 2010). This can sometimes mean that culturally responsive pedagogy is simply not a priority (Warren, 2011). Participants in Warren's pilot study explore how their own conception of empathy informs various aspects of their teaching practice. Findings suggest that teachers and administrators limit CRP to small, inconsistent, menial attempts to include culture in the curriculum. Teachers inconsequentially integrate culture into the learning versus figuring out how the lessons they teach interact with the culture of the students they teach. An administrator from the study thought that discussions of race and culture had no place in his school and that teaching and learning should focus on academic rigor separate from addressing the child's cultural identity.

Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) concede that engaging in culturally responsive teaching seems "herculean" to teachers who are attempting to balance all of the many demands of their jobs and that it "clashes with the traditional ways in which education is carried out in our society" (p.444). CRP is supposed to clash with the

traditional ways in which education is carried out. The tradition creates the imperative for educational experiences that respond to the difference students of color bring to the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching can be overwhelming because of the number of teacher competencies required.

CRP is a model that draws on empirical data from numerous studies across academic disciplines addressing how to better respond to the unique needs of culturally diverse people. A step toward becoming more culturally responsive is to focusing on becoming more culturally responsive. In other words, it is to the benefit of the teacher to exert his or her energies developing a keen awareness of how a student's race, culture, gender, family, and neighborhood, for example, shape that students' personal identity. Dutro et.al (2008) argues that to do this teachers' conceptions of race and culture must better align with those of their students. CRP doesn't fully account for what this looks like in a classroom between teachers and students.

Culturally responsive teaching is a lot to do and think about everyday, which further lends credence to the idea that becoming a culturally responsive teacher is nothing you master in one course on the subject or by reading a book on the topic. Teachers throughout the U.S. are successfully educating students of color, but not enough of their stories are being told. Milner (2009) suggests that at the core of being culturally responsive is the teacher's ability to "understand the complexities of students' culture and their ways of experiencing the world" (p. 131). Curriculum decisions, minimizing student misconduct, and bolstering academic rigor are simpler tasks when teachers possess this understanding. The question of how to understand a group of people with

whom you have very few social or cultural similarities, or personal interactions, is most pertinent.

Tate (1995) found in his study of a culturally relevant math classroom that the teacher was particularly successful because she built the mathematics curriculum around the lived realities of the Black students she taught. The teacher did this by utilizing African-centered teaching approaches. These approaches were student-centered and they acknowledged the experiences of the students while making the race of the student central to the pedagogical process. Other studies of cultural relevance or responsiveness agree that teachers who center learning on student experiences ensure that the learning is enjoyable and agree that CRP is less of a daunting task (Howard, 2001a, 2001b; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994; Bondy et.al., 2007). CRP is not something extra to do in addition to teaching. It is not an addendum or an afterthought to instruction. It is a teaching disposition that functions as the frame for the totality of the teacher's professional teaching practice.

Young (2010) uses the tenets of critical race theory to lead a group of education practitioners in an action research case study to think about their practice as culturally responsive pedagogues. Young insists that in order for teachers to be prepared to effectively educate students of color in a culturally responsive manner that the teacher needs to be critically aware of how race and achievement intersect. The researcher's conversation with one school's teachers and administrators was intended to raise "race consciousness as well as expose participants to the endemic nature of racism" (p. 249). Young found significant discrepancies with the Ladson-Billings (2006) definition of culturally relevant teaching and how the district described or gauged academic success,



cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness. Young argues there is no gap in the literature of what culturally responsive teaching is, but rather how to effectively implement it in schools. She found that the teachers in her study thought that to be good at culturally responsive teaching was extremely difficult for both novice and veteran teachers given the time and curriculum restraints (Young, 2010, p. 257). The author acknowledges that these teachers and administrators mean well in the work they perform on behalf of their culturally diverse student body; however, many of their attempts were superficial and short-lived.

McAllister and Irvine (2002) invited a cohort of urban schoolteachers to immerse themselves in the culture of the students they taught. The two researchers found that the teachers each agreed empathy is a necessary disposition for teaching across culture. These teachers went to work with a student's family, attended the family's worship service, ate dinner with the family, and engaged in a number of other cultural activities in the student's neighborhood. These teachers agreed that these experiences significantly improved the empathy they had for their culturally diverse students. What we don't know from the article is how these teachers conceive of empathy and how their conception informs their application of empathy following this experience. Data from McAllister and Irvine's study (2002) simply suggest that the teachers think empathy is important.

Gay and Howard (2000) assert that teachers of European descent must take serious their "cultural biases and ethnic prejudices" if they are to be effective teachers of students of color (p. 8). Literature in critical race theory of education and whiteness studies in education suggest that many White teachers don't realize the extent to which

they possess and express cultural bias in their expectations of student performance. Their misunderstanding of students can frustrate their good intentions. Likewise, multicultural education scholars argue that empathy is personal and begins with the actions that teachers take to minimize racial prejudice. There are several social constructions of empathy relevant to this discussion described by leading scholars to be discussed in the next section.

### **Social Constructions of Empathy by Scholars of CRP**

Ladson-Billings (2006) in her chapter of the book *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms* asserts that being a culturally responsive teacher requires empathy. She maintains that the empathetic teacher “feels with the student rather than for them” thereby building “a sense of solidarity” with the student (p. 31). Feeling with the student helps the teacher to prepare learning experiences that will maximize learning outcomes for that student. Ladson-Billings contends that knowing what’s wrong is important, but not for the purposes of feeling sorry for that student. Feeling sorry leads to lowered expectations. On the contrary, she insists that empathy improves the teacher’s ability to modify learning experiences so that they more adequately meet the need of students. Empathy is a professional competency that prepares teachers to thoughtfully account for student social and intellectual needs when making crucial instructional decisions. Ladson-Billings cautions that in doing so, expectations for student performance should remain high.

Ladson-Billing’s reflections are consistent with Tyrone Howard’s (2010) contention that empathy precedes an ethic of care. He argues that empathetic teachers understand how the intersections of race, class, gender, and language influence a

student's experiences in school. He argues that empathetic teachers don't make excuses for student failure. On the contrary, these teachers use their knowledge to challenge students to achieve at high levels by keeping them engaged and motivated. He insists that empathetic teachers make learning about students an ongoing priority of their professional practice. Howard and Ladson-Billings emphasize the importance of empathy in student-teacher interactions by arguing the necessity of the teacher to be both active and attentive to the shifting needs of students moment-by-moment. They place sole responsibility on the teacher as power brokers, leaving little room for the adult to make excuses for why the child is not performing the way that he or she expects. Both scholars see empathy as a necessary tool for overcoming the challenges associated with educating students of color in a racist and prejudiced network of schooling.

Milner (2010) profiles the teaching practice of several successful teachers of students of color. His book chronicles the work of teachers who effectively teach students across difference. He argues that in order to fix the problem of teaching and learning for Black and Latino youth, that the field needs to exert more energy focusing directly on how teachers teach rather than just student outcomes (i.e., test scores, measures, and the persistence of the achievement gap). In his book, Milner identifies empathy as a useful teacher intervention. Milner asserts that empathy centers on finding parallel or congruent experiences in teacher's own lives to the lived realities of students. By doing so, a couple of the teachers in his study felt they better connected with students and students better connected with them.

Milner argues that empathy work is an expression of one's personal identity. As he saw in his case studies, the effective teachers "could not separate themselves and their

own life experiences when making decisions that affect students.” (p. 60). Empathy is a consideration that allows teachers to be transparent and vulnerable with students. As a result, applications of empathy to student-teacher interaction improve how students relate to teachers and vice-versa. In one particular case empathy causes the teacher to regularly situate self in the teaching and learning of his students. Milner’s findings coincide with those from Ladson-Billings (1995) studies of successful teachers of African-American children when she begins to define the parameters of culturally relevant teaching. In his treatment of empathy, Milner concludes that empathizing is not about treating every student the same, but that it is about responding to students fairly and differently as necessary.

Dance (2002) and Lawrence-Lightfoot (1985) both agree that empathy is a necessary disposition of teachers who teach in culturally diverse settings. The two researchers see empathy from a primarily cognitive point of view emphasizing the seriousness of empathy for helping teachers to see the schooling process from the perspective of the child. Not only do teachers need to be able to see things from the student’s perspective, they need to make sure that the child “feels seen” (Dance, 2002, p. 73). Dance’s observation underscores the significance of inviting students into the empathy process as critics to confirm or deny the accuracy of the teacher’s intention. It is the subsequent action taken by teachers during the student-teacher exchange that materializes empathy’s outcomes.

In his book, *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*, Gary Howard (2006) maintains, “[E]mpathy begins with seeing others in their own light rather than through our projections of them in our light” (p. 79). Empathy is

necessary for teachers to appropriately respond emotionally and intellectually to students. Howard extends Milner's argument for empathy as personal by insisting that students have to be understood through the frames of reference they bring to class, not the ones that teachers create for them. Part of getting personal is understanding how the teacher's own experience and perspectives differ from the student. Then, assessing how the misalignment of perspective may potentially damage student-teacher interactions.

Lisa Delpit (1995) argues that teachers ought not to enter the teaching profession thinking they know everything they need to know about students of color. They must pay attention to the cultural and social norms that accompany students to school. Then, she admonishes teachers to inform their response based on cultural understandings of these students. Delpit's contention coincides with Ladson-Billings and Howard's assertion that teachers must make judgments about students beyond what they see in front of them. It is about inquiring how race, class, and gender differences have privileged certain groups in school and disadvantaged others. Finding the holes in the traditional practice of "doing" school and accounting for the challenges they pose to the teaching and learning of Black youth is of paramount importance, especially as it relates to the perspectives on what, for example, a good student is and isn't.

Looking at these works collectively, I find that the authors suggest empathy is developmental, that teachers must cultivate it over time. They would also agree that empathizing is deeply personal work that is much easier said than done. Empathy is a call for teachers to look more critically at themselves, their own bias, and the sources of the social and cultural perspectives guiding their work. Similarly, training to become culturally responsive is not about acquiring *best* practice because best practice looks

completely different for each child. Preparing to be a culturally responsive teacher means interrogating how race and culture inform instruction. It is also about acquiring an understanding from youth about how race and culture shade their schooling experiences.

The scholars' observations of empathy's application suggest that each teacher's conception of empathy is going to be different because each teacher is different. Their experiences are different and their students are different. Therefore, it seems that empathy's application cannot be standardized. The lack of research in this area does not confirm or deny this matter. There, however, should be strong similarity in terms of student outcome for each case. This research project not only explores teacher conceptions of empathy, but the study investigates how those conceptions materialize in the classroom between teachers and students. The final section of the literature review will focus squarely on defining the construct of empathy as a human capacity and empathy's implications for helping relationships, like those between White female teachers and Black male students in this study.

### **Empathy**

Literature on the topic of empathy is vast and far-reaching. Research on the process, product, role, and application of empathy has a long history in evolutionary biology, clinical, social & developmental psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive developmental research. This review is not exhaustive, but it draws together literature useful for supporting a straightforward understanding of empathy. This critical review of literature briefly explores how empathy has been defined, its differentiation from sympathy, how empathy is developed, the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis, and how empathy has been used in other helping professions including teaching. This review also

includes a detailed discussion of Mark Davis's (1994) Multidimensional Framework of Empathy. This is the theoretical framework I used to identify evidence of empathy in the interactions of White female teachers with their Black male students.

### **Defining Empathy...**

Empathy's basic definition is the response of one individual to the observed actions, experience, or situation of another individual. The *observer* is the individual applying the empathic response. This person is the empathizer. The *target* is the individual on the receiving end of the observer's response. This is the person perceived in need of a helping response. The *observation situation* is the physical context for which an observation of the human condition is made. Empathy is an interpretation of the actions or the conditions of the target in the observation situation. The observer attempts to make sense of the observable evidence (e.g. facial expression, emotion, physical behavior(s), etc.). The response to this observation is then guided by the observer's interpretation of the need of the target.

The word empathy is translated from the German aesthetic word *Einfühlung*, introduced by German scholar Theodor Lipps, meaning "to project one's self into others" (Titchener, 1909). Empathy is actualized and expressed as the "inner imitation" or internal resonance an individual goes through when observing another person's emotional, physical, or situational condition (Davis, 1994; Katz 1963; Stueber, 2006; Titchener, 1909). This internal resonance can produce an emotional and/or a physical response. This imitation is not a literal acting out. The internal response, however, drives subsequent action on behalf of the target.

Empathy is a “flexible human capacity” that enables one individual to gain knowledge of, connect with, and affectively share in the experiences of other individuals (Davis, 1994; Decety & Jackson, 2004). The ability to empathize is apparent as early as infancy. For example, Davis (1994) describes studies that find that an infant will cry when he or she is in proximity to another crying infant. Researchers claim that the infant’s response is the result of the child’s experience of another human’s physical condition. The infant has responded to the actions of another. One’s ability to empathize and the depth to which one can empathize mature over time as he or she moves from infancy into adulthood (Davis, 1994; Decety & Jackson, 2004; Mar, 2011). The rate, degree, and context for which an individual develops empathy will vary widely by person (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990).

There has been some debate in the psychology literature over whether or not empathy is purely emotional or primarily an exercise in human cognition. The application of empathy requires a range of cognitive processes in the accurate perception of another person’s distress (Chandler, 1973; Flavell et.al., 1968; Kohler, 1929; Mead, 1934). Others argue that individuals whose emotional responses to a situation are congruent with the individual that they’ve observed in that situation is a display of empathy (Chandler & Greenspan, 1972; Hoffman, 2000; Stotland, 1969; Stotland, Sherman, & Shaver, 1971). Katz (1963) and Davis (1980, 1983) characterize empathy as a physical, emotional, and cognitive response to the observed condition of another person. Davis (1994) concludes that empathy’s definition must be inclusive of empathy’s affective and intellectual domains.



More recently, social psychologists, neuroscience/cognitive development psychologists, and psychotherapists also agree that empathy involves both cognitive and affective processes (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Rogers, 1975). Given the multifaceted representations of empathy, a definition that does not account for the cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy is incomplete. It is advantageous to understand empathy as multidimensional in nature, incorporative of both one's intellect and emotional state in response to another person's human condition. In the professional context of teaching, both the personal humanity and professional knowledge of the teacher is of significance to how well she negotiates interaction with students. The teacher's response orientation heavily influences student social and academic outcomes (Delpit, 1995).

### **Sympathy versus Empathy**

Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, you would've found the word sympathy in the literature as the term of choice for describing a human's ability to imitate or imagine the perspectives of another human being. There has been much work over the years attempting to trace the distinct origins of empathy versus sympathy (Hunsdahl, 1967; Gladstein, 1984), but much of the work has led to conflicting understandings of sympathy's relationship to empathy. Defining sympathy in accordance with its earliest roots in 18<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy characterizes it as "feeling for someone, and refers to feelings of sorrow, or feeling sorry" (Eisenberg and Strayer, 1987, p. 6). Jahoda (2005) found that the differences are unclear and that it may be that the two terms are more closely related than what theorists originally believed. The origin of their usage in describing the human condition is the basis for their meanings. Sympathy has a

substantially longer history than empathy. Sympathy began being theorized at least a century before the mention of empathy in the 1700s by Adam Smith, a behaviorist.

Both sympathy and empathy stem from separate intellectual traditions. Therefore, they are slightly different. Sympathy is a way to relate while empathy is primarily a means of knowing (Wispe, 1986). In recent years, scholars settle that sympathy is most akin to the shared affect one person has for another in a distressing situation. Mark Davis (1994) likens sympathy to one particular aspect of empathy he terms “empathic concern” (p. 57). Empathic concern is the affective domain of empathy meant to account for the process an individual goes through when he or she sympathizes with someone. This emotional connection or “feeling with” an individual (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990) in turn creates a heightened awareness of the target’s plight. Whereas, empathy can and does include feeling with or for someone, it is also inclusive of the ability to project one’s self into the self of another. By doing so, the observer or the empathizer develops a sharper understanding of the target’s condition. The adoption of perspective by the observer promotes a more valid response by the observer. According to Davis, empathy is inclusive of both an emotional and cognitive domain.

### **Mark H. Davis Multidimensional Framework of Empathy**

Mark H. Davis’s (1980, 1983, 1994) multidimensional framework for the application of empathy is one of the most used and respected models for understanding empathy’s product and process. Davis argues that empathy’s “true” nature is embedded in a “set of related constructs all having to do with the reactions of an observer to the experiences of a target and gives equal status to both cognition and emotion, process and outcome, disposition and situation” (p. 221). A comprehensive definition of empathy

must account for both the processes that facilitate the helping response as well as the social variables mediating those outcomes for the target. Davis's theoretical framework is most informative for describing how empathy is applied in professional social contexts such as a classroom.

Davis's framework of empathy is the theoretical lens used for recognizing evidence of empathy's application to the student-teacher interactions under investigation in this study. Davis insists empathy is both *Emotional* (Empathic Concern) and *Intellectual* (Perspective-Taking). Empathic Concern is "the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others". Perspective Taking is "the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life" (p. 57). This widely referenced theory of empathy builds on the most comprehensive research of empathy in the field of social psychology.

To better understand the process one undergoes when empathizing with someone, Davis constructed an organizational model that accounts for four inter-related constructs of value for systematizing observation of interpersonal human interaction. These constructs include antecedents, processes, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes (See Figure 2.1). Davis maintains that the goal of this model is to support a robust, inclusive definition of empathy that doesn't leave important understandings of empathy's construction on the peripheral—a definition that accounts for empathy's emotional and cognitive processes involved. This organizational model attempts to "emphasize the connectedness of these constructs" (p. 12). The application of both dimensions of empathy by the White female teacher participants is examined.

**Table 2.1**  
**Davis (1994) Empathy Process Organizational Model (p. 13)**

	<b>Definitions (p. 12)</b>	<b>Levels</b>	
<b>Antecedents</b>	“Characteristics of the observer, target, or situation”	The Person The Situation	<i><b>Individual</b></i> and/or <i><b>situational variables</b></i> influencing the observer’s ability to respond
<b>Processes</b>	“Particular mechanisms by which empathic outcomes are produced”	Non-Cognitive Simple Cognitive Advanced Cognitive	<i><b>Intellectual exercise</b></i> the observer undergoes in response to the observation of the target differentiated by degree of cognitive effort or sophistication applied
<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	“Cognitive and affective responses produced in the observer which are not manifested in overt behavior toward the target”	Affective Outcomes Non-Affective Outcomes	The <i><b>immediate internal response or reaction of the observer</b></i> after witnessing the condition of the target
<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	“Behavioral responses directed toward the target”	Helping Aggression Social Behavior	The <i><b>physical actions taken on behalf of the target</b></i> in response to the target’s observed condition

Antecedents are the variables shaping the observation situation’s social and physical context. Davis asserts that there are particular emotional, personality, and/or behavioral characteristics the observer brings into the observation situation. The degree of familiarity or personal affiliation of the target to the observer is an example of an antecedent. The location of the observation situation and the attitudinal disposition of the target as perceived by the observer are other examples of empathy’s antecedents. These simple contextual factors impact how the observer processes what he or she has

witnessed in the observation situation. If the observer has a high degree of similarity in terms of experience to the target, for example, it is thought that the observer's empathic response will be more intense as well (p. 15).

Processes refer to the immediate cognitive activity of the observer during the observation situation. There are three general degrees of cognitive activity. Some responses, both negative and positive, require little cognitive activity. Davis refers to this level as *non-cognitive processes*. These responses are usually automatic requiring little thought or attention. The second degree is simple *cognitive processes*. At this level, the observer engages in a moderate amount of intellectual activity. Cognitive processing at this level relies on rudimentary cognitive processing abilities, such as labeling which refers to an observer's ability to "infer something about the target's experience" based on easy to follow verbal or physical cues (see Shea et.al., 1991 in Davis, 1994, p. 16). The most advanced degree of cognitive processing requires the observer's most sophisticated cognitive processing capabilities. This stage includes perspective taking or role taking. Role taking is an attempt by the observer to psychically put themselves in the shoes of the target and to experience the observed situation as if he or she were the target. Numerous theorists argue for the importance of the observer's ability to imagine other's perspectives for appropriately responding to the observed situation.

Intrapersonal outcomes refer directly to the initial internal response the observer has when confronted with the observed situation. This response can be positive or negative, emotional or non-emotional. A target can say that he or she has just lost their job and in hearing this news the observer may become immediately saddened. Any number of factors may cause the observer to become saddened including the observer's

experience with job loss or previous observations of individuals in the similar situations. However, the target, if he or she has not shown any discernible emotion, may actually be happy about this situation (their job loss). Davis terms this type of intrapersonal outcome as a *reactive* response. The observer's response in this situation is not directly correlative to the condition of the target. Congruent emotional reactions shared by the observer with the target is referred to in the literature as a *parallel* response. Reactive responses "in many cases will result from more sophisticated cognitive processes than a parallel outcome" (p. 19). Parallel outcomes tend to be more self-centered. This intrapersonal outcome influences the observer's subsequent external action in response to the target's perceived need.

The observer's immediate reaction to what they've just seen is based primarily on his or her perception of the target's particular need at that moment. The observer's perception can be judged as right or wrong depending on how closely the perspective framing his or her response aligns with that of the target. In other words, if the target is experiencing a situation in one way and the observer fails to observe that situation in the way that the target has observed it, then the empathic response may be called into question.

Interpersonal outcome refers directly to what happens to the observer internally while the interpersonal outcome is the external expression of the observer's reaction to the observed situation. Responses are generally categorized as helping behaviors (see empathy-altruism section), aggressive behavior, and/or social relationships. Davis insists that these outcomes result "most directly from cognitive and affective intrapersonal outcomes, and less directly by various empathy-related processes and antecedent

conditions” (p. 20). In sum, how the observer responds can easily be attributed to his or her initial emotional or intellectual reaction to the observed situation. In order to make the most impactful response, it is necessary that the observer have enough accurate information about the situation.

Davis’s (1994) meditational model (p. 178 – 179) is of significant use for explaining the role the target has in confirming the accuracy of the empathetic response by the observer, and in this case the teacher. The model addresses the convergence of perspective taking and empathic concern to produce favorable outcomes for students. The target’s perception of the observer’s action on the target’s behalf is tremendously important to the effectiveness of the observer’s response. If the target perceives the observer’s response is inaccurate or misguided, then the validity of the empathic response must be reevaluated. This means that the intention of the observer to alleviate distress or improve the target’s condition may or may not be fully actualized. In the context of multicultural classrooms, as I briefly mentioned in the CRP section of the chapter, teachers have to allow for student feedback. This allows for teachers to confirm that the actions they take are culturally appropriate and valid.

Davis’s multidimensional framework of empathy is a straightforward, organized, and comprehensive definition of empathy. This work builds on a century of empirical research on empathy in the field of psychology. This framework is the most complete of any model presently available for describing evidence of empathy in the specific social interactions of teachers and student. The focus of this project is not on student responses to the teacher’s actions per se, but rather the teacher’s actions in each interaction and her motivations, intentions, and priorities for the actions that she takes. Viewed as helping

relationships, I am likening each student-teacher interaction in the classrooms where I observe within a context of helping. The next section will discuss the role of empathy for negotiating the helping relationship.

### **The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis**

Many researchers find that true empathy gives way to authentic altruistic motivation (Dovidio, Allen, & Schroeder, 1990; Toi & Batson, 1982; Fultz et.al, 1986; Batson, 1991; Van Lange, 2008) giving much credence to the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson et.al, 1988, Batson et. al, 1991, Batson, 1991). The hypothesis states that when one applies authentic empathic concern, he or she is then moved to help another person based strictly on the needs of the person being helped absent and not on egoistic motivation. The hypothesis argues that empathy starts the helping process.

Batson (1991) offers three approaches or paths to helping behavior. The first path he terms *Reinforcement*. Batson argues that this path involves egoistic forms of helping implicating the helper or observer as the primary beneficiary of the helping response. Observers in this category only help because: a) they will receive some reward; b) they want to avoid punishment; or c) because escape—avoiding the situation altogether—is not an option for them. In lieu of one of these self-centered alternatives, the observer is compelled to offer help to a person in some visible form of distress. Batson contends that empathy is absent in this scenario because the decision to help is completely self-serving.

A second path is the *Arousal Reduction* approach. Again, this path primarily benefits the observer. This path differentiates from the Reinforcement path because the observer is much more concerned with eliminating his or her own distress associated with their observation of another person's physical, mental, or emotional distress. The



observer helping on this path is motivated to help in an effort to reduce or eliminate his or her own feelings of guilt, anxiety, or personal distress. Nonetheless, if their personal distress becomes too high or if escape is possible, the observer on this path will avoid helping altogether. Escape and/or promise of some external reward/praise are important factors to the observers' decision to help and if escape is easy, the observer will avoid the helping situation altogether. In some cases, the target may receive minimal help, but the observer is still the primary beneficiary of the helping response. This path is also thought to not be inclusive of empathy because the observer's response is self-centered.

The third and final path to helping is *Empathy-Altruism*. An observer helping a target on this path is truly empathic because his or her decision to help has little or nothing to do with their personal need. The helping response has everything to do with alleviating the distress of the target. The observer's personal distress and ease of escape are overcast by the observer's feeling of compassion and commitment to meeting the perceived need of the target. There may be some physical or immaterial reward for helping, but the fact that the observer is responding to his or her observation of a target absent of egoistic motivation denotes a truly empathetic regard for the target (See Batson, 1991 for complete study details).

Batson's argument is based primarily on the observer's feeling and their level of personal distress. As I mentioned previously, if the observer has failed to adopt the perspective of the target, though selfless, his or her response may not adequately address the need of the target. The helping response may even be harmful. The intellectual dimension of empathy is of great significance in helping the observer to think

strategically about how to respond and communicate that response in a manner that will yield the most positive outcome for the target.

Warren's (2011) pilot study found that White female teachers emphasized "helping" as a key motivation for teaching students of color in high-need areas. Their inability in most accounts to connect with students, failure to prepare students to be academically successful, and the conflicts that routinely arise in their classrooms suggest that their perception of what students need led to responses that ultimately caused conflict rather than eliminated them. A matching of the social and cultural perspectives between observer and client, or in this case teacher and students/families, may significantly improve the appropriateness or validity of the helping behavior. Empathy accounts for a more complete understanding of the target. Truly empathetic responses invite the target to provide feedback to the observer's response. This feedback if received can improve future interactions.

### **The Development of Empathy**

Developing empathy differs by discipline. Evidence suggests that a person's ability to learn to empathize with another person can be improved significantly through training and various field experiences (Aspy, 1972; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990; Truax & Carkhuff, 1976/2008). Scholars in neuroscience insist that empathy is developmental. An individual's ability to empathize is flexible and "susceptible to social-cognitive intervention, such as through training or enhancement programs for targeting various goals [social or otherwise]" (Decety & Jackson, 2004, p. 94). Empathy matures over time as an individual develops socially and intellectually. The ability to empathize can

be significantly enhanced when individuals engage in ongoing professional development and targeted training.

The McAllister and Irvine (2002) study suggests that through the cultural immersion experiences teachers had, they became more aware of empathy's necessity in the classroom. However, that doesn't mean that they developed more empathy for the students of color that they studied. McAllister and Irvine's research demonstrates that teachers recognize the importance of acquiring cultural frames of reference that more accurately mirror those of their culturally diverse students. There are several things we don't know about empathy from this study. We don't know how the teacher's new knowledge repositions their relationships with these students or how these new cultural perspectives inform how they negotiate interactions with youth. We also don't have a sense of how empathy is operationalized in their teaching practice as a result of their sustained immersion in the communities of color. There is very little change that the teacher can make of an institutional level without the support of his or her administration. Their newfound perspectives do not suggest that the teachers have resigned any deficit perspectives of students as a result of their immersion. In fact, the teacher's immersion could have easily reinforced deficit notions of student culture. These are all legitimate concerns when thinking about how to operationalize empathy for teachers in a way that supports academic rigor and high expectations for students of color.

Aspy (1972) provides an outline for how to develop a teacher's empathic capability. In Aspy's work the trainers first provide teachers a primarily cognitive definition of empathy. They emphasize the need for teachers to use empathy as a way of "understanding" students. The trainers then provide teachers with an in-service empathy

training scale consistent with the definition previously given to the teachers to rate several student-teacher interaction. Next, the teachers listened to audio of different teacher-student interactions where the teachers are asked to focus on the teacher responses to students and rate them accordingly. The interaction samples have different ratings of empathy previously assigned to them and the teachers are evaluated individually to assess their ability to assign the appropriate rating to the interaction. The process is repeated until the trainers find that the cohort of teachers is proficient.

Aspy insists, “[T]he central focus of the in-service training program is communication rather than precision...so the trainer concentrates on the trainees’ apparent understanding of the dimension....” (p. 54). Developing empathy in this regard is about one’s ability to recognize empathy through the verbal communication of teacher to student. This view represents empathy as chiefly intellectual and similar training programs are used for the preparation of counselors, psychotherapists, and other clinical practitioners (Truax & Carkhuff, 1976/2008). Aspy recognizes that when you refer to empathy that it is difficult to be exact. He argues that empathizing is more about learning to recognize specific issues in an interaction and then to communicate that understanding back to the target to determine the appropriateness of the response. Herein lies the task for this research to not attempt to define empathy, but rather operationalize it by examining empathy as a professional competency of teachers. In the next two sections is a discussion of empathy’s application in the helping professions followed by a review of literature of empathy’s application by teachers for students.

### **Empathy in the Helping Professions**

Empathy is employed in several different clinical helping professions including counseling, psychotherapy, social work, and medicine. Practitioners utilize empathy as a mechanism for developing trusting relationships with their clients that they intend will improve clinical and social outcomes for the client (Aspy, 1972, Katz, 1963). In early psychotherapy and counseling empathy is contextualized as a strand in a tripartite expression: human care, alongside genuineness and warmth (Truax & Carkhuff, 1976/2008). Without warmth and genuineness, it is almost impossible for the practitioner to accurately empathize with his/her client. The client has to be convinced that the practitioner has his or her best interests in mind.

Accomplished counseling scholar Carl Rogers (1975) insists empathy is a strategic “moment-by-moment” exchange where the practitioner is always one step ahead of the client. The practitioner routinely checks in with the client to relay his/her understanding of the client’s need as a way to affirm their accuracy of perceptions (Aspy, 1972; Rogers, 1975). This is consistent with Davis’s (1994) contention that the target must confirm or deny the accuracy of the observer’s perception. This is a constant dialectical interface had regularly between practitioner and client.

There is also significant agreement that the practitioner must be himself or herself at all times, open and transparent with the client (Carkhuff & Truax, 1965). The expectation is that the practitioner is up front with their biases and comfortable exercising his or her various vulnerabilities when relating to the client (Aspy, 1972; Rogers, 1986; Stueber, 2006). This puts the client at ease and creates a relationship that makes clients feel safe to open up in the same way. The client’s willingness to be open is especially important if the practitioner is going to accurately adopt the client’s perspectives for the

purpose of empathizing with him or her. This is consistent with Milner (2010), Howard (2006), and Howard (2010) conceptions of empathy. Students need to trust their teacher if they are going to be open with the most vulnerable aspects of their personhood. Practitioners are comfortable with making mistakes and getting things wrong in the empathy process.

Similarly, scholars in social neuroscience argue successfully empathizing with another lies in the ability of the observer to exercise “mental flexibility”, be “self-aware”, and share affectively in the experiences of others. Flexibility, transparency, and being self-aware support more accurate understandings of the target’s feelings (Decety & Lamm, 2006; Decety & Jackson, 2004). Practitioners must be hyper aware of their own biases and any other self-centered perspectives, ideas, or inclinations. These clinical and social neuro-scientific examinations of empathy reinforce what researchers in multicultural education have said about the possibilities of empathy to improve how teachers interact with culturally diverse student populations.

Truax and Carkhuff (1976/2008) maintain that empathizing must account for the self of the observer keeping in mind that the gendered and cultural lenses they use to empathize have considerable impact on *how* they empathize. This view is consistent with Stueber’s (2006) warning for the use of empathy in folk psychology. He argues that empathy is personal and cannot be detached from one’s subjective identities. The application of empathy may not look the same for every teacher, but in the interest of creating safe spaces for human interaction, it is necessary for teachers to be aware that empathizing with others begins with self.

### **Empathy as a Tool of the Trade**

There is a small body of literature emphasizing empathy's centrality to teaching and learning. Brazziel (1964) describes empathetic teaching as,

An attempt on the part of the teachers to enter in the world of the child, to see the world through this child's eyes and thus to equip themselves to utilize this child's concepts to develop broader and more accurate concepts...[it's] the surveying of the teacher's arsenal of skills in the light of the observed needs of the child and the subsequent acquisition or improvement of the needed skills in-service...the sloughing off of traditional or approved methods of teaching and learning (p. 385).

Brazziel describes empathy here as more than a human capacity. He maintains that empathy is an important skill of professional importance to the teaching profession. Given the myriad of social, cultural, gendered, and racial differences had between White female teachers and Black male students, it is necessary to see how the concept of empathy materializes in the classroom.

Scholars theorize empathy to be a necessary disposition for teachers of culturally diverse students. It is thought that a teacher's ability to empathize with students of color better positions he or she to communicate with and respond to students for the purpose of bolstering student academic and social outcomes (Berman, 2004; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Milner, 2010). An older body of research emphasizes the utility of empathy for helping teachers to humanize the education enterprise as evidenced through the establishment of a more nurturing classroom environment and the cultivation of strong relationships with students (Aspy, 1972; Aspy, 1975a; Aspy, 1975b, Black & Phillips, 1982; Stevens, 1967). As

I've stated before, this literature in education is absent of a clear, empirically grounded understanding of empathy's application to student-teacher interactions. It is useful for making sense of how empathy's application potentially improves the pedagogy of effective teachers in multicultural class settings. Observations and reflections on the utility of empathy in education research have yet to fully operationalize the application of empathy between teachers and students with race, class, and/or gender differences.

Further investigation of empathy's application to student-teacher interactions includes an examination of both the *process* of empathizing (the antecedents and initial affective and cognitive reaction by teachers in a helping situation) and the *outcomes* (the consequences of the teacher's actions in response to students in the helping situation) as outlined in Davis (1994) empathy organizational model. A teacher's ability to demonstrate care and compassion for students (empathic concern) alongside their capacity to adopt student social and cultural perspectives (perspective-taking) may fundamentally improve the quality of the learning experiences they provide and the relationships with students that they build. This is an area of study desperately needed to facilitate relevant discourse on how teachers, namely White teachers, are better prepared to become effective educators of students with differing worldviews.

More recently, education scholars consider empathy to be a necessary disposition for work with youth from multicultural backgrounds (Cooper, 2011; Dolby, 2012). Cooper (2011) emphasizes the development of "profound empathy" declaring that it tends to "optimize learning" (p. 247). Profound empathy does this because it moves the teachers to engage in ongoing formative assessment of student needs and a hyperawareness of the teacher's behavior towards students. Ladson-Billings (1992) adds



the importance of “informed empathy” to culturally relevant teaching. She stresses that teachers must engage a more nuanced knowledge of students inclusive of the multiple domains of student experience. This knowledge must accompany the teacher’s intention to empathize with students. Both scholars center the analyses on arguing the importance of responding to students beyond how one feels; concrete knowledge and observable or documented data of the social, political, and historical context of the school setting must support teacher response to student needs. Feelings are one thing, but strategy related to how one acts on those feelings are of greater consequence.

Dolby (2012) emphasizes this point with her example of pre-service teachers who wanted to distribute toys to students in Haiti following the life-changing earthquake in 2010. The students felt the need to help, so they took action by organizing a toy drive for children orphaned by the tragedy. However, they needed more knowledge of what types of toys to collect because the wrong toys could be more of a burden to the people than a benefit. They had to spend time researching and assessing the hazards various types of toys would cause. Just organizing a toy drive would appease the *feeling* they have for helping and alleviating their own “personal distress” as Batson (1991) would call it. That doesn’t mean that their efforts would actually help the children in need. This point brings greater clarity to Davis’ contention that empathy is multidimensional making his framework of greater use to the research under investigation.

In her article outlining contributions that teacher education makes preparing teachers to teach culturally diverse students, Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) declares that effective teachers must learn to embrace and use the realities of their students to guide their praxis. She goes on to say that embracing those realities is a *process* in and of

itself. It doesn't happen overnight. She doesn't use the language of empathy, but the concept is the same. The teacher's understanding of how a child's personal life experiences shape his or her experiences in school is just as important as that teacher's content knowledge.

Empathy turns the focus of low student-achievement back to a conversation on the humanity of the teaching profession. Scholars agree that humanizing education should be a priority (Aspy, 1972, 1975b; Bartolome, 1994; Franquiz & Salazar, 2004), especially during the present climate of high-stakes test accountability. The empirical literature in education is absent of enough examples of how White teachers, and White female teachers in particular, successfully employ their understandings of culture and build more positive relationships with students of color. Hence, the current study is both timely and relevant.

### **Implications for Studying the Application of Empathy with Diverse Learners:**

#### **What Has the Literature in This Section Taught Us?**

The empathy literature discussed in the chapter has several implications for empathy's application by teachers as a professional disposition for becoming more culturally responsive. Empathizing effectively has just as much to do with the empathizer as it does for the individual with whom the observer is empathizing. Likewise, teachers who apply empathy to their professional practice must consider how their own experiences and personality mediate their ability to empathize effectively with strangers (i.e., students they've never met who they share no similarities). Also, empathy requires constant critical reflection on one's own motivations for helping.

A teacher's willingness to be critical of their institution's policies, systems, ideologies, and norms is another important implication. Teachers need to first know how students experience school. For the population included in this study's investigation, the literature suggests that their experiences in school are most likely not positive. Teachers should be willing to uncover the areas of discomfort for Black males and pursue strategy to improve the conditions if they are to empathize most effectively with Black males.

Finally, the application of empathy doesn't assume the teacher is perfect, just that she becomes adept at attending to the moment-by-moment shifts in student needs as she negotiates various types of interactions with students. The literature describing the application of empathy by practitioners in the helping professions suggests that teachers would need to regularly monitor their interpretations of student meanings, perspectives, behaviors, and motivations. This, in essence, guides how teachers negotiate interactions with students. This orientation helps teachers to be outcome-driven. These are outcomes that enable students to experience success in class. In this case, teachers are keenly aware of how a classroom atmosphere shifts as well as the role he or she plays in setting the tone for the interactions had with students and not the other way around.

### **Challenges for the Application of Empathy**

The literature also acknowledges that empathizing effectively requires that the client confirm the perceptions of the observer. With that said, empathizing depends largely on the practitioner's knowledge of the way(s) in which the client is seeing and experiencing the world. Without the client's feedback, it is very challenging to argue that the empathetic response is anything more than an exercise in sympathy or pity.

The race literature's insistence on exploring the social context—recognizing the influence of larger systems and institutions—is especially imperative to the empathy relational process. As it relates to the role of the teacher, this is the recognition that each child is the product of a larger set of inter-related social influences all contributing to how the child experiences the world around him or her, and the way the world sees them. This is especially important for teachers and students given the high volume of human interaction had in the classroom.

The first step for a White teacher in a multicultural classroom requires that she is critical of herself as a raced being. She must acknowledge how the social and cultural perspectives she has developed over time inform her professional decision-making. Finally, the teacher must be especially mindful of how her participation in the privilege and power accorded to being White guide (or misguide) her interactions with youth. Exactly how teachers actually do all of this is beyond the scope of this literature review and this research project. I am optimistic, however, that the current study will shed some light on these processes. Empathy is a promising convention for helping the teacher address each of the aforementioned issues.

Additionally, there are some challenges to transferring clinical understandings of empathy's application to the work of teachers in school. Teachers may have upwards of 15 – 20 different student personalities to manage every day. This makes moment-by-moment adjustments for each student a difficult task. This is similar to the sentiment of the difficulty associated with implementing culturally responsive instruction. A focus on understanding each student intimately over time should be a priority. One must keep in mind the inevitability of the teacher to make mistakes. Empathizing is not about being

perfect. It is about teacher's intentionality for understanding students on the student's own terms. This is opposite of the "false empathy" (Delgado, 1996) Eileen O'Brien (2003) argues is the problem of the relationship building capacity of White anti-racists with people of color in her article. The power dynamic is in the student's favor for creating boundaries for the successful negotiation of interactions with their teacher(s). This is one reason I chose to specifically focus this study on teachers who have demonstrated exceptional performance as teachers of Black male students. These teachers have developed skill sets making them particularly successful in managing the academic and social needs of their Black male students. The combination of their conception of empathy with the understanding of empathy provided by social psychologist Mark Davis should help shed light on this matter.

The application of empathy as a professional disposition of teachers committed to becoming more culturally responsive boils down to how well an individual can read the events, actions, and condition of the student. The invisible nature of racism and other oppressions related to one's multiple identities may pose a significant challenge to the application of empathy. Though empathizing with others is completely subjective (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Stueber, 2006; Truax & Carkhuff, 1976/2008), its thoughtful application and execution may be one solution for improving Black male educational outcomes. Opening up a larger discourse in the field is important step in the right direction.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The race and racism in education research presented in this chapter help us to understand how a White teacher's social and cultural perspective may significantly limit

his or her ability to effectively interpret, communicate, and respond to the needs of culturally diverse youth. Culturally responsive teaching is an intellectual, ethical, moral, and pedagogical orientation that positions the cultural expertise and preferences of students as paramount to the organization of learning experiences by teachers for them. The problem is that far too many White teachers define what is cultural for their students. They decide what is and is not cultural based on their own dominant perspectives. The literature suggests that White teachers filter information through invisible hegemonic lenses. These lenses are the product of their many years of membership in the dominant class, and subsequently are reinforced through their unconscious participation in whiteness. These perspectives do not automatically change or become substituted by the unique social and cultural perspectives of their students of color when White people begin teaching. The resignation of such oppressive frames of reference is a conscious and legitimate act. The research informs us that recognizing, naming, and relinquishing of racist perspectives is the first step to disrupting the detrimental effects of White supremacy on students of color in U. S. schools.

Culturally responsive teaching literature provides a promising body of research guiding how White teachers can be prepared to arrange culturally meaningful and relevant learning experiences for students of color. The research is clear that are certain competencies that teachers must develop. Acquiring student social and cultural perspective is one of those professional capacities. For example, part of being an effective culturally responsive teacher is ensuring that students feel cared for and valued in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2001a, 2001b). The research assumes this can't be done without knowledge of students' social and cultural perspectives of care. The only

way to acquire such understandings of care is to know how students translate and receive care, as to avoid making care one-sided (Valenzuela, 1999). The adoption of student social and cultural perspective helps the teacher better organize how they communicate care to students. The cultural responsiveness literature is unclear, however, about how teachers go about adopting student social and cultural lenses. Then, it is hard to ascertain from the literature what teachers are to do with student perspectives once they have acquired them.

Several noted scholars in the field of multicultural education deal with this issue indirectly by arguing for the necessity of empathy as a professional disposition of culturally responsive teachers (Dance, 2002; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1984; Milner, 2010). From their perspectives, empathy is helpful for helping teachers build strong classroom climates where all students feel valued and included. These researchers also cite empathy's utility for raising academic and behavior expectations. Empathy is enacted by seeing with students' eyes. It is also thought to support teachers' ability to develop positive, productive relationships with students and families. Finally, empathy is theorized to increase the teacher's awareness of the ways race and racism infiltrate institutions of education. This awareness includes one's complicity in perpetuating the racist policy, ideology, and practice subordinating traditionally underserved youth in multicultural school settings.

The empathy literature clearly defines and outlines the history of empathy as a way to "imagine" the viewpoints of others. Davis's (1994) framework provides a firm theoretical basis for which to understand empathy's empirical construction. Despite years of debate in multiple disciplines over whether or not empathy is more emotional or

more intellectual, it has been settled by leading contemporary scholars that empathy can be considered a combination of both. Davis's definition holds that empathy is emotional, which he terms empathic concern. Empathic concern is likened to sympathy and other feelings of compassion towards the needs of others. Davis also concludes that empathy is intellectual. He terms this dimension of empathy as perspective taking. Perspective taking is the ability of someone to adopt the psychological viewpoints of another in appropriating a response to their perceived need.

Empathy is a competency studied and utilized in various helping professions over the last century, most for supporting how practitioners build strong, trusting relationships with their clients. Viewed as a helping relationship, empathy is theorized to help teachers better communicate and respond to students in the various interactions that they have regularly. A series of studies by Daniel Batson (1991) gives credence to the claim that empathy is the catalyst for authentic altruism (empathy-altruism hypothesis). That is, an individual's helping action is driven by the actual needs of the individual who the help is intended for, and not the ego of the helper.

Davis' multidimensional framework of empathy is most useful for understanding the application of empathy in social interactions, like those between teachers and students. Considering that teaching is a helping vocation, it is likely that operationalizing empathy in the teaching profession may contribute significantly to teacher preparation and professional development.

The literature reviewed in this chapter is foundational to the design, assumptions, analysis, and overall methodological approach taken in the current study. Literature in the race and racism in education section aids the theoretical assumptions of White



teachers' propensity to unintentionally oppress Black males in school. This literature is most important to understanding the contours of the under-education of Black males, specifically the effects White teachers' invisible beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions have on their organization of a culturally responsive teaching practice. Finally, I used this literature to support the development of my focus group protocol used with Black male students at each research site.

The culturally responsive teaching literature is important for addressing how teachers ought to respond to the aforementioned problem of serving Black males. This literature has a small body of work advocating the utility of empathy as a professional competency supporting a teacher's ability to a) hold students to high academic and behavioral expectations; b) establish trusting relationships; and c) acquire professionally informed social and cultural perspectives of youth and families. This body of research directly supports sampling procedures, school administrator interview protocol development, and research site selection.

The empathy literature informs several aspects of my research methodology. Davis's (1994) organizational model (see figure 2.1) was important for recording and analyzing the process of empathy during classroom observations and the subsequent follow-up interviews. This research also informed my understanding of empathy as a stand-alone concept, the development of the empathy survey administered to practicing classroom teachers, and the preparation of teacher interview protocols. The research most informs my synthesis and interpretation of the research findings.

In the next chapter, I discuss the method of my inquiry. Chapter three will give an overview of the pilot study preceding this research as well as the research approach,

data collection, and analysis methods. I also provide a description of the research setting and sampling procedures employed in the study.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The problem of Black male school academic underperformance is investigated in this study by examining how White female teachers negotiate interactions with them. Irvine & York (1995) insist that student-teacher interactions are the places where learning takes place. Teaching has historically been a human activity typified by the frequent interaction between student and teacher. The everyday exchange of words, ideas, glances, and gestures characteristic of student-teacher interaction are meant to produce specific outcomes. These outcomes include, but are not limited to, coercing behavior, inspiring reflection, and increasing students' content knowledge. The quality of teacher-student interactions not only influences student outcomes, but those interactions are indicative of teachers' academic expectations for student performance (Baker, 1999; Gay, 2010). The multiple interactions White female teachers have with Black male students are the units of analysis for examining the utility of empathy.

In order to study the interactions White female teachers are having with Black male students, I first need to identify the teacher participants. The selection of the study's participants includes interviews with school administration to solicit their nominations of White female teachers they agree are culturally responsive. The school administrators must affirm that the White female teachers meet all criteria for cultural responsiveness based on indicators from the literature. Additionally, focus groups with cohorts of Black male juniors and seniors will provide the necessary student input needed to make final participant selection. The quality of student-teacher interactions I assume are best judged by the feedback students provide. Student voice in the sampling process was an essential component of this study's research design. The administrator and

student nominations yielded a short list of effective White female teachers of four teachers, each of whom were invited for participation in the study.

Next, I interviewed the teachers to inquire of their conceptions of empathy. Examining how teachers think about empathy's enactment in their student-teacher interactions is important for interpreting the cause or motivation of their actual application of empathy. Evaluating empathy's utility involves synthesizing how close teacher beliefs about the benefits of empathy's application are to actual student outcomes.

The centerpiece of this research is classroom observations. Each interaction observed must be appropriately contextualized in order to examine the teachers' engagement in the empathy process (see table 3.1). I use the empirical data obtained from the observations to further interrogate each teacher's intentions and motivations driving certain behaviors or decisions in the follow-up interviews. Finally, the empathy survey widely distributed is particularly useful for shedding more light on the phenomena of empathy's operationalization. These findings contextualize an understanding of empathy's application by teachers to their teaching practice with Black males.

The first section of this chapter describes the pilot study informing the research questions and design for the current research project. The study was foundational to further understanding the complexity of empathy's application as a professional disposition of teachers in a multicultural classroom setting. The following section argues the usefulness of a qualitative multi-methods approach for developing a rounded perspective of teachers' conceptions of empathy in the professional context of an actual classroom. The remaining sections of chapter three include data collection measures, a

description of the research setting, an explanation of the sampling strategy, and an overview of data analyses methods.

### **Conflicts & Contradictions: A Pilot Study**

This section of the chapter outlines the findings from a pilot study conducted during the 2010 – 2011 academic school year. Warren (2011) investigated how a cohort of early career White female teachers conceive of empathy, its development, and its impact on their teaching practice with students of color. The primary research question was *How do a cohort of early career White female teachers conceive of empathy?* There were two high school teacher participants (Ms. Thompson & Ms. Terry), one middle school teacher (Ms. Eisen), and one primary grade teacher participant (Mrs. Foreman). Three of the teachers were Teach For America alum in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year charter school teachers while Mrs. Foreman was a 2<sup>nd</sup> year career-changer teaching in a private Catholic school. All four teachers taught in a large midwestern city. Each teacher participant referred at least four or five of their professional colleagues (e.g., other teachers and administrators) for interview. These individuals were chosen based on the teacher participant's confidence of their colleague's ability to talk about the teacher's professional teaching practice with great clarity and detail. It was my intention to gather the insight of each teacher's professional peers to construct a more complete narrative of each teacher's professional work with students of color. The study included a total of fifteen participants (i.e., 4 teacher participants and 11 professional colleagues), each of whom self-selected their participation in the study.

The four teacher participants were interviewed and assessed for empathy using Mark Davis's (1980, 1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Prior to the assessment

each teacher was asked to define empathy, discuss their route into teaching, and talk about how they thought empathy informed various areas of their teaching practice. The teachers also made a judgment of how empathetic they thought they were and after administration of the IRI the teacher participant had to respond to their empathy rating according to the scale. Following the single one and a half-hour teacher interview, the professional colleagues were contacted for interviews that lasted on average about twenty-five minutes. Warren interviewed two of Ms. Thompson's professional colleagues and three of Ms. Terry, Ms. Eisen, and Mrs. Foreman's professional colleagues.

The professional colleagues shared specific examples of each teacher's teaching based on specific questions asked according to the literature in culturally responsive teaching. The professional colleagues described how each teacher participant demonstrates care for students, whether or not the teacher's students were academically successful, and the ability of the teacher to connect learning to a larger social and political awareness, to name a few. These interviews helped to connect how the teacher participants described their own work to the perceptions of their professional colleagues.

The intention of the study was not to attempt to make definitive judgments of how empathetic each teacher participant appeared to be. Instead, Warren studies the interface between teacher beliefs about empathy and the enactment of that belief in their actual practice. The examples provided by the teacher participant's professional colleagues are the nucleus of the pilot study. The overlap of the professional colleague's thoughts about each teacher participant's practice forms the professional teaching narrative Warren uses to analyze empathy's application.

Collectively, the teacher participants define empathy as primarily emotional. Ms. Thompson, Ms. Terry, Ms. Eisen, and Mrs. Foreman separately use the word “feel” or “feeling” in their definition of empathy. According to the Davis’s (1994) multidimensional construction of empathy providing the theoretical framework for this study, the teacher’s definitions lacked an accounting of the intellectual dimension of empathy. The results of the IRI for each teacher corroborate the teacher participant’s definition of empathy as more emotional and less intellectual. Each teacher except for Ms. Terry had a higher score on the emotional scale. All four teachers, however, scored average to low for the combination of both the emotional and intellectual scale. The teachers make little reference to empathy’s utility for putting on the social and cultural perspectives of the students and parents that they serve. This data suggest that the perspectives the teacher’s use to interact or help their students is almost completely framed *without* the student in mind. The data suggests that each teacher’s approach to their work is based on what *they feel* is best for the student leaving little room for feedback from the student or the student’s family. This creates considerable tension in the relationships of these four White female teachers with their Black and Latino stakeholders.

Ms. Thompson and Ms. Eisen admit that even though they believe they are supposed to be empathetic, they make more of a point to be right than to spend the time understanding student’s points of view. Ms. Thompson comments that she knows what empathy is in theory, but that she doesn’t regard student feelings when she’s making important instructional decisions. Mrs. Foreman and her professional colleagues describe her teaching practice numerous times as wanting to “fix” the problems kids were having.

This orientation creates considerable conflict between Mrs. Foreman and the families of the primary students she teaches. Ms. Terry's professional colleagues succinctly describe her practice as "agenda teaching". She knows what she wants to teach, but one colleague insists that her passion gets the best of her. Ms. Terry is an out lesbian. She emphasizes that much of her instructional approach and content selection is driven by her own experiences of sexual marginalization and oppression and less on the issues of the youth in her class. Findings from this pilot study is the first step to developing an early understanding of the complexity of empathy's application to the multiple interactions teachers have with students and families. More research is needed, however, to further discern the nuances of empathy's application by teachers who are vastly different from the students they instruct.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The field of multicultural education does not have a body of literature that directly operationalizes the application of empathy as a professional disposition of teachers. Literature inside and outside of education theorizes the utility of empathy for improving how teachers effectively communicate and respond to learners across various differences, namely race, class, and gender. This pilot study contributes to the literature by asking first how teachers, early in their career, are thinking about empathy and its application to their practice with students of color. Then, going a step forward to investigate how their teacher narratives demonstrate evidence of empathy based on a widely referenced definition of empathy in social psychology (Davis, 1994). The pilot study succeeds in providing a snapshot for how a group of White female teachers conceive of empathy. The inter-subjective agreement between each teacher participant's own account of her



work and the account of her peers is limited in providing the concrete evidence needed to operationalize empathy's application. The various conflicts and contradictions that surfaced in the data analysis between what the teacher participants said and what they did as teachers pose important considerations for further research in this area.

The dissertation study extends this line of inquiry by incorporating focus groups with students, in-depth survey distribution to a sample of practicing classroom teacher, and ongoing interviews with, as well as classroom observations of, four White female teachers. Students and the outcomes associated with the academic, behavioral, and social/relational interactions they have with teachers are paramount to understanding how empathy should inform teacher practice. The pilot study included teachers who simply responded to a call for participants. The dissertation work takes a more sophisticated sampling technique by selecting teacher participants based on stakeholder nomination (i.e., students and school administration). The assumption of this project is that effective teachers exemplify evidence of empathy even if they don't use the language of empathy. Furthermore, I continue use of Davis's (1994) multidimensional framework and its convergence with the teachers' own conceptions of empathy to help me identify the competencies and areas of each teacher's professional decision making that best demonstrate evidence of empathy's application. Without actually watching teachers teach and talking to the recipients of their empathy, I find it difficult to make strong empirical claims for how empathy manifests itself as a professional disposition of effective teachers of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students.

Using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, I examine not a definition of empathy for teachers, but rather how empathy can inform teacher negotiation of a

culturally responsive teaching practice. I do this by focusing my gaze on the multiple interactions teachers have with their students daily. White female teachers dominate the U.S. teacher work force and Black males fair as one of, if not *the* most, vulnerable of America's K-12 student population. I study the interaction between a group of high-functioning White female teachers with their Black male students to guide interpretations of empathy's utility for ultimately improving outcomes for a demographic of students traditionally underserved. Hence, the research question and sub-questions I pursue are significant for achieving the original goal of the pilot study. That is, contributing an empirically grounded understanding of empathy's application as a professional disposition of teachers teaching across difference in multicultural classroom settings.

### **Research Question(s)**

The central question pursued in this study is: What is the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students?

Sub-questions explored in this study include:

- How do a group of high-functioning White female teachers describe empathy's impact on their interactions with Black male students?
- How do a group of high-functioning White female teachers teaching predominately Black students conceive of empathy?
- Is there a significant difference in conceptions of empathy and empathy scores in empathic concern and perspective taking by race, gender, or income (socio-economic status) for a sample of practicing classroom teachers?
- What value do Black male students place on their teacher's ability to understand them?

### **Qualitative Multi-Methods Design**

The research study design identified as advantageous for this particular line of inquiry is a qualitatively driven multi-methods approach. This is a qualitative project with a small, but significant quantitative component. Multi-methods or mixed method research is broadly defined as the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, questions, procedures, and inferences into a single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Mixed methods research, also known as multi-method or convergent method design (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), takes on many different forms and is still a fairly emergent research paradigm (Cresswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). These scholars primarily identify and define mixed methods as a means of data collection, analysis, and reporting. Similarly, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) define mixed methods explicitly as a research design framework, citing its breadth as a research approach. They assert that mixed methods is guided by the researcher's philosophical assumptions, which in turn determines his/her collection and analysis of data.

Mixed methods studies can have a qualitative focus with quantitative data collected, a quantitative base with some qualitative data collected, or mixed methods can be a single study that has a parallel mixed design (Cresswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Mixed methods research takes the challenges of one research approach (quantitative or qualitative) and combines it with the approach of the other to complement, extend, or triangulate findings in a single study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). For this qualitative study, the accompanying quantitative analysis helps map conceptions of empathy as articulated by teachers of Black youth. The data from the

empathy survey helps to elucidate findings from the teacher interviews and classroom observations conducted.

The data provided by both the qualitative and quantitative portion of the study support a more robust understanding of empathy's application to a teacher's professional teaching practice. I employ a version of Ladson-Billings (1994) community sampling strategy to identify the White female teachers included in this study. I base teacher selection on the nomination of both school administrators and Black male students. These teachers participated in interviews, observations, and several follow-up interviews. Simultaneously, I use the combination of a self-designed empathy questionnaire and an established empathy assessment instrument to further describe how teachers conceive of empathy and its application to their teaching of Black males. The mixing of quantitative and qualitative data triangulates the study's findings, thereby helping to strengthen the reliability of this phenomenological study (Cresswell, 2007; Rossman and Rallis, 2004). The entire data collection process is described in the following section.

### **Data Collection**

I administered a questionnaire based on data from Warren (2011) and quantitative survey design methods (Converse & Presser, 1986; Fowler, 1993) combined with an established empathy assessment tool (Davis, 1980, 1983) that I refer to for the remainder of the chapter as *empathy survey*. The qualitative tools include use of non-participant observation (Glesne, 2010; Hatch, 2002; Rossman and Rallis, 2004; Yin, 2009), semi-structured interviews, and focus group (Glesne, 2010, Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2004; Yin, 2009) methods. Focus groups were structured to support the facilitation of Critical Race Counter-Storytelling methodology (Solorzano & Yosso,

2009). Following is a discussion of each data collection tool and its application in this particular line of inquiry.

### **Empathy Survey**

The survey was then completed by a total of seventy-three practicing classroom teachers ( $N = 73$ ) for the study. Ninety-nine people began the survey, but of them seventy-three completed it for a 74% completion rate. There were forty White respondents ( $n = 40$ ), twenty-eight Black respondents ( $n = 28$ ), and five respondents labeled Other ( $n = 5$ ) that includes one Asian, one Latino, one Latino/a, and two persons who self-identify as Multiracial. Participants responses are analyzed using a one way ANOVA to determine whether there is significance by race, gender, and income for teacher's conceptions of empathy and the teacher's scores on the empathy assessment IRI (see last section on *Data Analysis* for detailed description of analyses methods). No participant's name is attached to the data for the survey. Respondents completed the survey by clicking a link in their email which then allowed them to take the online survey anonymously provided by Survey Monkey. Teachers who completed the survey then entered themselves in a giftcard giveaway by emailing the phrase "ICTES2011" to [empathyquestionnaire@gmail.com](mailto:empathyquestionnaire@gmail.com). By sending a separate email, the teachers were able to detach themselves from their survey responses.

The survey was distributed using a snowball sampling technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). White female teacher participants were asked to distribute the survey to their colleagues who are currently practicing classroom teachers. I also forwarded the survey to colleagues in my professional network which include school administrators,

teachers, support services personnel, and other graduate school colleagues. The link was then forwarded by those individuals to persons in their respective professional networks.

There was no criteria limiting who could take the survey other than the fact that they had to be a practicing classroom teacher at the time they took the survey. Survey asks teachers to identify the setting of the school where they taught (i.e., urban, rural, suburban), the type of school (e.g., charter, traditional public, selective enrollment, etc.), socio-economic background information, and other demographic information such as race and age.

As mentioned briefly, the empathy survey includes a self-designed empathy questionnaire and an actual empathy assessment. Davis's (1980, 1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) is an empathy assessment tool well-known and respected in the field of social psychology. Teachers participating in the qualitative portion of this project also completed the IRI and empathy questionnaire. There is no other tool to date that I found measures the multidimensionality of empathy as well as this one does. I was interested in two specific domains of empathy, even though Davis's instrument assesses for four dimensions of empathy. Davis (1980, 1983) describes the Perspective-Taking scale of the IRI as an assessment of one's "spontaneous attempts to adopt the perspectives of other people and see things from their point of view" (p. 2). The affective scale is termed Empathic Concern. This scale is described as a "respondents' feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others" (p. 2). Empathic Concern is also recognized as sympathy in the research literature (Davis, 1994; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987).

The most significant portion of this project is the qualitative portion centered around the teaching practice of four White female high school teachers. However, dissemination of the survey to a snowball sampling of teachers was useful for better understanding how practicing educators think about the construct of empathy. Initially, it was my intention to have the survey completed exclusively by White female teachers so that I could compare the findings to the data generated by the qualitative portion of the study. Participants in the pilot study gave me feedback that this approach might produce bias because White female teachers were being singled out. Hearing multiple voices was useful to build reliability for the questionnaires future use. Also, I found that the data from the surveys was most beneficial for designing future studies to explore conceptions of empathy by multiple school stakeholders.

Literature in the field of education fails to explain how teachers define, conceive, and describe empathy and the ways that empathy does or doesn't inform professional teaching practice. This research project takes the position that empathy is of particular significance to teachers teaching across race, class, and gender difference. White female teachers and Black male students clearly represent this dissonance. Hence, White female teachers are the culture group of focus for this study. The voices of other teachers with varying years of service, race, and of both genders is of interest for more fully understanding how teachers make sense of empathy's utility in their work. Data from the survey was used to determine whether there is a significant difference by race or gender in a teacher's conception of empathy. I also used the survey to identify whether there are significant differences in how Black and White teachers in particular are rated according

to the established empathy assessment included in the second half of the survey following the questionnaire.

### **Focus Group**

Counter-Storytelling (CS) is a critical race methodology that utilizes the voice of marginalized groups to provide alternatives to dominant discourse(s) on a myriad of social issues. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) insist that, “[T]he counter-story is a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). CS assumes that what the underrepresented group has to say about a particular issue can substantially illuminate faults in mainstream understanding about that issue. The counter-story also reminds us that individual’s personal experiences are powerful. The stories help the teller to persist in the face of unbearable oppression. Delgado (1989) emphasizes that the counter-story not only unveils the experiences of the oppressed, but that these narratives directly oppose the widely held (majoritarian) narratives put forward by the dominant group.

The focus group allowed Black male students to speak for themselves. I wanted to learn the value the students place on a teacher’s ability to understand them on their terms. The focus group created an opportunity for students to voice what characteristics of a teacher were important for them and then to identify teachers in their school who exhibited those characteristics. I chose to do focus groups in part because in order to identify the teachers with strong interpersonal relationships with Black males, the perspective that mattered most is that of the students. I assumed going in that the students would have an acute awareness of who the high-quality teachers were in the building and who was not. Their point of view was imperative to the teacher selection



process.

I conducted one focus group of all Black male students at each school in the study. As previously stated, the focus group participants discussed the value they place on a teacher's ability to understand their various frames of reference. The students also describe how the teacher's understanding of their social and cultural perspectives improves student-teacher interactions. Empathy is only as good as the ability of the empathizer to respond appropriately to the need(s) of the target. By adopting student perspective, the teacher is more likely to support students in culturally responsive ways (Gay, 2000/2010).

The focus groups were conducted during one class period and lasted about fifty-five minutes each. I worked with each school's administrators to schedule a mutually convenient time when the young men were in the building and available. The administrators chose students at random. I simply asked that they recommend a list of Black males with differing academic and behavior profiles. I didn't want to talk to just honors students or a group of students with long disciplinary records. Each focus group had a mix of juniors and seniors.

The primary purpose of the focus groups was to help me identify the White female teacher participants in each high school I would invite to participate in the study. However, keeping in line with critical race theory, the focus groups had a somewhat social justice orientation (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Critical race theory insists that theory support action. Many of the students spoke freely for the first time about their experiences with White female teachers without judgment by the adult posing the questions. Each student candidly discussed problems they have with teachers in school.

The students outline what teacher qualities matter most and what qualities they find to be undesirable. The focus group gave students an opportunity to talk openly about the ways they've been marginalized, misunderstood, and/or affirmed by White female teachers prior to and since their attendance to the high school where they were interviewed.

My conversation with these young men provided a context for the students to make thoughtful selections of White female teachers who they identified as truly exemplary in their ability to “understand” students. At the conclusion of the focus group, the boys nominate three to five teachers from their school who they agree have done an admirable job of understanding them and other Black males they know. The general conversation about the students experience with White female teachers provided a context that helped the students to think about delineate White female teachers who were effective from those who were not in the student's eyes. The students were asked to explain specific reasons why each teacher they nominate is a worthy candidate for participation in this project. Specific teacher nomination procedure by focus group participants is described in the sampling section of this chapter.

### **Classroom Observation**

Glesne (2010) describes four different stances one may take on the participant-observer continuum. For this project, I functioned as “observer” with little to no interaction with the students and teachers (p. 64). The primary goal of the classroom observations was to capture teacher-student interaction snapshots without intrusion or third-party participation. I observed the interface between White female teachers and various Black male students, both students in the teacher's class and other Black male students in the building. My observation focused on the various ways each teacher

responded to and communicated with her Black male students. I record each snapshot by noting the context of the interaction, or the *antecedents*, the *intrapersonal outcomes* of the teacher, and the *interpersonal outcomes* of the interaction. Antecedents, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes make up Davis's (1994) empathy organization model described in chapter 2.

I recorded intrapersonal outcomes by detailing teacher's various physical behaviors during interactions with Black male students. I documented the teacher's facial expressions, body movements, what the teacher said, how she said it, and her physical position in relationship to the student with whom she was having the interaction. Interpersonal outcomes are the events or happenings following each observed interaction. For example, I looked for if the student followed through on the task they were given and how the student performed on that assigned task. The interpersonal outcomes represent the material benefits or consequences of the interaction for the Black male(s) involved in the interaction.

Teacher observations fall in one of three interaction types. Differentiation between the three types of interactions is based on the intended outcomes for the Black male student(s) included in the interaction. *Academic Interactions* (AI) are meant to produce student outcomes related to content knowledge acquisition and student intellectual development. If the outcome of the interaction was intellectual in nature, with the intention of the teacher to improve, extend, or build on student content knowledge pertaining to the lesson being observed, the observation was coded as academic. *Behavioral Interactions* (BI) are intended to modify student behavior or conduct to ensure maintenance of a rigorous, intellectually stimulating classroom

environment. Any interaction having to do with disciplining students, reprimanding inappropriate behavior, or reiterating expectations for student conduct was coded as a behavioral interaction. Finally, *Social/Relational Interactions* (SRI) are interactions that support development of positive, productive relationships with students. These interactions were generally light-hearted, random, unstructured, and arbitrary to the learning objectives. They are typically not related to academic outcomes or behavioral outcomes. They are generally centered on the interests of the student or common interests between teacher and student that are non-academic like sports, popular media, arts, school happenings, or mainstream entertainment.

Observations of student-teacher interaction included documentation of how each teacher communicated academic and behavior expectations, teacher response to various student behaviors, how teacher's greet students and demonstrate approval, and charting the effect of subtle teacher behaviors such as "wait time" on student-related outcomes (Rowe, 1974). Empathy is as much a physical response as it is an intellectual and emotional response. As an observer, my inference began with noting the teacher's physical reactions of teachers in interaction with their Black male students. Logging the physical gestures of both the teacher and student improved the quality of my interpretations. I questioned teachers in the follow-up interviews based on their observed communication and response patterns to better discern their motivations, intentions, and thought process related to the three different types of interactions previously described. Each teacher's physical behavior sets the tone of the classroom atmosphere as well as supports or detracts from certain student outcomes. The observations directly center on teacher action and student-related outcomes, not students words or behaviors. What the

student says and does alongside other antecedents such as classroom activity, lesson being taught, etc., set the parameters of the interaction. I then take account for this information when examining how the teacher has responded and why she has responded the way that she has. These interaction snapshots, as I call them, are then used as anecdotal evidence to be discussed with each teacher in the follow-up interview.

I borrowed Ladson-Billings (1994) observation method of spending whole class periods observing. I alternated observations between morning and afternoon classes coming in once or twice a week. I observed the four teacher participants for over five hundred minutes each. In total, I completed about forty hours of classroom observations. Class periods ranged between forty-five and fifty-five minutes depending on the day of the week I observed. I entered the class with the students. I sat conspicuously with limited interruption of the normal flow of the class in an unobtrusive corner of the room until the end of the class period at which time I exited class with the students. There were times when students attempted to draw me into conversation, both personal and public classroom discourse. I redirected their attention to the assigned tasks or back on their teachers ensuring that I maintained very limited interaction with them. After completing half of my observations, I conducted follow-up interviews with each teacher to gather more detailed information about the interactions I observed. The follow-ups also were used to do some member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rossman & Rallis, 2006) and to clarify meanings for what I saw in their classrooms. I describe methodology for conducting all interviews in the next section.

Finally, I use a sequential time analysis approach to recording the events of the student-teacher interaction (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). I would observe interactions in

time intervals. I would watch an entire interaction of the teacher and a student or group of Black male students. I would observe for up to about a minute and then I would look away to type the details of my observation into the observation-coding document I created. This “event recording” (p. 54) improved my ability to focus on the fine details of the interaction and to appropriately segment the behaviors being observed. I mark the beginning of the observation by noting the time from my audio recording advice, but I do not mark the end. I do note in the outcomes section of the observation coding document subsequent student response and outcomes and the time of what I perceived to be the student response. Noting the time in the outcomes section was useful for identifying patterns in teacher response or communication with their students in the various types of interaction.

**Table 3.1**  
***Framework for Documenting the Process of Empathy based on Davis (1994)***  
***Empathy Process Organizational Model***

	<b>Definitions (p. 12)</b>	<b>Levels</b>		<b>Data Collection</b>
<b>Antecedents</b>	“Characteristics of the observer, target, or situation”	The Person  The Situation	<b><i>Individual</i></b> and/or <b><i>situational variables</i></b> influencing the observer’s ability to respond	<b>(Observation)</b> This is a description of the context of the interaction, precursors such as the lesson, student behavior, teacher behavior, and any other descriptive details
<b>Processes</b>	“Particular mechanisms by which empathic outcomes are produced”	Non-Cognitive  Simple Cognitive	<b><i>Intellectual exercise</i></b> the observer undergoes in response to the observation of	<b>(Follow-Up Interview)</b> This is when you take specific patterns in teacher’s academic, social, and behavioral classroom interactions and ask

		Advanced Cognitive	the target differentiated by degree of cognitive effort or sophistication applied	questions about intention, thought processes, and motivations for action
<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	“Cognitive and affective responses produced in the observer which are not manifested in overt behavior toward the target”	Affective Outcomes  Non-Affective Outcomes	The <i>immediate internal response or reaction of the observer</i> after witnessing the condition of the target	<b>(Observation/Follow-Up Interview)</b> Documentation of the teacher’s emotion. These are mostly inferences based on the teacher’s facial expressions, verbal, and body language. There is some member-checking that can be done during interview to get a better sense of these
<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	“Behavioral responses directed toward the target”	Helping  Aggression  Social Behavior	The <i>physical actions taken on behalf of the target</i> in response to the target’s observed condition	<b>(Observation/Follow-Up Interview)</b> This is the documentation/description of how the teacher communicates and responds to students in various interactions and what happens as a result of the teacher’s actions in terms of student outcomes

## Interviews

The final mode of data collection includes structured and semi-structured interviews conducted with the teacher participants and school administrators. The school administrators were interviewed with the goal of identifying at least three White female teachers in their schools who demonstrated evidence of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). The administrators were asked several

specific questions such as are there any White female teachers in their school whose students were academically successful. I inquired about the Black male students in particular. I also asked about curriculum and the nature of the relationships the White female teachers had with their Black male students. Towards the conclusion of the interview, the administrators were asked to nominate at least three White female teachers who fit all of the criteria previously discussed. I wanted to walk the administrators through all of the questions before they made their selection. I asked each administrator to confirm his or her selections and provide evidence or firm reasoning why the candidates met the criteria.

Each teacher selected for participation in the study completed one initial interview, two follow-up interviews, and an exit semi-structured interview. The semi-structured format avoids too much rigidity in the conversations had with the teacher participants. I prepared a few questions to spurn dialogue. The teachers answered the questions how they saw fit. I then followed up with clarifying questions to ensure I reached the most appropriate conclusions (Yin, 2009). During the initial interview, I asked the teachers to talk about their route into teaching, their upbringing, and to describe their definition of empathy. The teachers discuss how they felt empathy informed their practice, particularly as it relates to Black male students and whether or not empathy was important for becoming a culturally responsive teacher. To conclude the interview, the teachers made judgments about how empathetic they thought they were and then each teacher completed the empathy survey. The initial interview was an introduction to the teacher, her background, and her passion about her work as a teacher. This was a fairly casual conversation and an opportunity to establish rapport with the teacher. During the



initial interview is when each teacher for the first time was asked to really grapple with their understanding of empathy, the contours of its application to their practice, and to make a decision about how and why it mattered for negotiating positive interactions with their Black male students.

In addition to the initial interview, each teacher participated in two follow-up interviews. Yin (2009) asserts that interviews may “take place over an extended period of time, not just a single sitting” (p. 107). During these follow-up meetings I clarified any misunderstandings, gathered further insight about a specific observation, and inquired further about the nature of student-teacher interactions observed in the classroom context. The two follow up interviews were scheduled during the middle and towards the end of the data collection period. Questions for the follow up interview came directly from classroom observations. I asked each teacher participant about specific interactions or patterns in behavior I noticed in observation of the multiple exchanges she had with Black males inside and outside of her classroom. Interactions that I found particularly interesting based on the nature of the exchange (e.g., particularly volatile interactions or outrageously humorous interactions) were discussed. I would use actual observation narratives in the follow-up interviews to discern more discreetly how teachers go about taking student perspective and developing the critical knowledge that they need to appropriately communicate and respond to students.

Additionally, I used the follow up interviews to inquire about teacher intentions, motivations, and priority for various types of interactions or patterns in behavior that I noticed. For example, if I noticed that the teacher very rarely or never raises her voice in conflict with students or when engaged in a behavioral interaction, I ask her about why

that is, what her motivation is, and how she rationalizes that decision for accomplishing the intended outcome. The teacher responds candidly, sharing with me her intention behind the language she uses and clarifying how she thought her behaviors produced favorable outcomes for students. Understanding the phenomena of empathy requires inferring the thought processes one goes through in response to the needs of another. The follow up interviews were essential for doing this work. Interviews alongside observations provide a deeper understanding of participant perspectives and ideas about phenomena (Hatch, 2002). These follow up interviews also serve as a form of “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The exit interview brought closure to the project. This last interview gave me an opportunity to understand further how teachers conceive of empathy in their professional practice and to assess how participation in the project has modified their thinking about empathy’s application and the challenges thereof. I used this interview as an opportunity to engage the teachers around various inquiries I developed over the course of the data collection period that matter for operationalizing empathy in a multicultural classroom setting. Each teacher says at some point in our interviews that she doesn’t treat Black males differently from other students. Each teacher also acknowledges that race matters for how the students perceive themselves in relation to the teacher in the classroom context. I used the exit interview as an opportunity to ask more specific questions about how Black males are different specifically and how interacting with them differently matters for their academic well-being. Finally, the exit interview allowed me to collect more data related to student outcomes. All of what I’ve described here allows me to

better understand the application of empathy in terms of how the teacher demonstrates empathic concern and how they engage in perspective taking.

### **Setting**

District 15, as I will call it, is a moderate sized district sitting on the periphery of a major midwestern city. Some might consider the district as suburban, but a significant portion of the school district's Black student population migrated in from the city as a result of massive gentrification in the city. It has all the makings of an urban school district with the exact same challenges and a similar student population. The district has had to deal with the changing demographics from a predominately White district to a predominately Black over the last decade.

The district has two main high schools (East High School and West High School) and an alternative education center. The high schools serve neighboring communities, one of which is slightly more affluent than the other. Students attending East H.S. are primarily from Tinville, while West serves students primarily from Langdon Heights. West serves the majority of White students in the district and has the reputation among students as the more affluent of the two high schools in the districts.

The district serves 3,719 students. East serves about 1,600 students while West serves close to 2,000. Fifty-three percent of the student population is considered low income. The district is 66.1% African-American, 16.1% Latino, and 13.1% White while the teachers in the district are 77.3% White. The district spends close to \$14,000 per student and the student teacher ratio average for the district is 17:1. The principal of East is an African-American male and the principal of West is a White female. Both were very accommodating of this research project and provided valuable support.

## **Sampling**

The qualitative portion of the dissertation study took place at the two high schools previously listed only. Selection of the school site was fairly flexible, but included several criteria. First, each school is a non-selective, traditional neighborhood public high school. The school had to be open to any student in its attendance boundary to attend free without restriction. Majority of Black male students learn in these types of schools. The practice of White female teachers in these schools is of most interest to me. These are also the schools that many times are most under-resourced. Administrators of these schools who expressed early interest in the study based on professional referral or my direct contact were included in the study.

I made contact with local school administrators and set up time to discuss my project and to gauge their interest. I utilized the recommendations of my own professional network of principals, graduate school colleagues, and graduate school faculty to help me identify schools whose administrators might welcome a research project like this one. Each school administrator that consented for his or her school's participation in this study negotiated the terms of data collection with the PI. They each completed a short interview and nominated a group of White female teachers in their school who they thought were culturally responsive based on my questioning.

A similar sampling strategy to Ladson-Billings (1994) community sampling approach was used to select the White female teacher participants of the study. School administrators nominated teachers based on three main criteria (i.e., academic success of their students, connection of curriculum to larger social and political awareness, and teacher's cultural competence). These are three main indicators of a culturally responsive

classroom. School administrators also made the selection of the White female teachers they recommended by confirming the teachers had positive relationships with their Black male students. At the end of a brief interview with the school administrators to obtain this information, I conducted student focus groups as previously described above. Student participants in the focus group were at schools where I've had no prior professional affiliation.

The focus group consisted of Black boys from both East and West high schools. The boys were recommended by the school administration. The administrators made recommendations of students. My only request was that the students be juniors or seniors of mixed academic and behavioral backgrounds. I didn't want all honor students or all students who spent most of their time in detention. The mix of students and perspectives would help paint a more complete picture of the quality of the White female teachers in each high school. I recruited the students and each participant self-selected their participation in the study. At the conclusion of the focus group the students were asked to nominate at least three White female teachers who they thought did a good job empathizing with them based on our conversation. The students provided several teachers names. The names were then ranked by the students with 1 being the teacher who most or all of the boys agreed was excellent at adopting their perspectives and using those perspectives to frame positive interactions with them.

I crosschecked the list of teachers provided by the student focus group with the list of teachers who the school administrators nominated in my original conversations with them. I used the student ranking to determine the order in which I would invite the

teachers to participate in the study. Teachers who agreed to be in the study were then interviewed and observed. I completed this research project with a total of four teachers.

The following table is a brief overview of my data collection procedure.

**Table 3.2**  
***Overview of the Method of Inquiry***

<b>Order of Data Collection</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Collection method</b>	<b>Selection of sample</b>
First	73 teachers teaching Black students	Survey: 38 items, taking less than 10 or 15 minutes for each respondent to complete it	Snowball method: Link to the survey will be sent out to individuals in my own professional network of educators and the link was subsequently forwarded; The school administration at each school forwarded the link to their teachers.
Second	School Administrators of traditional public high schools	Interviews: 10 minutes or less to discuss the research project, what I want to accomplish, confirm willingness to host the project; obtain a list of names of teachers who may be good candidates for the study based on evidence of cultural responsiveness according to indicators from the literature (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994)	<b>1<sup>st</sup></b> : Email administrators of traditional public high schools based on referral <b>2<sup>nd</sup></b> : Make appointments to meet with or have telephone conferences with principals interested in the study <b>3<sup>rd</sup></b> : Choose school based on the number of teachers the administration can provide (The greater the choice, the greater the likelihood that student list will provide some overlap for the choice of teachers who are good candidates for participation in the study)
Third	31 Black male Juniors and Seniors	Focus groups to discuss student's experiences with White female teachers	Students will self-select participation in the focus groups. School administrators recommended a list of

			Black males chosen random based on the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Junior or Senior status</li> <li>- Mix of academic and behavior profile</li> <li>- Students who administrators agree would be active participants</li> <li>- Students who administrators agree will return the parent consent form</li> </ul>
Fourth	2 - 3 White female teachers	Interviews & Non-Participant Observations	10 weeks of observations including one initial interview, 2 follow-up interviews, and an exit interview; Administration of the empathy survey that includes questionnaire and Davis (1980, 1983) IRI

## Data Analysis

### Qualitative Data

I took a phenomenological approach to analyzing the data for this study (Creswell, 2007; see Moustakas, 1994). Beginning with the initial interview transcripts, I took a clustering of the sentences, quotes, and statements made by each teacher as organized by the various questions that I asked. These clusters cohere to form tangible themes I used to code the transcripts during a second and third read of the data.

I was interested in identifying emergent themes from how the teachers conceive empathy, much like what was done in the pilot study described earlier in the chapter. I used a deductive coding scheme to categorize key words, ideas, and phrases emerging from the interview data.

Similarly, I employ a pattern matching or “correspondence” coding scheme (Stake, 1995, p. 78; Yin, 2009) for the observation data. Classroom observations focused on the types of interactions each White female teacher had with their Black male students. Observations have some preselected categories framed by Davis’s (1994) organizational model described in chapter two and reintroduced in chapter three (see table 3.1). Initial analysis of each class session was coded on the spot according to the *antecedents*, *intrapersonal*, and *interpersonal outcomes* teachers take in the interactions had with Black male students. Those interactions are characterized as any personal interface including when the teacher is providing guided practice, collecting homework, disciplining or rewarding students, or addressing a conflict involving a Black male students.

A secondary analysis includes describing patterns associated with the language, behaviors, and actions taken by teachers in these interactions and the student outcomes. I discuss these patterns with teachers in their follow-up interviews to inquire about their motivations, intentions, and priorities. I also analyzed observation data for evidence of empathy based on the teacher’s own conceptions of empathy as discussed in the initial interview. I did some comparison between their conceptions of empathy in relationship to their practice and Davis’s organizational model.



Each teacher is assigned a generic empathy rating that we discuss in the initial interview based on scores from the Davis (1994) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The assignment of an empathy rating in this study is not so that I can make a definitive claim about how truly empathetic these teachers are. The literature suggests it is more complicated to determine one's empathy. A hard judgment of one's level of empathy based primarily on a singular assessment of empathy is incomplete. On the contrary, the empathy score does provide some evidence to triangulate the teacher's own articulated conception of her own level of empathy. The rating also indicates to some degree the ability of the teacher to engage in what can be considered empathetic behavior. Finally, the rating is a talking point for each teacher as they must grapple with the questions, the meanings of the questions, and the relationship of what is asked to their personal and professional interactions with others.

To determine each teacher's level of empathy, I created a ranking system from very low, low, average, high, and very high empathy based on Davis (1980). The teachers received a score for both the empathic concern and perspective taking scale. The female sample ( $n = 579$ ) in Davis' study scored an average of 21.67 ( $SD = 3.83$ ) on the empathic concern scale after taking the final piloted version of the IRI. The same sample scored an average of 17.96 ( $SD = 4.85$ ) on the perspective taking scale. I use this data to create a normal distribution from which to derive this rating system (see table 3.3).

**Table 3.3**

***Teacher Empathy Ratings for Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking***

<b><i>Empathic Concern Score</i></b>	<b><i>Domain Rating</i></b>	<b><i>Perspective Taking Score</i></b>
29 or higher	<b>Very High</b>	29 or higher
26 – 28	<b>High</b>	24 to 28
18 – 25	<b>Average</b>	14 to 23
15 – 17	<b>Low</b>	9 to 13
14 or lower	<b>Very Low</b>	8 or lower

The follow-up interviews, as well as early drafts of the findings, were sent back to the teachers for member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) purposes. I do this as a way to build reliability and validity for the findings. I have some data from students, prolonged engagement in the field, and the use of multiple data sources (Cresswell, 2007; Lather, 1991) to further build validity. My intent is to understand the data and describe what I perceive to be the conceptions and application of empathy by four White female teachers, who by stakeholder account are effective teachers of Black male students. This approach provides a platform for “sustained inquiry, refinement of ideas, and the opening of a discourse grounded in pragmatism” in multicultural classrooms (Cresswell, 2007, p. 205).

### **Quantitative Data**

The quantitative data was prepared and analyzed using SPSS statistical modeling software. Responses from the empathy questionnaire and IRI was collected, recorded, and stored in Survey Monkey. The data was then uploaded to SPSS and analyzed using two separate one-way ANOVA tests. I ran analyses that compared the means between the differences in income, gender, and race to outcomes for teacher conceptions of

empathy and their scores on the Davis's (1980, 1983) IRI. By doing so, I looked for significant differences in teacher conceptions and empathy scores by race and socioeconomic status. Running two separate tests meant lowering my alpha from .05 to .25 to avoid an inflation of error.

The reliability of the empathy questionnaire portion of the survey lies primarily in the pretesting (Fowler, 1993). Data was initially collected from eighty-two teachers ( $N = 82$ ). There were 30 male respondents and 52 female respondents. Cronbach's alpha for the eight items on the empathy scale (Questions E1 – E8 on the self-designed questionnaire portion of the survey) was .694 for the thirty-seven White female teachers ( $n = 37$ ) who took it to build the tool's reliability. There is about 70% chance that a White female teacher answering these questions will answer them the same way. Even though the survey was open to any practicing classroom teacher, I initially planned only to use the data of White female teachers in this project. After feedback from respondents and consultation with members of the dissertation committee, it was decided that data from all respondents better answered the research questions.

I define race in the sample according to the respondent's selection on question D3. As stated earlier, there were not enough respondents who selected a race other than White or Black/African-American to have their own category. Therefore, those five respondents ( $n = 5$ ) were accounted for in the group labeled Other in the analysis. Income is a substitute for this project for socio-economic status and only accounts for what each respondent selects for the question B3 (Please choose the option that best describes the net combined annual income of your current household?). Finally, the

variable for gender is based on the respondent's selection as male or female for question D2.

*Teacher Conceptions* of empathy is defined using four questions (i.e., E5a & b, E6, E7) from the empathy survey that focus on teacher's belief about empathy as a professional disposition. The teachers are asked whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree about empathy's application to the teaching of Black students, Black male students, and as a capacity for bolstering one's cultural competency. Strongly agree was assigned a four-point value; agree, a three-point value; disagree, a two-point value; and strongly disagree, a one-point value. The sum of the responses to these four questions by each survey respondent forms the variable of teacher conceptions.

*Empathy Scores* are calculated based on the scoring scheme Davis (1980, 1983) provides. Items are tallied as follows, A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and E=0 except for the five items (i.e., questions 26-2, 26-3, 26-7, 26-8, and 26-9) with a reverse scoring rubric: that is, A=0, B=1, C=2, D=3, and E=4. The sum of the scores for each question form the *Com-IRI* variable in SPSS used in my analyses. Theoretically, the greater the score of an individual the more empathetic the individual is according to the IRI.

Before I ran the final one-way ANOVA analyses for the seventy-three diverse survey respondents (N = 73), I completed a factor analysis of the four questions chosen to define teacher conceptions of empathy. The question, "In general, I consider the student-teacher relationship I have with Black male students to be a positive one", had an extraction that was a slightly lower than the other three questions. This may be because this question asks the respondents to judge empathy's application directly to his or her own practice as opposed to judging empathy's application hypothetically. Additionally,

Cronbach's alpha for the four items on assessing Teacher Conceptions of Empathy was .811 for the seventy-three teacher respondents ( $N = 73$ ) who took it to build the tool's reliability. There is about an 81% chance that a teacher answering these four questions will answer them in the same way as the individuals taking the survey.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The primary method of data collection described in this chapter includes semi-structured interviews with teachers, classroom observations, and administration of an empathy survey inclusive of a questionnaire and reliable empathy assessment tool. The study was conducted in one urban high school district on the periphery of a major midwestern city. School administrators at each high school were interviewed to identify a list of White female teachers who met the criteria for cultural responsive teaching based on indicators from the literature. Following the school administrator interviews were focus groups of Black male students. The students in each focus group discussed their experiences with White female teachers. Then, students were asked to nominate a list of White female teachers in their school who they believe do a good job of "understanding" them. The students created a list of teachers that I then compared to the list generated by the school administrators at the respective high school. The teachers participating in the study were selected based on the nomination of both their school administrators and their present or former Black male students.

I took a qualitative multi-methods approach to the study. I included both qualitative and a small quantitative component to the research study. In addition to the interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, I distributed the empathy survey to practicing classroom teachers. The survey was distributed through a snowball sample

beginning with the four teacher participants. This design triangulates the data sources, thereby strengthening the reliability of the findings. Data were analyzed using phenomenological data analysis techniques and by running two one-way between subjects ANOVA tests. Data were collected and analyzed between December through May of the 2011 – 2012 academic school year.

Student-teacher interactions are the most appropriate unit analysis for examining the utility of empathy largely due to the personal nature of empathy's application. The classroom observations, teacher interviews, and the empathy survey are the means I took to examine how teachers communicate and respond to the range of student needs. The choices that teachers have to make in the negotiation of academic, behavioral, and social/relational interactions are filtered through some set of social and cultural perspectives; primarily their own, those of their students, or some mix of the two. The multiple data sources used in this project are significant for documenting the adoption and subsequent application of students' frames of reference to interactions with them, and how teachers negotiate a culturally appropriate response. Lastly, my sampling approach is especially important to operationalizing empathy so that it is useful to individuals committed to ameliorating the school failure of Black males in America's schools. White females considered effective teachers of Black male students by both a group of their students and their supervisors, are likely to have interactions that exemplify evidence of empathy.

My epistemological orientation and commitment was to take a completely asset-based approach to this project. It is important to move the field forward by telling the stories of White female teachers successful in their attempt to educate Black males. This

project does not vilify White female teachers, but rather is critical of the interactions they are having with Black male youth and the multiple factors mediating the quality of those interactions. Also, the inclusion of student voice was essential to countering the deluge of research documenting Black male school failure. I depict Black male students as experts about what is valuable to the interactions they have with their teachers including what it means for teachers to “understand” them on their terms. Their voices are critical to shaping the interpretation of data and the analysis of research findings that may both confirm or disconfirm empirical evidence from classroom observation.

In the next two chapters, I report findings from the current study. Chapter four focuses on findings related to teacher conceptions. This chapter includes data from the focus group, empathy survey, and the initial interviews conducted with the four White female teacher participants. The highlight of the chapter is a description of each teacher participant’s upbringing, route into teaching, and individual conception of empathy’s application.

Chapter five features the narratives of each teacher participants’ actual interactions with Black male students. Findings are a synthesis of focus group, classroom observations, and teacher interview data. The chapter also includes data related to how the teachers engage in the application of empathy (empathic concern and perspective-taking).

## Chapter 4 – Findings Part I – *Conceptions of Empathy*

After employing the research methodology described in chapter three, several important findings emerged. Conceptions of empathy derived from interviews with each teacher participant include a collective agreement that empathy is an important disposition of teachers in culturally diverse classrooms. Empathy includes care and compassion for students, but that these teacher character traits are not substitutes for high academic and behavior expectations. This conception is closely related to Davis' (1994) definition of empathy as both emotional and intellectual. The teachers separately concur that empathizing with students includes some partnership with students. In other words, there is a responsibility that teachers have to be problem solvers and to take relevant action to help students achieve academically, but that students must also be willing to help themselves.

Other findings are that students do believe it is important for teachers to “understand” them and to build positive relationships with them. There are various ways that they do this including getting to know them. Students also value a teacher's ability to demonstrate patience and to not judge students simply based on how they act, but rather on how students perceive themselves. The expectation and assumption driving this project is that White female teachers *can* be effective teachers of Black students and that those who are recognized as effective do demonstrate evidence empathy, even if they don't use the language of empathy in their professional practice.

The primary research question for this study is “*What is the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students?*” Empathy in the professional context of teaching and learning represents the process of



acquiring student social and cultural perspective, and then using that intimate knowledge to appropriately communicate and respond to student needs. The teacher's response is supported by her intention to produce positive student outcomes. The language of culturally responsive teaching and the various scholarly conventions inherent in its construction can mystify the process of actually *becoming* culturally responsive. Therefore, the aim of this work is to clarify the motivations, intentions, and actions that support at least one aspect of cultural responsive teaching, the adoption of students' social and cultural perspective, or the core of empathy's application to human interaction.

The first section of the chapter includes findings from both the empathy survey and focus group. The survey was distributed widely to in-service classroom teachers teaching in a range of school settings. The teachers are primarily Black or White. Findings from the survey contextualize what we know about how teachers may think about empathy's application to their practice with Black male students. There are little to no significant differences by race, gender, and income status for how teachers conceive of empathy, nor do these conditions have much effect on teacher empathy scores on Davis's IRI.

Findings from the focus groups at each school are useful not only for further justifying the students' selection of the White female teacher participants in the study, but also the data provides insight for better appreciating how students interpret adult behavior towards them. Students also offer their own opinions worth consideration for shaping theory development related to operationalizing empathy's application in multicultural classrooms.

The following section of the chapter is a detailed narrative of each teacher and her route into teaching. I discuss similarities in their backgrounds and the differences that separate them personally and professionally. These narratives are portraits of each teacher. They include pertinent background knowledge of each teacher's upbringing, route into teaching, and how the teacher makes sense of empathy in our initial interview. This perspective of each teacher helps us better understand her approach to managing classroom behavior, the stories she tells in class, how she organizes instruction, and ultimately, how she negotiates various types of interactions with her Black male students discussed in chapter five.

The final section of chapter four is a discussion of findings based on an analysis of each teacher's individual conceptions of empathy. This portion of the chapter includes exploration of how the IRI empathy assessments taken by the four teachers compare to each woman's conception of empathy and what the data tells us about empathy as a professional disposition. Then, this section concludes with a brief discussion of how data from the teacher participants' conceptions of empathy converge with Davis' (1994) model of empathy.

### **Empathy Survey Findings**

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of race, gender, and income on teacher conceptions of empathy. I also conducted a one-way between subjects ANOVA to compare the effect of race, gender, and income on teacher empathy ratings. The tests were run at the  $p < .025$  to account for the two different ANOVAs.

There were seventy-three total respondents ( $N = 73$ ) who completed the entire empathy survey. Forty White ( $n = 40$ ), twenty-eight Black ( $n = 28$ ), and five Other ( $n = 5$ ) practicing classroom teachers responded to the survey. The category of Other was created due to the few respondents to the survey who were not White or Black. One individual self-identified as Latino, one as American Indian, one as Asian, and two self-identified as Multi-Racial. There were fourteen male ( $n = 14$ ) and fifty-nine female ( $n = 59$ ) respondents to the survey. Eleven respondents ( $n = 11$ ) report a *very high* net annual combined household income/earnings (\$125,000 or more). Fourteen respondents ( $n = 14$ ) report a *high* net annual combined household income/earnings (between \$100,000 and \$124,999). Fifteen respondents ( $n = 15$ ) report *moderate* net annual combined household income/earnings (between \$75,000 and \$99,999). Twenty-three respondents ( $n = 23$ ) report *average* net annual combined household income/earnings (between \$50,000 and \$74,999). The remaining respondents ( $n = 10$ ) report a *low* annual net combined household income/earnings (less than \$50,000).

The variable for teacher conceptions was based on responses to the questions of empathy's application (see Table 4.1). Teachers had to select strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The highest score to be earned was sixteen and the lowest was four. The main effect of race on teacher conceptions was not found,  $F(2, 70) = .404$ ,  $p = .669$ . White ( $M = 13.5$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ), Black ( $M = 13.7$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ), and Other ( $M = 12.8$ ,  $SD = 3.56$ ) reported no significant difference in their conceptions of empathy's application to their practice with Black male students. The main effect of gender on teacher conceptions was not found,  $F(1, 71) = .045$ ,  $p = .832$ . Male teachers ( $M = 13.6$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ) and female teachers ( $M = 13.5$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ) reported no significant difference

in their conceptions of empathy's application to their practice with Black males. Finally, the main effect of income on teacher conceptions was found,  $F(4, 68) = 3.2, p = .018$ . Individuals with a very high combined net income/earnings ( $M = 14, SD = 1.67$ ), high ( $M = 12.4, SD = 2.4$ ), moderate ( $M = 13.5, SD = 1.95$ ), average ( $M = 13.3, SD = 2.07$ ), and low ( $M = 15.2, SD = 1.3$ ) report a significant difference in their conceptions of empathy's application to their practice with Black male students.

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the high-income condition ( $M = 12.4, SD = 2.4$ ) was significantly different than the low-income condition ( $M = 15.2, SD = 1.3$ ). However, the very high-income condition ( $M = 14, SD = 1.67$ ) did not significantly differ from the high, moderate, average, or low-income conditions. Neither did the moderate-income condition ( $M = 13.5, SD = 1.95$ ) or the average income condition ( $M = 13.3, SD = 2.07$ ) significantly differ from the high or low-income conditions.

Taken together, there is no relationship between race and gender on how practicing teachers think about empathy's application to work with Black students, and Black male students more specifically. The results for differences in teacher conceptions according to income does suggest that there is a disparity between how teachers with high net combined annual income think about empathy's application when compared to individuals with a low net combined income. There is about \$50,000 gap between the teachers in the high group and those in the low group. It cannot be seen at this time whether other factors, including number of biological children, marital status, grade level taught, or number of years teaching influence the difference.

<b>Table 4.1</b>	
<b>Questions for Teacher Conceptions excerpted from the Empathy Survey</b>	
I personally consider empathy to be a necessary disposition for teachers of Black students	I personally consider empathy to be a necessary disposition for teachers of Black male students
In general, I consider the student-teacher relationship I have with the Black male students I currently teach to be a positive one	Would you say that empathy (can/does) significantly improve an individual's cultural competence?

Teachers were assigned an empathy score based on a cumulative score they obtained after completing Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The teacher respondents received a score for both the perspective taking scale as well as the empathic concern scale based on a scoring scheme developed by Davis. The main effect of race on perspective taking score was not found,  $F(2, 70) = .117$ ,  $p = .890$ . White ( $M = 20.2$ ,  $SD = 4.6$ ), Black ( $M = 20.2$ ,  $SD = 4.7$ ), and Other ( $M = 19.2$ ,  $SD = 2.7$ ) reported no significant difference in their scores on the IRI for perspective taking. The main effect of race on empathic concern was not found,  $F(2, 70) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .304$ . White ( $M = 22.1$ ,  $SD = 4.03$ ), Black ( $M = 21.3$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ), and Other ( $M = 24.2$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) reported no significant difference in their scores on the IRI for empathic concern.

The main effect of gender on the perspective taking score was not found,  $F(1, 71) = .042$ ,  $p = .839$ . Male teachers ( $M = 19.92$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ ) and female teachers ( $M = 20.2$ ,  $SD = 4.6$ ) reported no significant difference in scores on the IRI for perspective taking. The main effect of gender on the empathic concern score was not found,  $F(1, 71) = 1.05$ ,  $p =$

.747. Male teachers ( $M = 21.6$ ,  $SD = 4.4$ ) and female teachers ( $M = 22$ ,  $SD = 4$ ) reported no significant difference in scores on the IRI for empathic concern.

Finally, the main effect of income on perspective taking score was not found,  $F(4, 68) = .347$ ,  $p = .845$ . Individuals with a very high combined net income/earnings ( $M = 19.18$ ,  $SD = 5.1$ ), high ( $M = 19.4$ ,  $SD = 4.1$ ), moderate ( $M = 20.7$ ,  $SD = 4.5$ ), average ( $M = 20.3$ ,  $SD = 4.9$ ), and low ( $M = 20.9$ ,  $SD = 4$ ) reported no significant difference in scores on the IRI for perspective taking. The main effect of income on the empathic concern score was not found,  $F(4, 68) = .774$ ,  $p = .546$ . Individuals with a very high combined net income/earnings ( $M = 22.2$ ,  $SD = 3.6$ ), high ( $M = 21$ ,  $SD = 4.6$ ), moderate ( $M = 21.3$ ,  $SD = 4.2$ ), average ( $M = 21.4$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ ), and low ( $M = 21.4$ ,  $SD = 3.97$ ) reported no significant difference in scores on the IRI for perspective taking. To see a copy of the IRI, please refer to appendix A.

In sum, race, gender, and income have no significant bearing on the teacher's empathy scores. Female teacher respondents have a slightly higher average on the empathic concern and perspective taking scales. There are only five respondents in the other category. These respondents have slightly higher scores on the empathic concern scale, but not on the perspective taking scale. These results suggest that one's race, class, or gender has little influence on the empathy score he or she earns on the perspective taking or empathic concern scales of the IRI.

Another significant finding from the survey suggests that teachers believe empathy is most important for building personal relationships with students. There was one question about the frequency with which empathy is applied to various dimensions of a teacher's practice such as disciplining students, lesson planning, communicating work

expectations for example (see table 4.2). On this question, 69.9% teachers chose “frequently” for “the application of empathy when building personal relationships with the black male students you teach” more frequently than any of the other options.

**Table 4.2**  
***Frequencies of the Application of Empathy to Various aspects of Teaching Black Male Students***

(N = 73)	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Total</b>
Planning Learning Experiences	35.6%	45.2%	12.3%	6.8%	100%
Grading Homework and Classwork	27.4%	30.1%	27.4%	15.1%	100%
Communicating Work and Behavior Expectations	57.5%	32.9%	6.8%	2.7%	100%
Disciplining	45.2%	38.4%	13.7%	2.7%	100%
Building Personal Relationships	69.9%	20.5%	5.5%	4.1%	100%
Total Respondents					N = 73

### **Focus Group Findings**

The focus of this research centered on the work of four White female teachers nominated for participation by Black male students and school administrators. To help contextualize the student’s selection of teachers, the focus group was spent primarily

discussing the students' different experiences with White female teachers. The Black males shared many stories about their experiences. In addition to asking whether the student's valued the teacher's ability to "understand" them, I asked them to say what traits they thought made their favorite White female teachers "good". I will describe not only how the students discuss the importance of teachers understanding them, but also three traits that I find are relevant to supporting empathy's application.

Of the twenty-five students I spoke with at the two high schools, two of them commented that they didn't believe it was important for the teacher to understand them. Both attended West High School. Quentin (pseudonym), a senior, thought that a teacher's responsibility was simply to teach. Whether or not she understood the student on a personal level was of little consequence to his success as a student. James (pseudonym) chimed in saying, "When I had to apply to college, there were only three teachers I could go to that knew me. Nobody else knew me well enough to write my letter of recommendation." Quentin emphasized that in the college courses he takes at the local community college, the teachers are "an arm's length away." He says, "They give you an assignment and you do it. That's it." Another boisterous student, Tim (pseudonym), points out that Quentin is on the right track. He emphasizes that position works for Quentin, but for many other students, the student-teacher relationship is important. Teachers build that relationship by "getting to know the students." This is the trait that the students in both focus groups agree is a primary reason that they nominate the four teacher participants. Students cite that the each of the nominated teachers is "down to earth" and they "really get to know you." The one other student who did not agree is a self-proclaimed "teacher's pet". He acknowledges that being the teacher's pet



has its privileges. From his experience, a teacher understanding him didn't translate more or less benefits in terms of learning outcomes.

Data suggest that students do generally value a teacher's capacity to empathize with them. Even before I bring up the language of a teacher's ability to "understand" students, the students discuss their experience being noticed and recognized by their teachers in class. This is the first theme that emerged across each of the focus groups. The boys discuss the negative attention they get in class as compared to their White counterparts. "Lot of difference between the treatment between White students and Black students...the White students will be talking, I will turn around to say, 'Hey G, stop talking', and I am the one that gets in trouble." The students are adamant that they want to be seen and they want to be heard, but they don't want to feel like they are under constant surveillance. One focus group of students agreed that by in large, the White teachers in their school perceive them negatively "because what you see bad happening in the city is usually African-American." One boy commented that he perceived Black males, including himself, were judged too often according to the negative depictions of Black males in the media. They all nodded in agreement that they feel like their White teachers are fearful of them. "I know that they're afraid, so it just makes it worse."

Another recurring theme was the desire for White female teachers who are patient with students. One boy said too many White female teachers "won't take the extra step." He complained that from his experience White teachers are easily "frustrated" and at a certain point refuse to help you. Another student chimed in, added emphatically, "There's a difference between 'I'm here to teach vs. I want you to learn'." The student convincingly pointed out those teachers who are just in school to teach are not very

concerned whether students actually grasp the content of the lesson. The burden to learn is on the student, and not the teacher. They give homework and go through their lesson, but their attitudes about it make students feel like they don't care. On the contrary, teachers who are committed to learning take their teaching to the next level by exhausting any and all possibilities within their control to see students be academically successful. These teachers partner with students by sharing the burden of responsibility. A student asserted, "I hate it when teachers say, 'I get a check no matter what happens. I been through high school, I already have my degree'... That just makes me put up a wall." He acknowledged in his comments that teachers who act as gatekeepers don't motivate him (even if that is their intention). He shuts down and checks out. The students agreed that there is some give and take, and that students must take responsibility for how they behave in class.

Similarly, students agreed that teachers do make judgments for how they will negotiate interactions based on how the Black male student presents himself in class. From one student's experience, he reflects, "If they perceived me as a screw up, they wouldn't go the extra mile." A majority of the boys agreed that they have had similar experiences when teachers have misunderstood their behavior. The boys each told similar stories when teachers perceive them and/or their actions one way and their intentions were completely opposite. One boy expressed resentment saying, "We always have to understand them before they take the time to understand us." Kenneth added, "It's what you portray yourself to be." Kenneth went back to the point that if students don't want to be portrayed as malevolent, that they should do everything in their power not to give teachers a reason to believe that they are that way. On the contrary, many of

the boys believe that they are already perceived in a negative light upon meeting White teachers, making it hard in their minds to change how the teacher sees them.

The conversation ended with the students' nomination of teachers. Of the list of at least five teachers at each high school, the two top-ranked teachers were invited to participate in the study. Each of those teachers agreed to participate in the study. Their names are Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley. Their stories are to follow in the next section.

### **Teacher Narratives**

The four White female teachers included in this study are distinctly different people. Their views, ideologies, personal philosophies, and opinions are unique and interesting. Each of the short narratives to follow is a portrait of their background/upbringing, route into teaching, interesting facts about them, and an attempt to describe their personality.

#### **Ms. Arnold**

Mrs. Arnold is a teacher with over a decade of teaching experience. She is the only one of the four teacher participants chosen for this study who did not grow up in or attend a high school in District 15. Ms. Arnold is from (and currently lives in) a predominately White suburb about forty-five minutes from where she teaches. Her dad was actually a teacher at the high school she attended. She reflected, "I grew up in schools and that was cool... [I] was an athlete and good student." Nonetheless, she concedes that math was never her strong suit. Today, she still has some trepidation about doing fractions and decimals. She had intentions on becoming a psychiatric social worker in college, but found her niche in English, concluding that she wouldn't have

done well in the math classes required anyway. Arnold, as some of her students refer to her, is the oldest of the four White female teacher participants and the only one with children of her own.

Ms. Arnold had a somewhat tumultuous route into full-time teaching. Her wide range of life experiences distinguishes her from the other three teachers in the study. During her student teaching, for example, she was sure she was going to have a teaching position at the highly ranked predominately White high school where she taught English. In explaining this experience to me, she stated, “several bizarre things happened.” After getting wind that a student was supposedly going to attempt suicide, Ms. Arnold reported this student for professional counseling. Apparently, the incident was not true and this student insisted Ms. Arnold was lying about the student’s threat to commit suicide and that Ms. Arnold could not be trusted. This made for many awkward and negative subsequent interactions with students the remainder of the year.

Following this incident, Ms. Arnold made the decision to move on to another author’s poems after the class had spent enough time studying Edgar Allen Poe. A student complained to her father that Ms. Arnold moved from Poe prematurely, who in turn complained to the English department chair who then reprimanded Ms. Arnold for not spending enough time studying Poe. It turned out to be a lie, but Ms. Arnold’s relationships with students after this was poor. The school could not rationalize hiring her as a full-time teacher.

After not finding a full-time teaching position, Ms. Arnold would spend the next several years in California surfing and managing a United Colors of Benetton store near the beach. She had intentions to teach while in California, but the state credentialing

requirements were outside of Ms. Arnold's financial reach. Eventually, she returned to her home state to try her hand at teaching again.

She returned to her old high school as a permanent sub and volunteer. The school then offered her a full time teaching position her third year because of her exemplary service. It was during her first official year as a full time teacher a third "bizarre" thing happened. Two students were caught plagiarizing one another's writing assignment. Of course, Ms. Arnold failed the two students for that assignment. The year prior, a student committed suicide after supposedly being caught up in a cheating scandal. At least this is what the students rumored. One of the students identified for cheating was the son of a school board member. He told his Dad *his* version of the story. The board member then confronted Ms. Arnold asserting, "You [Ms. Arnold] better hope those kids don't kill themselves. That's going to be on your head." The board member attempted to coerce Ms. Arnold to allow the boys to rewrite the papers to earn the credit they had lost. When she refused, at the end of the year Ms. Arnold was not invited to return to the school the following year. Off the record, her principal shared that she couldn't be asked back because she had "pissed off" a school board member—the school board had to approve all rehires for the district.

Disappointed and displaced by her unprincipled dismissal from this school, Ms. Arnold searched yet again for a teaching position that fit her. At the last minute (about a week or two before the start of school), she was hired at a predominately Black high school in a district not far from her home. The district happened to be in the same sports conference as the high school where she attended (and had just been dismissed). This district was not the rich, affluent rival down the road. It was the poorer, more dangerous,

Blacker school district feared for its reputation of gangs and violent activity. At least, this is the picture that school administrators, families, and students from Ms. Arnold's alma mater (and last teaching job) had of the district.

She recalls the first day in her new school hearing "Shake that Ass" (also known as "Shake It Fast" by the recording rap artist Mystikal) on the football field. Perplexed that the band music had taken a sudden shift from the traditional "Pomp and Circumstance" she remembers of her last school, she calls a Black colleague from her former district to lament, "Walter, what am I doing?" She was unsure at that point whether she could be successful in this new school context.

Ms. Arnold would spend the next eleven years teaching at the school. She had no intention on leaving this school, but the violence against her students was becoming too much for her emotionally. Ms. Arnold enjoyed her teaching situation. However, too many students had become the victim of senseless deaths. The volume of death in such a short time period was simply overwhelming. She reflected back on her experience emphasizing that, "It isn't that I was scared for me...I went into labor with all three children at work...I broke up fights in the hallway all the time, but I never felt like it was going to come and get me." She was comfortable in the environment and respected by her peers and students.

Ms. Arnold cited that eleven students had been killed in two years. "The new girl killed another girl in my class over a boy...One of my sophomores killed another sophomore." She asserted, "I can't be here another 20 years with this type of drama...because it was very upsetting to me that all these kids [died]." So many of Ms. Arnold's Black males would write on day one, "My goal is to get out of high school

alive.” This, coupled with the district leadership’s “shady double dealing” was too much for Ms. Arnold to endure. After over a decade in this school, Ms. Arnold sought out another teaching position.

Ms. Arnold finally settled down at District 15 East High School. She confirmed, “I think [teaching at East] its fun...I think its great.” Ms. Arnold is a spunky, “Forty-three year old Greek girl whose parents were divorced” and whose Dad was “abusive.” She acknowledges that she is different from the Black males she teaches, but there are similar experiences she has had that she feels can be leveraged to connect with her students.

She jokingly admits that at the beginning of the school year, she will ask students if they want to switch her class because they’ve heard she is a “bitch”. Half the student’s hands will go up that they want to switch courses, but she reminds them that they can’t. Later they tell her, “You’re hard on me and you don’ take shit, but you’re not a bitch.” Smiling, she confirms that regardless of the student’s challenges, they must step up to the plate if they are going to pass her class. She prides herself on holding students to high academic expectations.

She doesn’t regret any of her personal or professional experiences to date. She feels strongly that teaching in a predominately Black high school was the best professional choice for her. She describes herself as a “realist” and that she’s not a “warm, hugging type”, but she clearly has a strong affinity for her work. She didn’t see herself immediately as the most empathetic person, but reasons that she cares deeply about her work and seeing students reach their full potential.

Ms. Arnold thought of herself as having high empathy, but emphasizes that she's not "soft-hearted" in reference to an item on the empathy survey. "If you ask my students, they will tell me I'm a bitch... Half-way through the year someone will come up and say, 'You're totally not as much of a bitch as we thought you were going to be'." She affirms that empathy has to be learned and that it requires that an individual "Do something" and "try to make somebody's day better." When she thinks further about her own application of empathy following administration of the empathy survey, she settled, "I don't take a lot of excuses," but that she is always assessing what student's needs are by "question[ing] kids the right way." If she thinks the kid needs require extra, then she will adapt. She said in maintaining her persona as a hard nose, no excuses type of teacher that, "I'd rather go with the impression...with the students...that they're not going to get anything from me... The only ones I will give to are the ones I think legitimately deserve it."

### **Ms. Babcock**

Much like Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock comes from what she calls "that nice nuclear family" from the suburbs. She received a prestigious teaching fellowship in high school that allowed her some teaching experience during the summers while she attended her state's flagship university. She reflects, "I guess that is where my whole teaching career started." She entered college to be a teacher, but had a strong passion for sport.

When Ms. Babcock graduated from college, she spent two years as a certified athletic trainer for a Division I college athletics program. She reflected on the experience fondly saying, "It was a great time...loved what I did...." The experience provided her with experiences that she draws on regularly in her teaching of science. She conceded, "I



always felt that I was helping fifteen people, really, who were already very privileged.” She remained an athletic trainer for two years before pursuing a full-time career in teaching. “I always just felt like I could be doing more for more people, as corny as it sounds, you know, I could touch more lives here.”

She is still very much involved with the athletic teams at East even though she teaches full time, which puts her in contact with dozens of Black male students she has never had in her class. When asked about her knowledge of African-American culture, she emphasized:

I grew up in [the community]. So, it’s not like I grew up in some place where Black people weren’t around, you know. Like I was the minority, you know, back then. SO it wasn’t’ like it was something that I wasn’t around. I don’ know. But I guess from year one to know, you just gain a senses of like, you just get vibes of what’s – you know, you get a pulse for the school. And you get a pulse for like what’s going on...But as for African American culture, I’ve always felt comfortable with that...You know, I worked in the Big Ten and the Big Twelve with a lot of African-American athletes, and grew up in [the community]. So it’s not like something that’s foreign to me.

She felt very comfortable speaking about African-American culture, having had significant interaction with Black males prior to becoming a classroom teacher.

At the time of data collection, Ms. Babcock was in her sixth year teaching at East High School, the same high school where she had also attended. She speaks proudly of growing up just down the street from her alma mater, where she now teaches grades 9<sup>th</sup> –

12th. She spent her first few years as a physical education (PE) teacher before becoming the instructional leader for PE. Presently, she teaches various topics in science, including Anatomy, Health Occupations, and Biology.

Ms. Babcock declares that she is “very sarcastic.” She really enjoys humor and it is the centerpiece of her teaching. She enjoys telling jokes and hearing the funny stories that students share with her. When asked to describe her personality, she went on to say:

Like fun loving I guess. I like to have fun. But at the same time when things get serious I can drop the hammer and kids will listen, you know.

They know it...I’m excited about what I do, and I don’t like to be bored so I seek out opportunities to do other things just because I don’t like being bored. Like I could never be that teacher that just like hands out the worksheet just because I would be bored. What would I do? I would lose my mind. So I’m always looking for fun things for us [the teacher with her students] to do together.

She creates interactive, kinesthetic games to routinely review content and teaches using props, multiple visuals, and technology innovation. Ms. Babcock greets students when they come in with a big smile and boisterous “Good morning/afternoon” upon their entrance into her science lab.

In an interview with me, Ms. Babcock shares that reading Ruby Payne’s (1996) text on the framework of poverty book put in perspective why humor had an important place in her class. She cited Payne’s book for exposing her to the reality that White people value independence and wealth while Black, poor people place greater value on wit and humor:

One of things that they said is in the African American culture that it's, versus the White culture, like White culture, like money and pride or esteem or something was like the number one thing that made you higher up. And in the African American population it was like how funny you were. It was humor. It was like who is the funny person in the room? And they were the person that was held in highest esteem. And it kind of hit me like, "Oh that kind of makes sense." Because you kind of always wonder. Like you know that you get along with the kids but you really don't know why. You never really think about why. But when I read that I was like, "Oh, maybe that's why they like me because I kid around all the time and I joke around with them."

Sense of humor is a valued feature of Ms. Babcock's course. As a result, there was much laughter during class, which, as the researcher, made observing her classes quite enjoyable.

Her classroom was beautifully and meticulously decorated with student work that covered all four walls. She began each class period by playing the music of popular artists that she enjoys as the kids walked into her classroom. When her music went off, it was the signal for students that Ms. Babcock was ready to begin class. She invests substantial time in making her classroom a warm and inviting space for each student.

Ms. Babcock emphasized, "I am empathetic, but that doesn't mean that expectations are lowered. There are no excuses, but there's an explanation. There is no excuse for doing poorly, but there's an explanation." Ms. Babcock defined empathy simply as, "Being able to put yourself in other people's shoes." She went on to say, "That's kinda how I just try to live life in general. You know, I just about... well, what's going on there, like why is that? Why is that in their life and, I guess just knowing,

being able to put yourself in somebody's else's shoes." Her general understanding of empathy centers around imagining another person's condition and frequently trying to make sense of the experience accorded to that condition.

When Ms. Babcock starts talking about empathy in the context of her work with Black male students, she believes that empathy is most important for communicating to Black male students that she has no desire to treat them differently than other students. She said emphatically, "I treat em' all the same." On the same token, difference is valued in her class. "We're opposite ends of the spectrum.... You have to show them that, you know, I'm a White female teacher and you are a Black male student.... How you feel is how you feel, and I can't argue that." She conceded that Black males might perceive that they have nothing in common with her. She rebutted, however, that "When you break it down and you say that none of that really matters and you say, I'm person you're a person, you know, it's just gonna be like that, we're gonna look at that.... There's no like elephant in the room.... Kids say stuff...it's [a] very comfortable atmosphere." From Ms. Babcock's view, diversity can either alienate or unite individuals from different backgrounds. She makes it her business to find ways to use student-teacher difference to "bond" with her students.

### **Ms. Coleman**

Ms. Coleman is the youngest of the four teacher participants. She is also the only teacher in the study not teaching a core content area (i.e., Math, Language Arts/English, Science, or Social Studies). Ms. Coleman both attended and teaches at West High School. She recollects that the racial makeup of the school has taken a sharp turn in the decade since she was in high school. She remembered, "When I was a student here, it

was a primarily White, blue-collar school.... I had Black friends but they were from being in sports and there weren't a whole lot of African-American students in my classes." Education was something her "blue-collar" family valued greatly.

Ms. Coleman insisted that for her college was not an option. The only question was where she was going to actually enroll in college. She recollected never being comfortable with the status quo. Therefore, she opted to go to a university where she knew none of her classmates would attend. Ms. Coleman completed her undergraduate at a little known state school about four hours from her home. She confessed, "I just wanted to be different." This was a decision she reflected on proudly.

The Spanish teacher had just finished spending a whole year in Mexico before her first year teaching at a predominately White high school. She became completely immersed in the culture of Mexico. "I really immersed myself in the culture, I became very close to the family that I lived with... It's been seven years since I left and I still go back every year to visit them. They're like parents to me." As she says, the culture of Spanish-speaking countries "hooked" her. She became increasingly interested in learning, speaking, and eventually, teaching the Spanish language. Her love and enthusiasm for the language and culture of Spanish speaking countries was a passion second to her desire to deliver course content in creative innovative ways.

Ms. Coleman has about seven years teaching experience total at the time of data collection. As briefly mentioned earlier, she began her career in a large high school serving "about 98% White" students in a neighboring state from her home state. Ms. Coleman maintained that teaching at the school was not an enjoyable experience. When asked to think back about the experience and why it wasn't enjoyable, she commented:

I did not enjoy teaching there because I felt I had come off this experience being immersed with people, different cultures, and then I came home and I was teaching in a 100% Caucasian classroom.... I just felt like a disconnect. I really wanted to work with... ummm...students of like a mul—. You know, a myriad of cultures, and I didn't feel like I was getting, I wasn't reaching students. I just wanted something more diverse.

She went on to comment how the lack of diversity and the overall culture of the school was draining for her. The kids had no interest in the culture of the countries that they were learning about. Spanish was just a class they had to take, and this was very troubling for Ms. Coleman.

After two years at the school, she was looking for a change. An opening became available at her alma mater and she applied. She enthusiastically shared that:

Here [at West] you see a variety of faces in your classroom, and from that, you get so many different perspectives from kids on where they come from, and what they've seen, and umm.... There's a lot kids that have come from the city and come here and what they bring, their life experiences are so different, than umm.... The school I was at before and there's nothing wrong with the school I was at before, it just wasn't for me.

With a big smile, she talked fondly of loving her work and feeling like, "they need me and I need them.... I don't know what I would do if I lost my job".

At the end of our last interview, one Black male burst into her room with wide eyes to communicate the news of his acceptance to the state's flagship

institution and his first choice for college. With a hug and high five, Ms. Coleman affirmed the young man's effort. Students email Ms. Coleman to tell her about their success in college and to share important updates about their progress. Ms. Coleman conceded that actions like these that students take are evidence that they know she cares about them. "They always come back" she said.

When we started discussing the issue of multiculturalism in our initial interview, Ms. Coleman stopped me and asked with conviction, "I can just be honest with you, right?" She went on to assert, "I came here from teaching an all White school. I live in a White family. I'm the only person in my family that speaks Spanish.... I find it so infuriating when people, like the, the melting pot of the U.S. We're not! It's still not equal." She started and supervises the school's cultural exploration club. The club puts on a range of cultural programs, assemblies, and experiences for the school community to partake in. She prides of herself for her work with this club and the awareness of diversity it brings to the school.

Ms. Coleman could easily be considered the most emotional of the four White female teachers in the study. Ms. Arnold is more of a tough, edgy teacher who shows very little emotion. Ms. Babcock is more jovial and quick witted. Ms. Coleman is the more soft and kind-hearted of the four teacher participants. She confessed, "I can cry at a commercial.... I am a really emotional person." That is sometimes a barrier that she has to work through in order to reach her students. Ms. Coleman, more than the other four teacher participants, spoke explicitly about her insistence to meet the needs of the whole

child. She cares deeply not just that her students understand the content that she is teaching, but that they are also happy people.

When I asked her how her knowledge of Black culture has changed over the seven years she's been teaching, she looked me in the eyes, lowered her voice, and leaned in as she commented:

I had to learn Black culture. I had never, I had never known what it was like to have the Link Card...experience death a lot...people are like in jail...Friends are doing drugs and the culture of girls getting pregnant and all of this kind of stuff. I never experienced in the years I was in high school. Like the pain and horrific things that they have seen. Like I feel, it saddens me that kids their age would even have to even, even think about, know what these things are like.

Ms. Coleman finds these things sincerely troubling when she reflects on how much Black students have had to endure in her years of experience working with them.

She makes a similar comment to Ms. Dantley (who I will introduce next) that she wants her students to walk away from her class having learned *something* even if it's not Spanish. Ms. Coleman strongly values personal relationships, high-quality instruction, and classroom management. When asked how to rank them, she responded that personal relationships with her students are the priority over high quality teaching and managing behavior. "If you have good relationships with your kids, you have a greater success or greater opportunity to successfully have academic instruction because they're willing, they're engaged, they're open."



Ms. Coleman believes everyone has the ability to be empathetic. She insisted, “Someone has to model [empathy] for you.” She defined empathy as being able to “stop before [you] speak and think about what the other person is experiencing.” She emphasized that to be empathetic that you must be “open to a change of opinion or willing to compromise.”

Ms. Coleman does view herself as an empathetic person, but that “no one is ever done learning.” She went on to say, “I’m human. I get mad. I get frustrated. Sometimes I go home and think, uhhh, ‘maybe I should’ve done that differently’.... I care about them [interactions with students] so I think about how I could change things all the time.” Being empathetic from Ms. Coleman’s perspective requires a significant degree of reflection. As it relates to Black males specifically, she believes that the reflecting she does is most important to making sure that she is building relationships with students. “It even starts with, like, saying their name and looking at them every single day and, like, just telling their name. I take it seriously. I greet them every single day when they walk in the door.” She is intentional about her interactions and considers thoughtfully how her personal interaction improves or detracts from her demonstration of care for students.

### **Ms. Dantley**

Ms. Dantley went to college with every intention of becoming a physical therapist (PT). Teaching wasn’t originally on her radar, at least not until she actually started taking the courses preparing her for a degree in PT. She disclosed, “I was persuaded to be a PT by my family.”

Science or doing experiments were never strengths of hers, but she always loved “being on stage.” If she couldn’t become a physical therapist, she pondered how she might pursue a career in broadcast journalism. She settled that she “needed to be a little more realistic” in her thinking, citing that she has “always been a rational person.” A career in entertainment would have been much harder to break into and sense the odds were not in her favor, Ms. Dantley reasoned teaching made the most sense.

She knew definitely that she wanted to be a teacher after experiences she had volunteering in a kids program. Reading and writing were strengths of hers. With that simple revelation, she switched into English Education. She adds that the education program of her undergraduate institution was highly ranked. Her family agreed that her personality made her a perfect match for the teaching profession.

She has been teaching for about a decade in the same district. She began her career teaching middle school. When a teaching position at West High School became available, she quickly transitioned. Ms. Dantley, like Ms. Babcock and Ms. Coleman, grew up and attended high school in District 15. She attended East High School, but teaches at West. She earned some credibility among her Black male students because she attended the “rougher” of the district’s two high schools. She felt compelled to take any teaching opportunity in the area; otherwise, it might’ve been “subbing and working at a pizza place at night.” When asked to reflect on her decision to return to her home district, she contended, “I’m content...Once in a while, I maybe missed an opportunity I could’ve had.... I’m very happy in teaching, in life, and where I live.”

As the West High School’s activities director, Ms. Dantley has relationships with many different students and school stakeholders. During the time of data collection, she

was spearheading several efforts to bolster school spirit. I would come into her office, and she was showing me the new wigs or t-shirt campaign she was organizing. This responsibility allowed her the privilege of only teaching four classes instead of five. Her small office—cluttered with games, wigs, flags, papers, candy, and all of the other things an activities director has to wrangle—was where she spent numerous hours managing the school's many different extracurricular programs. She discussed being asked to do the job because of her love for student activities, sports, and clubs. She has an energetic spirit that makes being around her very easy.

She doesn't refer to herself as privileged. She maintained, "Especially as a White female, I mean you know, you do have to take a look at where students are coming from...growing up in the region, they already know that I'm not a person of extreme privilege." She did acknowledge, "I'm not afraid to, like, mention the fact that we are different races. It's obvious. I'm not going to be the people that is, like, 'Well I don't see color', because everyone does." She pointed out in our interview that seeing difference is not a reason to treat others differently.

I asked her if she had to rank her priorities as a classroom teacher between building relationships, classroom management, and high-quality instruction, what would go first, second, and third. Her priority is a well-managed classroom. She believes in fairness, but insists it's hard to teach and build relationships if the classroom is not well-ran. Relationship building was last. In this regard, she's closer in personality to Ms. Arnold. She believes that students should share the same privileges in class that she enjoys. If she can eat in class because she's hungry after a long day, her students should be able to have a snack in class as well, within reason. "They're not allowed to eat

Frooties. I want to stop the ‘Frootie’ dealers because they deal Frooties...I don’t want those Frootie wrappers all over my classroom.”

She described herself as having a “pretty big personality.” Much like Ms. Babcock, humor is important to her. She went on to say:

I’m strict and I guess a little bossy. I mean, especially in school. I like things my way, and you’re going to get used to these rules in this classroom, and that’s just how it is. And with that, I’m very fair...I stay consistent.... I always have a little animosity towards those things at the beginning of the year, but that they adjust, and they get used to a person with a strong personality....

She makes it very clear that she is not “the huggy, touchy-feely, gonna shake everyone’s hand when they walk in the room and give them a pat on the back...that’s not me”. She and Ms. Arnold are very similar in this way. They are almost polar opposites of Ms. Coleman. Ms. Babcock is somewhere in the middle. Ms. Dantley typically teaches from the front of the classroom making minimal physical contact with students. Students walk up when they need her attention and she regularly entertains their queries.

Ms. Dantley does not consider herself the most empathetic person. “I’m not the most empathetic person in the world. I’m not all sunshine and roses all the time.” She did feel strongly, however, that she was a nice and understanding person. She defined empathy as “taking on other people’s feelings and either help[ing] them work through what they’re going through or you take their feelings into consideration when you deal with them.”

Ms. Dantley does believe every human being is born with the capacity to empathize. She considers life experience and one's personality to be significant variables for shaping how humans express empathy. She confirmed:

Life experiences change how empathetic [someone is] towards others...my mom died tragically...Some people can look at this circumstance and say, 'Well, I don't feel bad for you, shoot that happened to me too'... I don't think that's being very empathetic. I'm more empathetic *because* [emphasis added] of my experience.... Some people just aren't nice.

Her experience with tragedy makes her more sensitive to people who have experienced tragedy, thereby, changing how she might respond to these individuals had she not had that experience. Alternatively, Ms. Dantley emphasized that she is not a softy. She described herself as not at all "mushy" or "June Cleaver." She went on to say, "I really do feel like I care about people, I care about students.... Sometimes, I don't take a lot of excuses."

### **Teacher Conceptions of Empathy**

These four teachers are completely different people with varying perspectives and backgrounds. The difference and the overlap between them make the findings related to their conceptions of empathy of particular interest. This section expounds on how the four teacher participants define empathy, how they believe empathy is cultivated or developed (including whether one is born with the capacity to empathize or if empathy is learned), and how empathy is enacted in their teaching practice, specifically with Black male students. The teachers were also asked to discuss how empathy supports a teacher's ability to engage in culturally responsive teaching practice.

I have organized their responses to my questions based on the most prevalent themes across each interview. The teachers articulate their understanding of empathy in multiple ways. There were several similarities amongst the four worth noting here. I will include particularly interesting contrasts of significance to this reporting of teacher conceptions of empathy when applied in the professional context.

### **Definition of Empathy**

When initially asked to articulate personal definitions of empathy, the teachers make statements similar to those of the early career White female teachers in the Warren (2011) pilot study described in chapter three. Ms. Dantley declared that empathy is about “take[ing] on other people’s feelings,” while Ms. Babcock insisted that empathy is “being able to put yourself in other people’s shoes.” Ms. Arnold settled that empathy is not just “feeling bad.” She asserted that the truly empathetic person is constantly asking, “How might I solve the problem? There might be a propensity towards action...[action] takes things to the next level.” Ms. Coleman said, “Stop...and think about what the person other person is experiencing or has experienced and how might he situation be different had I experienced what that person went through.” Underlying each teacher’s definition includes some process of “thinking” to inform judgment making when responding in an empathetic manner.

The language of “ability” was apparent in each teacher’s definition—ability to respond appropriately as a problem solver and the ability to adjust or adapt if necessary to meet the needs of another individual. Ms. Coleman concluded, “If I’m empathetic, I’m a person that has the ability to change...being open to a change of opinion or willing to compromise...[empathizing means] you’re listening, not judging.” Ms. Dantley

maintained, “You take on other people’s feelings and either help them work through what they’re going through or you take their feelings into consideration...I’m more of a, let’s-figure-out-how-to-deal appropriately, figure out how to resolve a situation.” The person who is being helped has some responsibility in helping the empathizer develop a response most appropriate to meeting that individual’s needs.

### **Cultivating Empathy**

There were two salient themes that emerged from my inquiry of how the four teachers thought about empathy’s cultivation. The data from the interviews imply the degree to which empathy is applied to student-teacher interactions depends heavily on the types of personal life experiences the teacher has had. Ms. Dantley claimed,

Life experiences change how empathetic [an individual] is towards others...I’m more empathetic because of my experiences... Every person has experienced something...that one experience whether it be getting pushed down on the playground in first grade has made you feel something for other people.

Ms. Babcock cites her experience as a Golden Apple scholar, teaching in the inner city as shaping her understanding of privilege. She also mentions traveling the world and seeing different cultures as significant to her development of multiple social and cultural perspectives. She affirms, “I’m the person I was my whole life...but then you have life experiences that shape that.”

Similar to Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman discussed her experiences living in and immersing herself in the culture of Mexico as a means for shaping how she understands and appreciates individual difference and diversity. She also acknowledged graduate

study as having a noteworthy impact on her development of empathy. She shared enthusiastically, “It was such a program that we read a book on, uhh...like, how to teach kids that speak African-American vernacular.... Looking at things now from a critical pedagogy.... Really asking kids to critically think and showing them, not the pretty outcome all the time but what, what is really going on.”

Ms. Arnold talked about having experiences where empathy has to be actually modeled for you. “If you haven’t had it modeled for you, how can you actually know how to engage in empathy?” she reasoned. “You see a sad movie and you cry, but that doesn’t necessarily make you want to do something about it.... Someone has to show you or tell you that there is a way to make some other person’s situation better.” Ms. Coleman concurred by saying, “I think that someone has to model that for you. And if you don’t see good modeling of empathy, then you probably wouldn’t be inclined to understand what empathy is.” She further conceded, “I have a lot more life to live...I’m still young, so like, I know that I can do better.... I think about how I could change things all the time. I think I’m still young, but I think I’m on the right track.” She also acknowledged that she couldn’t possibly be as empathetic as she needs to be right now because she still has more growing up to do.

The more teachers discussed empathy after taking the IRI, the more their conceptions evolved. The questions from the IRI forced each teacher to attempt to logically juxtapose concrete, tangible outcomes of empathetic behavior with how they perceived they express empathy. The discussion that ensued was challenging for the teachers as they further grappled with the application of empathy.



## **Application of Empathy**

When describing scenarios of empathy's application, empathy is reserved for matters that require some problem solving on behalf of another individual. Ms. Arnold talked about empathy in an example of "raising money" for individuals who experienced a hurricane and the necessity to take relevant action to help them, as opposed to "just feeling bad" for them. Ms. Babcock discussed empathy as a mechanism for better understanding the impacts of growing up without the benefits of a "privileged household" and a "nuclear family." Ms. Coleman discussed having learned and/or developed empathy as a result of her "teaching." Learning about "Black culture" and "the pain and horrific things that they [her Black students] have seen saddens" her. Ms. Dantley discusses empathy in relationship to the tragedy of her mother's tragic death.

The four women separately agreed that the individual on the receiving end of empathy's application has a role to play in finding a solution to his or her problem. This became more a clear position as teachers began discussing empathy as a tool of their professional interactions with Black male students. Ms. Arnold said that you must ask yourself, "How can *we* [emphasis added] change that situation around." Ms. Babcock said, "We'll try to figure it out" when describing how she has engaged empathy in the past.

Data suggests that the four teachers conceived that empathy's application requires a significant degree of judgment making and interpretation of the target's circumstance specifically in a helping context. It appears that taking perspective is important in determining a response for each of the teachers. It is unclear from the interviews how well they actually do this in practice when negotiating various interactions with youth.

## **Personal Examinations of Empathy's Application in the Professional Context**

As the conversation in the initial interviews moved towards operationalizing the application of empathy in the professional context, each teacher confidently delineated being caring and compassionate from being fair and rigorous in their expectations for student academic and behavioral performance. Ms. Babcock said, "As far as the fluffy emotional stuff, I get it and I might have those moments and understand that, but I don't allow it to be an excuse. The bar is set high." When Ms. Dantley talked about a confrontation she had with a student for his disrespect to a substitute the previous day, she shared:

I wouldn't say someone walked by and said, "Oh Ms. Dantley, she just treats everyone with a little burst of sunshine".... We had a serious conversation, but I showed him that I cared about him, but I also cared about, you know, how he acts, and what he learns and, you know, making him a better person.

She went on to say, "I'm no June Cleaver," as to say she doesn't want to be perceived as soft by her students. She listened to his side of the story and then engaged him in a series of questions that got him to think about his actions. She emphasized that listening to him was important, but that his life's difficulties did not take him off of the hook for meeting the expectations for student conduct in her absence. He was reprimanded and given a series of alternatives for renegotiating and avoiding future conflict.

Ms. Dantley continued reflecting on her personal application of empathy with students after taking the IRI. She admitted, "Putting myself in someone else's shoes, I do that less often than I would need to be empathetic.... I find it interesting not just to care

for other people but, you know, to take a step back and be putting yourself in their shoes before you talk, react, whatever.” She was thinking deeply about her original conception of empathy and how it fits into the fourteen questions she just answered. She settled that caring is necessary but maintaining rigorous expectations for student performance is paramount.

I asked Ms. Arnold what she thought of the IRI after completing it during our initial interview. She quickly retorted, “I think I’m pretty empathetic, but it’s not for everybody. I’m selective. I won’t go that extra mile for everybody.... If I think something’s going on, I will go to the other side pretty quick.”

In like manner, Ms. Babcock rejoined in response to the IRI, “I am empathetic...but there are no excuses. There is no excuse for doing poorly, but there is an explanation.” None of the teachers took the IRI and recanted their belief that they are empathetic. In this case, Ms. Babcock added that empathy must be accompanied by high expectations.

Ms. Coleman reacted to the survey in similar fashion to the other three teachers. She submitted:

Reading some of the questions, I’m like, “Yeah, that’s totally me.” Like I can cry at a commercial.... You have to hold kids accountable...if, like, I know someone has had a bad week, umm, and they just really did poorly on something, I may give them an opportunity...so I don’t think that you can, oh I’m not going to mark this [assignment] wrong.

She was acknowledging the necessity to score students accorded to their actual performance, but that if something is going on that is impeding their ability to perform,

the teacher needs to know that and be sensitive to it. Not for the purposes of lowering the expectation, but rather to provide other means by which that child may experience success in the classroom.

One of the greatest benefits of administering the IRI was not to make a definitive judgment of how empathetic each teacher is. The specific questions spurned critical thinking about the application of empathy aside from each teacher's subjective conception of empathy. Further, the questions allowed the teacher to wrestle with both dimensions of empathy (empathic concern and perspective-taking). The questions the teachers brought up, though, were the questions assessing their degree of empathic concern. "I don't think that I'm a 'soft-hearted' person" exclaimed Ms. Arnold in reaction to the question that asks, "I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person." The teachers were asked to answer the question with little thought, but they each had to wrestle with not only whether or not the idea applied to them, but also what it actually means to be a "soft-hearted" person. Ms. Babcock went back and forth determining whether she could really be softhearted without any real closure. Similarly, the data suggests that at least three of the teachers think of too much empathy as more a weakness. Three of the teachers use "excuses" to say that they are unacceptable in interaction with students for why students do not meet expectations.

A couple of the teachers make the case in their discussion of how one expresses empathetic regard, that feelings are a sort of connective tissue linking the students to the teachers. Ms. Coleman claimed, "Knowing that people are struggling and taking that in, and taking that to heart and caring...I care about people and their experiences even though I have not experienced that same thing." Ms. Arnold offered her position by

saying, “You can feel bad for anyone, but don’t interact with everyone the same.... It’s a feeling.” Feeling with others or the demonstration of compassion for someone else is a bridge to connecting with them. Even this, as confirmed by Davis (1994), is undergirded by the observer’s ability to take perspective.

Ms. Babcock was unapologetic for a lower threshold of empathic concern. When asked to respond to her score on the IRI, Ms. Babcock shared:

My emotional empathy probably isn’t as high because I do have those standards of, “We’re going to do this,” you know, “I know what’s going on in your life, but we’re going to persevere through it and we’re going to get through it...I understand but you know what? We’re going to get through this.”

Likewise, Ms. Dantley mocked, “I’m empathetic, but I’m not always like, ‘It’s okay honey’.... My empathy is, I guess, it comes out in a different way.” She was characterizing empathy primarily in terms of one’s affective output. She notes that this is important but that it is not a reason to be weak or to cave in every time a student has a problem. It is about meeting the student where he is and working with him to solve his problem.

### **Convergence of Teacher Conceptions with the Davis (1994) Model**

Davis’s (1994) model of empathy as both emotional and intellectual provides the analytic framework necessary for engaging in a rigorous examination of the nature of each teacher’s interaction with her Black male students. Empathy’s application can be succinctly described as the demonstration of empathic concern and perspective taking. Teachers demonstrate evidence of these two dimensions of empathy in the academic,

behavioral, and social/relational interactions they have with their students. The process empathy (table 3.1) described in chapter two is a model useful for capturing the application of empathy. Classroom observation was the method for documenting observed behaviors and interaction antecedents and outcomes. Interviews were necessary for examining intentions, motivations, and priorities related to the various interactions documented during the classroom observations. The next chapter describes actual activities, tasks, and strategies teachers use that suggest further evidence outside of their conceptions how they demonstrate empathic concern and perspective taking. I will discuss here how the major themes associated with teacher conceptions overlap with Davis's description of empathic concern and perspective taking.

Data suggests that the teachers deeply value perspective taking. As mentioned previously, the teachers are concerned about making appropriate decisions about how to communicate and respond to students. They prioritize having a clear understanding of what students contribute to their problem(s) and an examination of what knowledge and resources she might need to help the student solve his problem. Ms. Arnold stated, "Some kids, if you question them enough in that right way, like, I'm good at diggin' ... I can tell whether or not they're lying .... If I think there really is something goin' on, I'll help." She went on to discuss the importance of asking the right questions to ascertain how she should appropriate her response. Ms. Dantley concurred in a separate interview, "I'm good at digging." She emphasized again that empathizing begins with being able to ask questions that get at the core of the student's problem(s).

When it relates to situations where the teacher perceives students might need help, whether it's an academic or behavioral interaction, the teacher is constantly judging what

is an appropriate response and how that response might produce the best outcome for the student without compromising the teacher's high expectations. Ms. Babcock contemplated in a helping situation, "I just think about, well, 'What's going on there? Like why is that?' .... I guess just knowing." Ms. Coleman added that, to empathize, she attempts to "stop before I speak and think about what the other person is experiencing or has experienced and how might that situation be different had I experienced what the person went through.... Here's what I'm seeing, what is the other person seeing.... Find a common ground."

The simple criterion Davis (1994) emphasizes for the demonstration of empathic concern is that the teacher has "tender feelings of compassion" for other persons. He asserts that underlying the expression of empathic concern is the ability of the observer to "mimic" or "imagine" the emotions of another in order to "infer the emotional state of another person" (p. 50). Ms. Dantley confirmed that having a similar experience is of less consequence than "knowing that people are struggling and taking that in, and taking that to heart and caring." She used the language "caring" several times to emphasize that she is very compassionate about her work and her students even if it doesn't immediately seem like it from her interactions. "I really do feel like I care about people, I care about students." Ms. Babcock said, "My emotional empathy probably isn't as high because I do have those standards of we're going to do this, you know, I know what's going on in your life, but we're going to persevere through it."

The students and school administrators agreed that Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley each care about students. The teachers also emphasized their care about students. When asked, they responded that they know students believe they

care because of the feedback students provide them in subsequent interactions. Care is subjective and demonstrated in multiple ways. Data from classroom observations and interviews concur that the teacher participants are strategic about how they leverage their knowledge of students to innovate learning tasks. The examples they chose, the discussions they led, and the projects they assigned align largely to a cultural context relevant to students' lived experiences. Their choices produce outcomes that include increased student engagement among Black males, and the perception by them that their teachers care about the matters that concern them. The product, or value of the empathetic response, lie in the accuracy of the response to produce the most favorable outcome for the target, or person on the receiving end of the response.

The teachers' descriptions of empathy as a capacity for solving problems in a helping situation is some evidence of their acknowledgment that feelings of compassion is an initial motivator to demonstrating empathic concern. Two of the teachers immediately used the language of "feelings" to define empathy. The scenarios that the teachers used to describe empathy's application suggest that "feeling bad" or perceiving that others are in personal distress as an impetus for their empathetic intervention suggests they experienced empathic concern prior to responding to others empathetically. Findings from the teachers' scores on the IRI are discussed in the next section to better understand how their conceptions of empathy overlap with Davis's framework.

### **Interpersonal Reactivity Index and Teacher Conceptions of Empathy**

Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) was used for two reasons. One purpose was to assess the teacher's level of empathy using a reliable instrument. The use of the instrument was also a method to examine the closeness of the teacher's conception



of empathy to what might actually be her actual degree of empathy. It was not my intention to name one teacher as more empathetic than another or to build a case that these teachers are models of the most empathetic people. Rather, my intention is to identify the utility of empathy by describing the application of empathy in practice, applied purposefully to student-teacher interactions within the professional context of a multicultural classroom setting. To engage this particular inquiry, I found it particularly important to begin by examining how teachers grapple with the idea of empathy and its application to their work. The IRI provided another perspective by which to do this.

An unintended consequence of using the IRI was its usefulness for facilitating a richer conversation with the teacher around empathy's application to their professional work with Black males. Prior to administering the IRI I asked each teacher the questions: "What is empathy?"; "Is empathy a learned ability or a human capacity we're born with?"; and "How do you develop or cultivate empathy?"

The teachers grappled with the item about being "soft-hearted" and "tender". The items asked, "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me," and "I would describe myself as a pretty soft hearted person" (Davis, IRI, 1983). With the exception of Ms. Coleman, each teacher felt uncomfortable with the language because they just didn't see themselves as softhearted, especially when they contextualized it within the confines of the interactions they have with their Black males. Ms. Dantley divulged, "Sometimes I don't take a lot of excuses for, you know, homework [for example]. I think a lot of teachers fall into that and I just—not that I don't feel bad sometimes—I don't wanna be a pushover and I want to be fair to everyone." On the

contrary, they also didn't perceive themselves as not being "soft-hearted." Ms. Arnold declared:

The warm and fuzzy statements like "I am a soft-hearted person" [shakes head].... Usually, I don't.... If I think that there is something going on, I will go to the other side pretty quickly. For the majority, you're a high school kid, you're lazy, you don't want to be here and I am going to work under the assumption until something happens that I need...I think I'm pretty empathetic, but it's not for everybody.

She was conceiving empathy as more emotional here and emphasizing the personal vulnerability she feels is associated with empathy's application. She doesn't want to be manipulated by a student's circumstances, but she does intend to be sensitive to their individual needs. Ms. Babcock added in her separate interview, "The fluffy emotional stuff, I get it and I might have those moments and understand that, but I don't allow it to be an excuse."

### **Summary and Conclusion**

One major finding from this chapter is that students do value a teacher's ability to understand them. The Black male participants fondly describe White teachers who go the distance to get to know them personally as individuals, not just as students. Second, based on the sample of classroom teachers who completed the empathy survey, it appears that empathy is most important in helping them to build personal relationships with students. Teachers agree that empathy is an important professional disposition for teachers of Black students and Black male students in particular. Third, empathy for their Black male students is a consideration when lesson planning and communicating

academic and behavior expectations, but teachers believe it may be of greatest benefit for relationship building.

Teacher conceptions of empathy based on the interviews with the four White female teacher participants include four important themes. Empathy is important for the demonstration of care and compassion, but that these values alone are insufficient. Teachers must hold students accountable to meeting high academic and behavior expectations. Empathy should support attempts to not modify high expectations, but rather to inform the adjustments that are made to help students meet those high expectations. Secondly, teachers agree that empathy requires *relevant* action. Relevant action is the response or gestures a teacher makes to respond to the perceived need of the student that most closely relates to the action the student would take for himself if he had the power to do so. These are actions that also produce a student outcome most favorable for the student with little regard to the empathizer's individual preference. The teachers discuss obtaining the information she needs to take relevant action through prior experience in interaction with the particular youth being helped, or through a sophisticated line of questioning. The third theme has to do with the implications of empathy as an important problem solving capacity. The problem to be solved doesn't necessarily have to be a bad problem, but that "stepping in another person's shoes" or "feeling what someone else feels" aids one's ability to make sense of a challenge that needs to be worked out. Empathy facilitates the acquisition of critical knowledge necessary to ensuring the most appropriate response to the specific student's circumstance. Finally, one's ability to empathize is shaped by his or her life experiences and personality. The teachers believe anyone can empathize, but to varying degrees.

By no means do I attempt to classify which one of these teachers are the most empathetic. As one can see from the teacher's personal narratives, they are different, with different upbringing, life experiences, and routes into teaching. It is unproductive given the field's weak empirical basis for judging empathy as a professional disposition of teachers to assign a label to any one of these teachers as more empathetic than the other. More imperative is recognizing how a teacher's belief about something as abstract as empathy can either support or detract from the effectiveness of their work. Thus, investigating teacher conceptions was necessary for the coming examination of the teacher's actual behavior. The themes or patterns that emerge will tell us a lot about empathy's utility from both an empirically grounded perspective of empathy (i.e., the Davis framework) and the teacher's own thoughts. The two balance the interpretation of data for understanding, then, empathy's utility for helping these White female teachers to negotiate student-teacher interactions with their Black male students.

Additionally, the focus group and empathy survey data are useful for triangulating the study's findings. Each set of data adds layers to the analysis of classroom observation and teacher interview data necessary for a more rigorous interpretation. These data also facilitate how the study's findings actually answer the primary research question as well as the implications this research has for culturally responsive teaching praxis and teacher education.

The following chapter threads together classroom observation data with follow-up interview data, informed by the intersection of Davis' (1994) definition of empathy with the teacher's own conceptions. I use the combination of observation, empathy survey, and interview data to construct what I'm calling interaction narratives. Each teacher

participant's application of empathy is described through a narrative of her various interactions with Black males.

## **Chapter 5 – Findings Part II – *Empathic Interaction***

The foregoing examination in chapter four features narratives of each teacher, the teachers' collective conceptions of empathy, findings from the focus group, and empathy survey data. Together, these form the theoretical foundation needed to further understand the student teacher interactions described in this chapter. I draw on these multiple data sources to support a rigorous, thoughtful interpretation of teacher behavior and professional decision-making. Finally, I could not discount my own experience as a teacher and school administrator for understanding how certain student and teacher behaviors may produce particular student outcomes. I consider these experiences along with the other data sources in my synthesis of the observation data to facilitate a conversation of each teacher's professional teaching practice.

Chapter five demonstrates that the four White female teacher participants in this study have their own individual philosophies of education, strategies, and professional approaches to negotiating meaningful interactions with their Black male students. I also include data about general teacher conceptions of empathy and the value students place on their teacher's ability to "understand" them. Whereas, the data in chapter four came largely from surveys, initial interviews with teachers, and focus group, in chapter five the data comes directly from classroom observations supplemented by follow-up and exit interviews with each teacher. The follow-up interviews were spent discussing patterns in teacher behavior based on classroom observations of the teacher's interactions with Black male students. I also divulged the details of a particular type of interaction I observed and would then ask each teacher to expound on the intentions, motivations, and/or priorities guiding how she handled the particular interaction(s). I did this to get a sense

of the internal processes accorded to the application of empathy referred to as *processes* and *intrapersonal outcomes* from Davis's (1994) organizational model in figure 3.1 of chapter three. These professional conversations resulted in a mixture of interesting, compelling, noteworthy stories of student-teacher interactions between these White women and their Black male students, present and past. The teachers' reflections included both triumphs and failures on their quests to become better teachers of Black students. Ultimately, the discussions led to the construction of a narrative that describes the interface of each teacher's humanity with her professional decision-making. These are the makings of each teacher's interaction narrative. Sharing empirical evidence with the four teachers in a safe, reflective space prompted the teachers to share relevant stories that I had not observed, and otherwise would not have known about.

*Interaction narratives* are real-life vignettes from each teacher's day-to-day teaching. These vignettes are composed based on a combination of interactions observed directly, findings from focus groups with Black male students at each high school, and relevant examples each teacher shared during the follow-up and exit interviews. I consider both the teachers' conceptions of empathy, as well as Davis's (1994) multidimensional framework of empathy, to draft honest depictions of each teacher's interactions with Black males. I do prioritize, however, each teacher's demonstration of empathic concern and perspective taking based on evidence from their classroom teaching and their scores on Davis' IRI empathy assessment tool.

Empathic concern and perspective taking are the building blocks for acquiring student perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly discuss the strategies teachers employed to leverage their knowledge of student social and intellectual interests useful

for negotiating interactions that produce favorable outcomes for the student. I provide a few examples of what I perceive to be examples of the expression of empathic concern and perspective taking in the next two sections. The interaction narratives of Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley follow directly afterwards.

### **Empathic Concern**

Davis (1994) defines empathic concern as the “tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others” (p. 57). Empathic concern is considered Davis’s emotional scale of empathy. The best indicator of one’s feelings through physical observation is the expression of affect. To assess empathic concern, I use findings from the Davis’s interpersonal reactivity index (IRI), as well as classroom observations. I record teacher emotions in the various academic, behavioral, and social/relational interactions they had with Black males. I start by documenting facial expressions. I also record the teacher’s verbal cues (e.g., declarative, affirming, reprimand etc.) and other body language (e.g., nodding, hands on hips, position in relationship to student, etc.) to make inferences about each teacher’s emotional output during the interaction.

I could not, nor was I tempted to, judge definitively which teacher had the greatest degree of empathic concern. According to results from the IRI, each of the teachers with the exception of Ms. Coleman fell in the range of average for empathic concern (see figure 3.3 for rating scale). Ms. Coleman had a score of 27, while Ms. Babcock followed with a score of 24, Ms. Dantley, a score of 21, and Ms. Arnold, a 20.

Ms. Coleman reported being a more emotional person declaring, “Reading some of the questions, I’m like, ‘Yeah, that’s totally me.’ Like, I can cry at a commercial... I



am a really emotional person.” Whereas, Ms. Babcock admitted she has “those moments” when she engages the “fluffy emotional stuff,” but she doesn’t allow “it [her emotion] to be an excuse.” Ms. Babcock was clarifying here that she doesn’t allow her emotion to cloud her judgment as it relates to her professional teaching practice with Black males. She doesn’t allow how she *feels* to scapegoat students from doing what they’re supposed to do in the classroom. She earned a score of 24 on the intellectual scale of perspective taking. This score places her in the range of high for perspective taking, distinguishing her from the other three teacher participants. Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley admitted to not being very emotional, “hugger” types in their interviews. They distinguished themselves from the other two teachers as much less likely to be very emotional or personal with students. Ms. Dantley said, “I’m not all sunshine and roses all the time.” She is clear that she does not want to be perceived as a “pushover” and admits to being “freak[ed] out” by teachers who she perceives to be too friendly with their students.

The teachers’ conception that empathy is a mechanism for problem solving and helping others suggest they experience feelings of compassion when engaged in the application of empathy. Ms. Arnold disclosed that when she thinks that a student has a legitimate need, she will respond accordingly by advocating for the student. She says, “I will move to the other side pretty quickly if I think something is going on.” Ms. Dantley “cares” for students going through difficult circumstances in her descriptions of several Black males in her classes. She responds by first reaffirming and communicating that she cares about that difficulty. One way she communicates her concern is by paralleling her experiences of tragedy—one being the tragic death of her mother—to the students. Then,

she will then challenge the student to find alternatives that prevent him from using his unfortunate circumstance as a reason to slow down his progress. These are the “life lessons” she tries to help students learn. Both Ms. Babcock and Ms. Coleman share stories of helping students get into college even when things didn’t look promising for the student. According to the teachers, helping is the catalyst for the application of empathy, and empathy supports one’s ability to adequately alleviate the problem, or “personal distress” (Davis, 1994, p. 57), the individual is experiencing.

When I asked the teachers how they knew that students understood that they cared, the teachers agreed students always offer some form of feedback. It might be a student saying, “You know I love you, Ms. Dantley,” as I heard by one of Ms. Dantley’s Black male students. The feedback might be the student’s willingness to comply with the teacher’s directions the first time, especially, when his other teachers may have a more difficult time getting the student to follow instructions. “They always come back...,” said Ms. Arnold. Black males will graduate and move on, but come back to see the teacher. Ms. Coleman shares her experience by saying, “Students go to college and then email me.... I don’t ever remember emailing my high school teachers when I went to college.” Each of the teachers alludes in their comments how much they care about the whole child. Students who make effort to reconnect suggest that the teachers have had some very positive prior interactions with their Black male students.

One student in East High School focus group rationalized selecting Ms. Arnold and Ms. Babcock, insisted they are “almost like a parent.” The boys passionately believed the teachers “want students to learn” by whatever means necessary. The teachers are demonstrating care for students by moving beyond just teaching content to

relating their care and compassion in a compelling way. A student said of Ms. Coleman that “she really got to know me,” and that she doesn’t treat students “based on how [they] act in class.” A student said of Ms. Dantley, “She’s willing to talk to you and hear you out and listen to your opinion and views.” Ms. Dantley desires more than anything that students leave her class thinking that they’ve learned something, whether that something is actual English content or an answer to a question of importance to them.

Moreover, Ms. Babcock and Ms. Coleman used the language of “family” as their framework for establishing and maintaining strong classroom community. They would often use metaphors related to being members of a family to communicate compassion and sympathy to students. Solidarity between the students and their teacher is important to negotiating for the intended outcomes of each type of interaction. Their classrooms are decorated with a bulletin board or posters related to being family. Ms. Babcock has a board labeled “Our Family” with each student’s name on the board. The teachers also go about the idea of family to ensure that their students knew that the teacher had great expectations for their performance, but that she would go to great lengths to ensure the student met each expectation. Ms. Coleman welcomes students to class by immediately telling them, “*Somos familia*,” or “We are family” in Spanish. Ms. Babcock reflected on meeting students and telling them, “Do you get mad at your Mom sometimes? ‘Yes.’ Will you get mad at me? ‘Yes.’ Will I get mad at you? ‘Yes.’ Am I going to kick you out just because I’m mad? ‘No.’” They want students to *feel* cared for, respected, and valued in the classroom.

Ms. Coleman maintained that caring is “not just worrying about their academic success but worrying about their personal success, social success in life, caring about

their home life, being involved and an active participant in who they are and who they become.” Interestingly enough, she perceived that students really know she cares because they don’t want to disappoint you, “Like your parents,” she retorted. During one observation, following an interview, an excited Black male burst in the room to share the exciting news of his acceptance to a selective university. He hugged her as Ms. Coleman reminded him of his hard work and how deserving he is of admission to his top university choice.

Ms. Dantley’s students do a significant amount of journal writing. They write daily and she reads every student’s journal entry weekly. She claimed, “I get a lot of feedback in journals. So, I get some things, even like, ‘Hey, this lesson that you did was really great...and I appreciate you.’” I observed many of her Black males walk up to her without raising their hands while she patiently answered their question(s). Then they returned to their desk. Dantley offered, “Sometimes...students just come to you or they’re comfortable talking to you about anything,” as an indicator that students believe she cares about them. Likewise, Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, and Ms. Coleman also mentioned that students come and talk to them regularly about matters of importance to them. The teachers discussed having an open-door policy, and that students appreciated that they make themselves available. This is consistent with how the Black male students described the teachers as well.

Eye contact with students was a theme that emerged across each of the four teachers during interactions I observed in their classes. Ms. Dantley and Ms. Babcock tended to stay stationary at the front of the classroom during instruction while Ms. Arnold and Ms. Coleman moved around the room quite a bit depending on the activity. The

majority of the interactions I observed, the teacher would make eye contact and nod in immediate response to what the student has said or done. This is way to let the student know that they were being heard or seen.

There were several instances when students brought up an issue of seriousness to them unrelated to the actual objective of the class period that the teacher engaged. The teachers routinely and intentionally participated in student-initiated extemporaneous conversation. During independent practice time, Ms. Babcock and Ms. Arnold were recorded talking to their Black males about sports or other topics of interest to the student. At other times, the conversations could be deeply personal and the student will want to talk things out about a problem that the teacher perceived needed immediate attention. Ms. Babcock said of this behavior, “There is no waiting until later.” She emphasized that students need the space to get what’s on their chest off of their chest. Otherwise, that issue will crowd their ability to focus on the lesson aims. During one observation, a student in Ms. Babcock’s class brought up a strained relationship with her father during the teacher’s lecture. Ms. Babcock patiently carried on the conversation with the student while the others took notes. It was not uncommon for any of the teachers to stop and engage students in discussion about matters outside of school. This is an important way that the teachers demonstrated compassion and concern for students. There are other examples in the interaction narratives to follow.

Ms. Babcock leaves her door open during ninth period for Black male seniors to come sit in the class. Some of these young men are former students, while others may have interacted with her because of their participation on a sports team. She lets them come into her class at will because she is concerned that they don’t want to leave school.

Rather than getting in trouble in the halls or on the street, the young men will sit in her freshmen biology course. Ms. Babcock defended this action by arguing, “I’ve always said that, ‘You know, every child needs three things: love, discipline, and attention.’ And that’s really what I try to do for every kid is, you know, give them attention.” As she strolled the aisle during the students lab assignment, I watched as she made her way around to her Black males noticing their new haircuts and inquiring about their attendance to the school’s sports banquet, for example.

What I’ve tried to show here is the range of behavior and ideologies driving how teachers demonstrate their feelings of compassion for students. Underlying the “tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion” is some degree of perspective taking (Davis, 1994). With each of the experiences described here, the teacher is constantly obtaining perspective that she will then leverage in subsequent interactions with her Black male students. Perspective taking is the counterpart of empathic concern, but it also supports and facilitates the functioning of empathic concern. In the next section, I describe other evidence of perspective taking by the four teacher participants.

### **Perspective Taking**

In this section, I describe data that suggest the ways in which teachers acquire student social and cultural perspective. Perspective taking is “the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life.” According to the IRI, each of the teachers score in the average range for perspective taking (refer to figure 3.3) with the exception of Ms. Babcock, whose score places her in the high range for perspective taking. None of the teacher participants rank in the low or very low range.

Three of the four teachers went to high school in the same district where they now teach. Ms. Babcock and Ms. Coleman teach in the high schools where they attended. Ms. Dantley teaches in the rival high school in the same district where she attended. This information came out during the teacher interviews. In other words, the students didn't select these teachers because of the teachers' affiliation to the community. Ms. Babcock reflected fondly on growing up "right down the street" from the school where she teaches, even though she doesn't currently reside there. These teachers have a deep, abiding knowledge of the community and how it has changed over the years, including the drastic demographic shift in the last fifteen years. A district that was primarily White has seen an influx of many students of color:

When I was a student here, it was a primarily White, blue-collar school....

There were some African-American students but...I really don't remember...I had Black friends but they were from being in sports and there weren't a whole [lot] of African-American students in my classes....

The reason I say this is because people are like, "Wow, you're so into like multicultural education, but you grew up in a White area."

This demographic shift happened, in part, due to the gentrification of a large local city. District 15 is a collar community, and like many others, whose schooling populations have been affected by the politics of the big city. "This demographic of students, I think it's fun, I think it's great," Ms. Arnold said of the students she teaches at East. The teachers' connection to the community, or in Ms. Arnold's case, a similar community (taught ten years in a school very similar to East High), is important to their ability to adopt students' psychological viewpoints.

The teachers cited their knowledge of local community establishments and neighborhood happenings several times during observations. They have some understanding of the historical, political, social, economic, and cultural context of the school where they teach that supports their adoption of student perspectives, or points of view. I observed the teachers use their knowledge of what was happening outside of school as the basis for much conversation they would have with students. Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley would also use their personal experience of being from the community to make sense of and interpret their Black male students' personal experiences. Ms. Dantley said, "They know I'm from here and that I'm not a person of extreme privilege." She uses her background and upbringing to communicate to students that she "understands" them and their experiences living in this particular community. Ms. Dantley's comments imply that she acknowledges some degree of privilege, that she has little more than the students do. She draws on the fact that she is from the community often in her attempt to relate to her students.

Three of the four teachers use some form of writing in their classes. These activities provide the teachers with knowledge of students they may not otherwise have available to them. Ms. Dantley and Ms. Arnold use journaling regularly. They pose prompts related to the reading assignment or to prep students for a debate. The journals are generally related to the lesson, but allow students to freely express their ideas or perspectives with little restraint. Ms. Dantley emphasized that she reads "every page, line by line, sentence by sentence," and that students know this. It's a good way to build "personal relationships," she claimed.



Ms. Coleman's students write letters at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to introduce themselves, chronicle their experiences in her course, and to offer feedback for how she can improve their learning experiences. The students also do a number of writing assignments that Ms. Coleman uses to evaluate their Spanish grammar and writing skills. The writing assignments are generally personally relevant to students' lived experiences. One student in Ms. Coleman's class was asked to read something he wrote in class for an assignment out loud in front of the classroom. The student divulged that he was gay and reading the letter was his coming out about his sexuality. Students will write what they may not tell the teacher in person, which is very important for teachers to learn about the issues and challenges that matter most to the students.

The teachers also carve out space in their classes to allow students to openly express themselves. Ms. Babcock reminisced on coming up with the idea of "family business." She said enthusiastically, "Like I made it up. I didn't read it in a book. I didn't get it. And I don't even know where I came up with this. Like just one day, I felt like this was a good idea." Family business is the time at the beginning of the class period when students can talk about whatever they'd like. Students tell stories, discuss assignments due in other classes, or debate about popular culture. It's flexible time, but Ms. Babcock limits it to a conversation about what is going on in the student's life that they feel they want to share with the entire class. Ms. Babcock allows each student to talk. No one is silenced. Sometimes family business is really short, less than five minutes, and other days I observed it was a little longer. She reflected on implementing this as a routine in her classroom emphasizing, "Oh, my God, it's the best thing I've ever

done in my life.” She begins each class period every single day by asking students for their family business.

Ms. Arnold, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley would, usually on a Monday, ask students about their weekends and what they did while away from school. The students will discuss parties they attended, family members who may have recently passed away, what they did on romantic dates, or plans that they are making for upcoming school events. The teachers listen intently, ask clarifying questions, and demonstrate attentiveness to the student sharing by nodding and making eye contact. They will then sometimes respond with advice or gratitude for the student sharing him or her story with the class. Typically, these times are short (less than ten minutes) at the beginning of class before moving into that day’s activities. The teachers will follow up with individual students throughout the week to inquire about what is going on in the child’s life.

Teachers used previous teaching experiences and prior interactions with Black male students as perspective for negotiating later interactions. One finding consistent across all four White female teachers is that they never raised their voice. Each teacher discusses having learned from previous experience that yelling was not an effective means of discipline with Black students. I observed very few physical displays of anger or frustration with Black males during behavioral interactions, especially with the boys who have a reputation of being very disruptive in class.

Each teacher commented in one way or another that they found getting angry and raising their voice in frustration didn’t yield fruitful responses to negative behavior. Ms. Dantley admitted, “I’m not going to say that I was always like this—like I was always collected like that. You know, my first couple of years of teaching, if I was mad I was

that teacher that blew up, and then it was a free for all.... I feel like it just makes it worse.”

Ms. Coleman submitted that most of her classes are well behaved, and so she doesn’t ever have to really raise her voice. In that sense, she has been lucky to be able to “teach all day” with few behavioral distractions. Even when she gets frustrated after reprimanding students softly and redirecting behavior, the students tend to get on track. However, her seventh period class is a different story. She conceded, “I have different strategies that I use with that class” to minimize behavioral disruptions. I discuss some of these interactions in Ms. Coleman’s interaction narrative to follow. My point here is that the teachers use the perspective they’ve obtained to think through and negotiate future interactions more likely to produce the intended outcomes of the initial interactions.

One particular student in one of Ms. Arnold’s class is admittedly a “pain in [her] side.” She will divert this student’s attempt to thwart the class’ progress by “thinking four steps ahead,” which allows her to “limit his ability to come back at [her] with something that [she] can’t just shut down.” She looks for thoughtful ways to redirect his attempts to derail class by using his wit against him. She is not always successful in “shut[ing] him down,” but has not given up on the student whereas, in her view, other female teachers in the building has, as evidenced in the long number of discipline referrals he receives.

### **Empathic Interaction: Interaction Narratives**

Davis’s (1994) framework of empathy provides the baseline for identifying evidence of empathy in each teacher’s interactions with Black male students. The teacher participants’ conceptions were also important to this process. The interaction narratives

to follow are the result of the application of both theoretical lenses to the observation, focus group, and interview data. From these narratives we get a deeper look at the actual interactions of each teacher important for first understanding some of the material outcomes of empathy's application, but more importantly, the utility of empathy for negotiating student-teacher interactions.

***Ms. Arnold***

Participants in the first focus group concur that Ms. Arnold is “down to earth,” and that she “treats everybody the same.” Trenton (pseudonym) shared:

If you slackin' off in class, she might say, “Get your shit together.”... She will give you time to like get the work done, or another day because she understands and she knows we can do the work, it might just be something holdin' you back and that will really help because the assignment she gives, most of them are heavyweight. The points are high.

Trenton acknowledged that the expectations are high, but that Ms. Arnold is patient, a trait the focus group participants confirmed is an important trait of “good” White female teachers. Ronald (pseudonym) chimes in to talk about what he likes most about Ms. Arnold. He emphasized:

She's like a motivational speaker, like, she's always hype or something. It's like, it's like she wants you to do good, but she's not the type of teacher that's going to get an attitude with you if you don't do good. She is going to be, like, playful with you and, like, make you actually want to, like, “Dang, I can actually do this,” “I gotta work harder.”

The boys clearly trust Ms. Arnold. They excitedly contrasted their experiences in her classroom with other experiences with White female teachers in their school.

“Everybody got a chance to be successful...no matter what race [you are].” After reflecting for a moment on why the White female teachers nominated (Ms. Arnold and Ms. Babcock) are good teachers, one student offered, “They’re almost like a parent...like a second parent.”

Ms. Arnold also refers to some of her interactions with Black male students in this same way, saying, “I’ve had kids call me Mom. Though I’m harsh on some very specific things, I have *decided* [emphasis added] to modify my interactions with mostly boys.” Ms. Arnold builds trust and community in her classroom by adapting to the need of the student, even though it sometimes makes her uncomfortable and puts her in a precarious situation with other students and teachers. For one of her Black male students, she declared, “I’m not a hugger, but I know James (pseudonym) needs a hug, so I give it to him.” For another Black male, Ms. Arnold admitted being perplexed by this student’s insistence on talking about the intimate details of his relationship with his girlfriend. She emphasized, “I am not ‘Dear Abbey.’... He doesn’t care what I have to say, but I listen anyway.”

Curse words fly across the room routinely in heated discussion from both the students and, on occasion, even Ms. Arnold. She acknowledges that her use of foul language is something she is working on. Not all students are comfortable with her “freedom” of speech, but she assured me that her use is not frequent. She made adjustments to her delivery when she is made conscious of student concern. Ms. Arnold is not perfect and her use of foul language is sometimes a point of contention with

students. She has no problem admitting that to students and making a concerted effort to work on this aspect of herself.

One particular day, a student in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade English class made the inference that, “Iago is Othello’s bitch.” The class is engaged in a discussion of character development in Shakespeare’s famous play, *Othello*. Ms. Arnold replied, “Yeah, kind of.” I inferred from her body language, stoic facial expression, head nod, and eye contact with the student, that she would’ve preferred another word choice. As she looked around the room and reflects on the plausibility of this Black male student’s assertion, she concurred, given the context of the word’s use, that the student’s analogy is an appropriate description. Comprehension of the concept by students is Ms. Arnold’s priority. The students affirmed their newfound understanding by nodding and cosigning the student’s declaration. Ms. Arnold conceded his interpretation is suitable.

“I try not to write up students.” Ms. Arnold prides herself on not submitting multiple discipline referrals for her Black male students, or any student for that matter. Negotiating behavioral interactions with individual students sometimes puts her at risk of being perceived as unfair or unethical by her students or other colleagues. Things that students get formally disciplined for in other classrooms don’t get the same response in her classroom. She emphasizes that she doesn’t write up students, “unless it’s something egregious I can’t handle in class.” She recounted putting students in the hallway or outright ignoring problem behavior to avoid dismissing the student from class. She demonstrates a significant degree of patience, but does not mind giving students a hard time who gives her a hard time. In other words, Ms. Arnold pushes the student constantly to be better than how he is behaving.

One particular student, Latrell (pseudonym) was one of those students that Ms. Arnold admitted is a daily challenge. “He will take the entire room completely off target,” she admitted. “He seems to have problems with female teachers...I don’t write him up...whereas his Spanish teacher will write him up if he looks at her wrong, which he looks at her wrong a lot and gets written up a lot,” Ms. Arnold chuckled. Even though Latrell pushes the boundaries of Ms. Arnold’s patience, she manages to support him by regularly challenging his careless outbursts and inappropriate behavior. She prioritized ahead of time how she might redirect his tangential comments in class by always being “four steps ahead.” She proactively chooses groups and assignments that push his thinking while also limiting his ability to go off task. This also included partnering with the student’s chess coach. Playing on the chess team is the one thing in school Latrell cares most about. She admitted enlisting the help of other “resources that are outside of [her] room.”

Latrell is obviously smart. I’ve seen him ask critical questions in class—questions that can easily make the best teacher uncomfortable if he or she didn’t know the answer. “He is one of those people that if you engage with him on almost anything—it could be the weather, it could be the color my shoes...it doesn’t matter—he will debate.” Ms. Arnold divulges that Latrell has a “horrible life story.” She went on to mention that her prior experiences and interactions led her to prepare alternative, wittier responses to “run interference” should he attempt to thwart the class’ focus. I watched her several times in a sometimes exasperated, frustrated tone turn the misguided dialogue into something meaningful for the entire class. He is earning a “B” in her class, but she conceded that interactions with him are a daily struggle. Her priority for interactions

with Latrell is to be flexible by finding creative ways to keep him engaged, learning, out of trouble, and in class. She is more successful at this task on certain days than she is on other days. Ms. Arnold is very flexible in her response to Latrell because she has to be if she is going to keep him in class, learning everyday.

In the follow-up interview after my first four observations, I shared with Ms. Arnold that I noticed one Black male who wore his headphones in class for a majority of the class period. Initially perplexed by her oblivious disregard for this behavior, I inquired about her motivation for allowing him to listen to his music during class. She informed me that this particular Black male got in trouble in most, if not all, of his other classes for wearing headphones. “He can’t sit still. He bounces around. He’s like a gnat. But he’s that way in every single class.” She allows him to wear headphones during independent practice because it helps him to concentrate. She also advocates to her colleagues that if he needs to listen to his headphones in their classes, they need to let him do it reassuring them that, “If he misses something, send me the handout and I’ll talk him through it later.” As a result, this student is experiencing significantly greater academic success in Ms. Arnold’s class when compared to his productivity, grades, participation, and overall conduct in other classes. Ms. Arnold agreed with a colleague who concluded her “room is organized chaos.” The expectations are high, but students are allowed to be themselves.

Another Black male in Mrs. Arnold’s class is found regularly sleeping in class and in danger of failing. Ms. Arnold describes him as a nice kid. After a long talk, she finds out that he is financially supporting his entire family. He’s tired because he’s working late nights. If he stays in her class, he will fail the course because he is not



producing the work required. Instead of failing him because he is not meeting course expectations she advocates for his placement in an alternative night school program in the district. By doing so, the young man can continue supporting his family *and* earn his high school diploma at the same time. In the best interest of the child without compromising rigorous course requirements, Ms. Arnold worked with the student to identify a solution that produced a favorable outcome for the student. Instead of allowing the student to stay in her class and potentially fail, Ms. Arnold intervened proactively by finding an educational alternative that produces a favorable outcome without compromising the student's home responsibilities.

She affirmed, "The kids that give, I give back." Other students like Jamon (pseudonym) who Ms. Arnold's considers to be a "pain" and "combative," won't get "ten minutes of my time because he just keeps throwing himself against the wall and nothing works." Ms. Arnold disclosed that this student was "kicked out last semester...got arrested, booked for battery and burglary. And now he's back, and he's doing the same thing." Upon his most recent return, Ms. Arnold confronted Jamon:

You realize you're really fucking up! You understand that right? He's like "yeah." I go, "What are you going to do?" He's like, "I got connections." And I said, "Jamon, you're 15, almost 16, you're going to be somebody's patsy. And you don't think before you do stuff. Let's get out of high school." And he's like, "Naw, I really don't care." He's honest...I can't fix that part of his life.

Ms. Arnold was brutally honest with Jamon. If he wants help, she is willing to help. His boldness and clarity translated to Ms. Arnold that he is not interested in her help.

Ms. Arnold chooses what battles to fight with her Black male students and when making adaptations to procedures or rules will be most advantageous. For example, there was a Black male student who got suspended because he refused to give his cell phone up to the school administration. Ms. Arnold confronts the student to inquire why he just didn't give the phone up. She recanted his story to me, remembering that he said, "Because my people aren't going to come up here and get that phone back, and I need the phone." The interaction taught her to ask questions to judge how to approach certain interactions. She reflected:

You know what, if it had been me, I probably would've done the same thing...knowing that kind of stuff, I'd rather not put a kid in a situation where I know I'm going to get them suspended for something stupid...I know I'm breaking the rules. And, in my evaluation with my evaluator, I told him.

Ms. Arnold is not quick to follow a policy just because it exists, especially if she perceives that following the policy is not in the best interest of the child. Again, this is a place in her practice where she is taking risks by breaking the rules. She is selective of how she manages certain challenges with her students.

Finally, one course I observed is a "study hall" that has about 85% Black males enrolled. The study hall is a non-credited course meant to be the place students get extra help in their classes, particularly the courses that they've failed in a previous semester. The students not only must pass their present course load, but they must retake and pass the one, two, even three, four, or five other courses they failed the semester prior. Some of the students in the course are taking as many as eight or nine classes. Attendance is

not compulsory (it is during their lunch period), but a majority of the students show up daily. Enthusiastically, Ms. Arnold asserted, “They know I will intervene on their behalf.... Once they realized that there was a value in what I can do for them, they were glad to come in and do for me.... They’ll decide. I can’t force them to do anything.”

In my observation, the Black males filed in one by one, get their grades checked, and talked with Ms. Arnold about whatever is on their minds. They discuss their relationships, issues they’re having with other teachers, and their disdain with one of the school’s sports team. Ms. Arnold offers them healthy snacks, such as granola bars and Granny Smith apples. She knows they enjoy these snacks. Having the snacks available is an important strategy she uses to get them to show up to the class. Ms. Arnold takes notes pertaining to each child’s individual progress, recording what teachers she has to follow up with on behalf of the student, and giving each student advice for how he might improve his grades for any course he is having difficulty. One Black male asked her to call his Dad to report his progress. She pleasantly complied with the student’s request because she knows it will bolster his academic confidence. She concluded, “Some of them, it’s [the class] been awesome. Some of them, its not going to matter either way what I do because they’re not doing it themselves in the classroom.” As far as she can see, this particular student is continuing to have strong progress.

Ms. Arnold affirmed that she’d rather be perceived by students “with the impression...that they’re not going to get anything from me...the only ones I will give to are the ones I think legitimately deserve it.” She is no-nonsense and wields a sharp tongue, but she cares deeply about her students and is very patient with them. The students trust her and, even though she is hard on them, view her as an advocate. She

will give of her time and resources to get them to come to class and do their best. She is okay with taking risks and being flexible if that will keep students in class learning. Ms. Arnold is most concerned with the bigger picture, so even when a student like Latrell makes the work of teaching a challenge, she goes to great length to make sure he stays in class. She has become skilled at taking what is potentially negative energy and turning it into something positive for the entire class period, though this is often frustrating and exhausting for her. Next, are the interaction narratives of the other teacher participant at East High School, Ms. Babcock.

***Ms. Babcock***

Ms. Babcock was ranked as number one of the White female teacher's at East high school nominated by the focus group participants. Charlie (pseudonym) affirmed that she is never "putting on a show...that's how [she] acts day in and day out. Just from being around them [teachers like Ms. Babcock and Ms. Arnold], how they talk and act, you'll know what type of person they are." The boys were adamant that they felt much more comfortable in Ms. Babcock's class than they had felt in other White female teachers' classrooms in the school.

One student offers a story about how his father had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. He shared how Ms. Babcock went out of her way to make sure he was coping with the news by offering him the option to come to her class and talk whenever he needed extra support. She made herself available to the student by confirming with each of the young man's other teachers that she was willing to allow him into her class when he needed it. This meant a great deal to the student during his rough time. "You get, like, their aura," says Reggie (pseudonym). He perceived in his interactions with

Ms. Babcock that she is always being her authentic self. The students valued her personal transparency. When Ms. Babcock's name is first mentioned, one boy started nodding immediately as he added, "I didn't even have her as a teacher and she is good."

"Good morning, young lovelies. Who has Family Business?" This is the greeting Ms. Babcock starts each class period saying after she turns off the transition music and students have settled into their assigned seats. "Family Business" is the first agenda item of each class period when the students can discuss anything on their minds that is non-academic. Ms. Babcock hosted family business almost everyday during each class period, as long as they don't have a really detailed lab or a test to complete that day. Students discussed their prom dates and tell funny stories, like the time one girl's mom fell down the stairs and then refused to talk to anybody in the house for a week because they laughed out loud at her mom's unfortunate blunder. Family business is the centerpiece of Ms. Babcock's classroom culture. Students feel completely comfortable being vulnerable by divulging the intimate details of their lives. Trust is an important factor of the course because the students are not allowed to share any of what they've heard. Consequently, each of her classes has very strong community amongst its members. Students love being in the class and will anxiously reprimand Ms. Babcock if she somehow forgets or cancels family business.

One of the Black males in Ms. Babcock's senior anatomy course, who happens to be a local rapper, decided that he wanted to share his talent with the class. Ms. Babcock acquiesced. The student performed a clever freestyle rap. A *freestyle rap* is a type of rap where the lyrics are created on the spot right off the top of the rapper's head with little to no preparation. The content of the rap is generally related to the social context. In this

case, the student rapped about being in science class, his classmates, Ms. Babcock, and how he felt about school and learning at that moment. The entire class immediately began rocking back and forth to the beat. I even found myself bouncing rhythmically as I recorded the details of the interaction. I was amazed by how easily students could transition from the impromptu rap performance to having a detailed conversation about the parts of the ear, the focus of Ms. Babcock's lesson that day. Part of what makes family business such an enjoyable, highly anticipated part of the class period is the spontaneous things students will say or do. It draws the students together in a way that nothing else can. Makes sense that Ms. Babcock cited family business as the "best thing" she could've ever done.

On another day, family business lasted for 25 minutes of a 55-minute class period. Ms. Babcock responded to my inquiry about the length of family business by affirming, "How do you price what somebody feels is important to them in their life? You can't! There is no, 'You can't talk.' Everyone gets to share." Ms. Babcock emphasized that family business generally balances itself out and that sometimes it is really short, but on occasion it can become long. When I asked Ms. Babcock about whether or not she regrets this and how it supports her teaching effectiveness, she emphatically declared:

Oh my God, it's the best thing I've ever done in my life! Seriously. It is the best thing that I...I literally, I go back and I like made it up. Like I made it up. I didn't read it in a book.... Like just one day, I felt like this was a good idea.... Kids come in and they all want to talk and whatever. So we like get it all done, and then we move on.

For her, doing family business is about being proactive. It's about allowing kids the space to get whatever is on their minds off their minds so that they can focus intently on the acquisition of content knowledge. "If I don't allow them to get this stuff off of their chests, I can't expect them to focus on the lesson," Ms. Babcock warned. This is an intervention Ms. Babcock developed based on trial and error.

She also has a question box in her classroom. Students who have serious questions they would like answered anonymously place slips of paper in the box. During class downtime or whenever it's convenient, Ms. Babcock will pull out questions and answer them. Some are very funny, some very serious. Student questions range in topic. Many of them are sex-related. Ms. Babcock answers questions about transmitting venereal diseases to clarifying myths about ways the young ladies know they might pregnant. Ms. Babcock created a safe space in her classroom, important for community and trust building.

Ms. Babcock has become quite adept at correctly using colloquial language and cultural expressions congruent to the forms of communication students use with one another inside and outside of school. Her ability to communicate fluidly with students using the words and phrases characteristic of African-American Vernacular English (Perry & Delpit, 1998) for example, is extremely valuable to the interactions she has with her Black students. The students cheer, congratulate and offer Ms. Babcock affirmative head nods and fist bumps when she correctly uses a phrase in its appropriate cultural context. Ms. Babcock offers in response to my inquiry of her use of student language:

I take an interest in them. You know, I think, number one, they think like,  
"Oh well, she knows what we say and what we talk about." I think it's

telling them, “You matter because I’m listening to what you say, and I’m using it. I’m listening to you. I hear you.” And then I think it’s hilarious as well, “Look at this crazy White lady up here.”... I also think that it gives them a sense of there’s a time and place for using that language, and there’s a time and place for being proper, and you can go between the two.”

She juxtaposes student expression with technical language related to the content she teaches. In further discussion about language use in her classroom, she maintains, “They’ll [students] use their kind of language in the explanation. And I’ll be like, ‘Yes, it’s exactly like that.’ You know, like. so as long as I know that they’re getting what I’m saying that’s the most important thing.”

When I inquired of Ms. Babcock about how she would defend her fluid juxtaposition of student colloquial language with content-specific technical language during instruction to colleagues or a supervisor, she simply replied, “I would ask them what types of relationships or interactions do you have with your students?” She admitted that she is taking some risks here because it is easy for her superiors and colleagues to make swift judgments about her choice to communicate with students similar with the way they communicate with one another. Nonetheless, Ms. Babcock contends that positive relationships are essential for maximizing student learning. “Taking an interest” in students includes adopting parts of their culture valuable to the way they navigate the world around them. By doing so, she is better positioned to develop the positive relationships that she speaks of.



“I think humor is important” emphasized Ms. Babcock. Her strategic use of humor manifests itself in multiple ways. She plays the “dozens” with her students, a tradition in the African-American community when individuals fire off quick-witted insults. The exchange is a contest of verbal wit and is harmless in most cases. Ms. Babcock explained, “It’s pure comedy around here.” She uses humor as a way to get students engaged and interested in the course. Her ability to play the dozens, for example, and respond to students with confidence, earns her respect amongst the students, especially when certain ones are attempting to distract the class.

Her quirky, sanguine personality is best reflected in the nicknames she bestows on students based on arbitrary prior interactions. “Like we all have names!” she exclaimed. One student calls her “Babcock.” The student will admonish the class by exclaiming, “Babcock is speaking” to quiet them down during the lesson. The student refuses to say “Ms.” Babcock, so she just says “Babcock” when referring to the teacher participant. “I think they just feel comfortable because it’s a comfortable environment. And it’s not something that I mind,” declared Ms. Babcock. She is not hung up on the formality, but makes it clear that this is the one student allowed to do that given prior experience with that student. Like Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock chooses her battles wisely.

She’ll occasionally make casual threats of expulsion and suspension when students aren’t meeting performance expectations. Ms. Babcock confirmed:

It’s definitely all kidding...in a sense that it wouldn’t be five days out, but it’s something that I want them to change. Instead of me—like their cell phone is out—instead of me confiscating it and sending it to the Dean’s Office, and them getting, you know like all this stuff, I’ll be like, ‘Cell

phones out. Five days out [of school for suspension]. Recommendation for expulsion.’ And they like laugh, and they put it away.

The students comprehend her sarcasm as a mild reprimand and they cease what they’re doing wrong. The intention is to get students to meet the expectation without escalating the interaction to the degree that individuals outside of the class have to get involved.

Ms. Babcock is taking action, which according to the teacher conceptions of empathy is important when a problem arises the individual perceives needs solving. How the problem is solved is important for producing favorable outcomes of the individual(s) with whom the interaction is happening. Ms. Babcock never intends to get the student suspended or expelled, but because she knows humor is something the students relate to, she uses it once again to make sure students are aware of the expectations. If students continue not to meet academic or behavioral expectations, he may be required to stand the entire class period or sit at a lab station alone. Regardless of the consequence, the student must stay engaged in the lesson by looking forward and jotting notes. Even more, he must remain in class. Ms. Babcock also concurred that she avoids writing discipline referrals as much as possible.

She throws her hands up and shouts “Free Ronnie” in unison with students. The expression relates to student frustration with the incarceration of a close friend or family member (even if the person is guilty of the crime). The students will use the term “free” in front of a loved one’s name. With fist pumps and passionate exclamation, the students exclaim “Free [person of interest]” when telling a story during “family business” about experiences they’ve had outside of school. The students will sometimes say it jokingly,

but they have experience of classmates and friends who have been locked up, who they perceive don't deserve to be locked up even if they've been found guilty of the crime.

This is one of example how Ms. Babcock has learned to share affect with her students. She uses other cultural expressions of joy, anger, and disappointment in interaction with her students. Correspondingly, Ms. Babcock asserted, "I put myself out there...I tell the kids...when you first meet somebody, you don't trust them. You gotta get to know each other. I don't know you, you don't know me, but eventually we'll get to know each other and there will be a bond." Putting herself "out there" and attempting to reproduce student expression subjects Ms. Babcock to student scrutiny and criticism by her peers and administration. She was clear that her priority is "building relationships." She does this by cultivating a safe classroom community where students are celebrated for being themselves and where they feel like members of a family

Students who don't enjoy science, including some of Ms. Babcock's Black male students who she admits are just not good at doing science, will put forth effort in her class. She declared, "They work for me." Even if certain Black male students have a reputation for not working in other classes, those same boys will do work in Ms. Babcock's classroom. Ms. Babcock clarified, "I always try to give the kids the benefit of the doubt. Even if they're not doing something, you know, ask 'em, "So, why didn't you do this?'... I want kids to know that it's okay to make a mistake and it's okay for us to, like, laugh about it and move on." Her "ideal goal" is that students become intrinsically motivated. She emphasized the importance of student resilience and their preparation to be academically competitive in our interviews. In this way, she has learned to be flexible in how she will approach each individual student. She confirmed, "There are no

excuses...I give students every possible chance.” She does this by maintaining a website where students can go to get materials, holding office hours, staying late, coming early, and giving students multiple options for the submission of their work.

One day the students entered Ms. Babcock’s class very distracted by the fight they had just witnessed. One discussion turned into another during family business. Finally, Ms. Babcock attempted to begin the lesson. The students are clearly unfocused as evidenced by their excessive discussion unrelated to the lesson objective. The students yelled out questions irrelevant to the lecture being given by Ms. Babcock—questions that included, “What kind of White person are you?” Ms. Babcock shot back, “Do you mean, ‘What is my ethnicity?’” She is not afraid to stop what she is doing to engage students in a conversation of importance to them.

Eventually, Ms. Babcock realized that she was not getting very far with the lesson so she again stopped the lesson, played music, asked the students to stand up and to stretch. She addressed the conversation of her “Whiteness” with the class, reiterates expectations, and moves back to the lesson. After giving the students an opportunity to talk through how another White teacher handled the fight and how Ms. Babcock would have handled it, the class was able to get back on track. “There’s no, like, elephant in the room about, like, ‘You’re White, I’m Black.’” Transparency is important to Ms. Babcock’s practice, and she capitalizes on opportunities to be vulnerable to student inquiry as she believes this may improve overall classroom functioning. This is another example of how being flexible tightens the culture of the classroom because the students don’t feel apprehensive bringing up touchy subjects.

BJ (pseudonym), a junior in one of Ms. Babcock's classes, got up at random, sat on a big bouncy ball in the front of the classroom, played with materials on the teacher's desk, and wrote on the board during Ms. Babcock's lesson. He was the only Black male in the class whose desk is positioned right in the front of the classroom. BJ constantly got up and sat down at his leisure. Ms. Babcock, unmoved by his activity, carried on the lesson as if these things were not happening. It was unclear how productive the student was being or whether he met the lesson objectives from this particular observation.

During a separate observation of a class period BJ is in, Ms. Babcock took her class outside to simulate the flow of blood through the heart. She wrote down each stop of the blood's flow on one block of the concrete sidewalk; there were fourteen stops altogether. Students had to memorize each stop in order, and then demonstrate their competency by naming each stop aloud as they progressed (walked) backwards down the sidewalk from the first stop to the next. BJ was the first student to complete the task successfully, correctly naming each stop. With a grand smile and eager exclamation he yelled, "Ms. Babcock, I did it!" I watched him as Ms. Babcock observed him completing the task. Indeed, BJ had accomplished the task with ease when compared to his classmates. "He's very bright. I mean, and he gets excited about things. That's what I love about him."

For what seemed to be contrasting observations of Ms. Babcock's interactions with BJ, I had to follow up to determine how successful this student was in class. Ms. Babcock pointed out that BJ is passing her class with a high B. BJ sat out of school the previous year for disciplinary reasons. It was easy for me to make a quick judgment as a former teacher and administrator that he was completely off task in class during the first

observation. I remember being very concerned about BJ's academic progress based on the interaction he was having with Ms. Babcock. On the contrary, one would never know he had been through so much.

When I ask about why she allows BJ to get up when he wants and whether or not she is concerned about the risk that he will interrupt the flow of the class, Ms. Babcock nodded nonchalantly as she informed me, "I know he's a mover. He's got to move. He's got to do something." The two had an agreement, and as long as he held his end of the bargain, Ms. Babcock adjusts accordingly. She had BJ as a student two years prior to my observation as a freshman. "He's got a little history behind him. He kind of knows how I roll, and like, 'We're going to do this.' I would think he was an A student all the way through." She is very flexible with meeting BJ's needs, but she is also very proactive. She knows that she needs to have a range of activities that will meet the needs of the different types of students in her class, like BJ, who have various intellectual, learning, and social interaction preferences.

One strategy Ms. Babcock employed to respond to student needs was by creating various kinesthetic content review games. Additionally, she uses clever games, graphics, carefully organized PowerPoints and mnemonics to teach most of her complicated science content. I observed the class playing games that were completely new to me. The games always involved some form of movement. When asked about how she uses so many activities requiring students to be out of their seats, she affirmed, "It's one thing that I try to incorporate in my class as much as possible, like the kids getting up to go some place to do something, instead of just sitting in their desk for 55 minutes." She understands that her students learn best when they are up and moving. She used activities

that allow for some movement regularly as a way to motivate students and improve the quality and impact of her instruction.

Ms. Babcock toes a fine line in her interactions with students. She wants to communicate to them that she takes great interest in who they are as they are, but that they must perform in her class. One never really knows how students are going to behave when they are given the freedom to talk and express themselves freely. What comes out of their mouths can be off-putting. This is a risk Ms. Babcock is willing to take. High expectations are the norm in her classes, but humor is central to negotiating the overwhelmingly positive interactions she has with her Black male students. Her sense of humor and the joy that she brings to teaching supports the building and maintenance of strong classroom community and trusting relationships with her students. Family business has done the best job of building classroom community of any other organized activity observed in the four teacher participants' classes. Family business also duals as a proactive intervention useful for helping students to actually focus on being young scholars by removing some excuse(s) they may have for not being intellectually aware. Ms. Coleman, the first of two teacher participants at West High School, has similarly powerful exchanges with her Black male students. Her interaction narrative is described in the next section.

***Ms. Coleman***

John (pseudonym) passionately fought for Ms. Coleman's name to top the nomination list of White female teachers invited for inclusion in the study. He discussed not really being strong in Spanish. Ms. Coleman made his experience in the class tolerable. He best described her by asserting, "She really got to know me." He felt

understood. She communicated her understanding of John's difficulty in Spanish class by tailoring the learning opportunities to both challenge him and ensure that he experienced some success. Other students concurred they appreciate how Ms. Coleman goes out of her way to get to know them as individuals. It makes the difference. Students feel "seen as capable" in her class. Whereas in other classes the students perceive that their White teachers do not see them as academically capable. The teachers appear visibly frustrated and have too little patience with students.

Another student added, "[She] don't go based on how you act in class." The student disclosed how his peers would sometimes act one way in class and act completely different outside of class. He shared the example of how some people are really smart and like getting good grades, but in class would rather make jokes to garner "attention" from their peers. According to this student, Ms. Coleman gets this and still requires high expectations. The students unanimously agreed that they like high expectations and appreciated when a teacher pushes them to perform academically.

Ms. Coleman acknowledged that there was a lot she didn't know about Black culture. She had to learn about the people, games, movies, and artistic expressions most important to shaping Black culture for the group of students she taught. She conceded:

I think that being a White teacher, umm, teaching primarily African-American students, I'm not—the kids know, we joke about it all the time. Sometimes they tell me about games they play, like when they were kids and stuff, they'll say, "She doesn't know what that is, she's not Black." Then they explain it to me and I say, "It's like hide and go seek, or it's like tag," and they're like, "Yeah."



Her admission was evidence of her vulnerability. Ms. Coleman's cultural competence has continued to expand and shift every year that she teaches. She acknowledges that there is much about the students and families she served that she doesn't know. Seeking out knowledge of student social and cultural perspectives is a priority for her.

Ms. Coleman takes initiative to learn about the things that interest her students. Whether it is sports or a popular music artist, she will spend time studying aspects of student culture. Ms. Coleman affirmed, "I think that in trying to relay what I talk about in class with kids to their culture is empathy...I take into consideration, like...umm, music, and talking about, like, things that I...I don't like basketball, but they love basketball, so I have learned about basketball." She comments on not being much of a sports enthusiast, but that she will intentionally watch the Bulls game so that she and her Black male students can discuss the game the next day or the following Monday. She explains, "And not that I'm like, trying to impress them, but it's, like, maybe like the kid that never wanted to talk to me will now want to talk to me or ask me something 'cause I know who Kobe Bryant is or whatever." Ms. Coleman demonstrates a considerable degree of flexibility as it relates to willingness to learn from her students. Knowledge in her classroom is reflexive. Students bring a degree of cultural expertise that the teacher can only get from the student.

Ms. Coleman will also use knowledge of student culture to help her better interpret the meanings of other student expressions in class. She shared an example:

Last year, somehow, movies came up.... The kids like gave me a list, like these are a list of Black movies we want you to watch over the summer.

And they, like, gave me a list... I watched some of them because I knew

then, when I came back to school, they, like, say stuff from those movies  
and I don't know what they're talking about, but now I know!

The students appreciate the effort Ms. Coleman makes. Additionally, Ms. Coleman is intentional about meeting the kids where they are by finding strategic ways to relate Spanish content to her students' real lives. One way she does this is to figure out what matters to students and then integrate that knowledge into the curriculum. As a result, the content she teaches is more representative of the students in the class.

There were two times when I observed Ms. Coleman appeared frustrated with students. Her rosy cheeks and straight face, while she repeatedly scolded the class for not meeting behavior expectations, was an obvious giveaway. This more serious deportment sharply contrasted the smile and warm demeanor I had come to expect from her. Even though she was frustrated, she never raised her voice – a trait that I noticed in all four teacher participants. She maintained calmness even when she was being undermined or outright ignored by the student(s) she reprimanded.

When asked about her approach to managing frustration and dealing appropriately with misbehaving students, Ms. Coleman insisted:

Well, I mean, as a younger teacher, I can say that I've tried the whole like raise-my-voice thing, and you know, it just doesn't work.... I really found that building the relationship with kids, even if they don't like Spanish...it's like, that whole, like, you don't want to disappoint your parents thing.... You know, like, because they don't want to go [leave the classroom]—and I think they do know that, like, my classroom is a, I

hope, it's a comfortable place. They can be themselves. It's kind of relaxed. And I don't think they want that to change.

Building trusting relationships is a priority for Ms. Coleman. Part of the way that she does this is by negotiating behavior interactions around learning from previous mistakes; realizing that yelling never made students *feel* respected. Nor did this practice curtail problematic behavior. Behavior in Ms. Coleman's seventh period class of sophomores is a more serious issue than the other four classes she teaches. Everyday she is optimistic about the outcomes of her efforts. Ms. Coleman takes multiple approaches to negotiating academic, behavioral and social/relational interactions in this class.

Vernon and Ronald (pseudonyms) are in Ms. Coleman's seventh period class. The two Black males are friends that, if permitted, would talk to one another the entire class period. Ms. Coleman admitted that this class is structured around them. That is, Ms. Coleman had modified the learning activities, pace, and heightened expectations for class productivity to keep the boys engaged and on task during the final class period of the school day. After observation of this class, in comparison to Ms. Coleman's other classes, it appeared the students did move through a greater volume of content in less time than the other sophomore class. Ms. Coleman's other classes happen to be equally productive, but a bit more laidback and free flowing. Ms. Coleman made sure to move from one activity to the next with swift transitions and clear directions in the seventh period class.

When she and I discussed how and why this seventh period class is so different from the other sections of Spanish, Ms. Coleman maintained that if she didn't push the

class in the ways previously described, then Vernon and Ronald would be distracted with one another the entire class period and, subsequently, distract the class. She regretfully admitted the two boys “most definitely...dominate [her] attention in [the] seventh period class.” During my observation, Vernon would answer many questions, especially when no one else in the class had an answer. His answers would be correct a majority of the time. Ms. Coleman shared:

I try to find time to get Vernon and Ronald engaged in something individually so that I can possibly get time to individually visit other students to talk to them to see they’re progressing, if they need help, and then in the middle of that still check on Vernon and Ronald and ping-pong back and forth between other kids and those two.

She recognized that because they “dominate” so much of her time during class that she runs the risk of losing the other student’s attention to focus on the two boys. She was not engaged in excessive or disproportionate number of behavioral interactions with Vernon and Ronald. Instead, she recognized that they are very active. Ms. Coleman must check in with the boys to gauge their task completion and intellectual engagement, as they are easily bored. She is constantly looking for strategies to find an appropriate balance.

Being active is only a bad thing when the classroom environment is not structured in a way to harness that energy towards increased learning for all. Ms. Coleman explained:

I think Vernon is a class leader. Some teachers may view him as a negative influence on class, which he can be. But for the most part, I would view him as a positive leader because he is smart, but he tries to

[put on] a facade of being [not smart]— “I know I’m smart, but I want to be cool.”... He [Vernon] is not afraid to be wrong.... He is not afraid of making a mistake.

These are characteristics in Vernon that Ms. Coleman appreciates. He makes her work hard, but her approach to their high energy is to make the class more rigorous rather than spend an excessive amount of time getting Vernon to modify his conduct. She recognized that the energy these two young men bring to class could either be a liability or an asset. Ms. Coleman responded to the challenge by making the class of thirty more student-driven, intellectually engaging, academically rigorous, and personally relevant.

Ms. Coleman admitted that foreign language is very challenging for her Black male students. One Black male I observed warned his classmates in a group project that he refused to speak in front of the class. He agreed to scribe, but was apprehensive to speak because he didn’t think he had the appropriate “accent” when speaking Spanish. When I asked her about Black male academic efficacy in her Spanish classes, specifically related to the speaking of the language, Ms. Coleman asserted, “It’s a language class.... I mean, they eventually have to speak because part of my assessment is, you know, not just can you read and write, but can you speak the language.” She addressed her student’s trepidation by reaffirming, “I would prefer that you [the student] just say something and not worry about your accent or worry how it sounds, but really like getting those words formed.” She tries to consider the student’s aversion to speaking the language in her planning of activities but maintains that this can’t be an excuse for not meeting the expectation for speaking the language.

Later in the semester, because she had a student teacher working with her, she did find that pulling students out of class to have them complete their oral exams was very successful. The Black male students, in particular, found it more appealing an assessment strategy. Being pulled out of class allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge of the language as a speaker while taking off the edge of having to perform in front of their peers. The vulnerability associated with having to speak a language they were uncomfortable speaking in front of others was enough to make the students choke. Ms. Coleman acknowledges that students will not always have this privilege, but that she will make the adjustment when she can.

Ms. Coleman professed, “I try to use a lot of different activities. And even in small groups, I try to give them assignments that have like requirements in their higher-level thinking skills.” After I asked how she knows what activities to use with her Black male students, she explained, “Like at the beginning of the year...I...figure out what they best like to learn.... One thing I’m proud of myself is that I’m not afraid to try new things, and if it doesn’t work, like figure out how to make it work.” Much like Ms. Babcock, I saw Ms. Coleman use many different types of learning activities. She is not afraid of trying something new, seeing it fail, and trying something else. “I like to let kids have choice...it allows them to feel like they’re involved, but in the best place fit for them.” Very few times did I see the Black males in her class off-task. She builds in consistent student interaction based both on her understanding that speaking is important for acquiring language, but also because the students really thrive at being able to learn the material cooperatively.

Ms. Coleman enthusiastically encourages all of her students to take Spanish beyond what is required to graduate. She lamented that all too often, her students of color refuse to enroll in the upper level courses due to a fear of failure. One Black male I will refer to as Bryan did decide to take the AP course. When I observed, he was engaged in the group work, collaborating with his peers about the class project. Ms. Coleman confirmed that he is struggling to keep up in the class. He admitted to Ms. Coleman in a separate observation, “I don’t know about this Ms. Coleman. I’m barely keeping up.” He was somewhat defeated as he compared himself to his more fluent-speaking peers. He chose to take the course, in part, because Ms. Coleman was teaching it, but also because he thought that it would better prepare him for college. Even in the seventh month of school, he still felt very unconfident about his Spanish speaking skills—a common issue amongst Ms. Coleman’s Black male students. In an effort to support his development, Ms. Coleman acknowledged:

I find reading assignments geared to his level. I differentiate for him. I have like four different lesson plans for students in that class...If I give them activities that I know are just above their ability where they are challenged just enough, they learn, but not so much that it’s incomprehensible.

She had steadily modified the work to challenge Bryan intellectually, while supporting his development as a Spanish speaker. He is earning a low B in the class, but is not planning to take the AP exam.

I asked Ms. Coleman how she addresses the various aspects of culture specific to Black male students. I wanted to know how she gets them interested in learning the

language and culture of Spanish speaking countries. She cited the frequent use of real-life scenarios and examples to contextualize the content for them. Ms. Coleman conceded:

Sometimes it hard to connect because it is a different culture [Spanish-speaking countries], but I try to, umm, link in the common values that most cultures hold, which is like food and family and faith and all of those things and always ask them to position themselves [by asking] “Is there anything that you can find similar about this that maybe you’ve experienced?””

She went on to comment that students don’t really enjoy grammar, but that she questions them frequently to get them to practice their Spanish grammar. Her questions stem from her knowledge of the various cultural examples she’s learned from prior interaction with students. She wants desperately for them to see the personal usefulness and significance of the Spanish language.

Two times I observed throughout the quarter, students were working on projects; one where they created a town labeling different landmarks in Spanish and one when they created a skit based on prompts from their text book. Each time, I watched as the Black male students, sometimes reluctantly, participated without much obstinacy. As a result, Ms. Coleman helped students to experience success. Then she capitalized on their budding confidence and motivation to stay engaged in increasingly challenging learning tasks.

Learning from and about students is very important if one is to make the classroom a place where every student feels affirmed and valued. Ms. Coleman made



getting to know her students and building relationships with them, based on the knowledge she obtains, a priority. This means taking what may be considered negative characteristics of a student and using that information to increase the rigor of the course. Ms. Coleman is constantly reflecting on prior interactions with students so that she can proactively organize learning experiences that capitalize on the strengths of her Black male students. The most significant aspect of Ms. Coleman's interactions with Black male students is her willingness to change when she knows something isn't working. She is persistent. Ms. Coleman is comfortable with trial and error. As a result she finds what works best for her. Ms. Dantley is the second of the two teacher participants at West High School. Her interaction narrative is to follow.

***Ms. Dantley***

The Black male students participating in one of the focus groups at West High School nominated Ms. Dantley primarily because of her high expectations. When William (pseudonym) suggested her name be added to the list of White female teachers who really "understand" Black male students, the others nodded affirmatively in agreement. One student spoke up saying "the workload, as far as [her] pushing you [academically], yeah, Ms. D." One student talked about how low he felt when one of his White female teachers inflated his grade and those of the other Black students in her class. He didn't like the feeling of knowing that he was getting a grade he didn't truly earn. "Ms. D", as some Black male students refer to her, express that she makes you earn your grade. They enjoy the feeling of accomplishment making their hard work in her class all the more rewarding. The students concurred they most appreciated teachers who don't cut corners with them by accepting less than the student's best work.

Students also nominated Ms. Dantley because she is not easily frustrated when a student doesn't immediately understanding the content of a lesson. William (pseudonym) offers, "She's willing to talk to you and hear you out and listen to your opinions and your views." He communicates that Ms. Dantley makes him feel heard in her class. "She never treats people differently...even if you're the class clown, she'll still answer your question or still try to help you out," expressed another student. The focus group participants shared several instances when a teacher refused to offer them help because she perceived he was not being attentive in class. Ms. Dantley, from the students' perspective, does not treat students this way.

Ms. Dantley does take holding students to high expectations serious, but she is also thoughtful about student's poor work habits—habits that they've developed prior to being students in her class. She supports students by offering them time in class that allows them to maximize the chance of their being academically successful. One such strategy that she uses is referred to as the "First Five". This is when the students get the first five minutes of the class period to fix their homework, complete a question or two, ask Ms. Dantley questions about what they didn't know, or simply to finish putting the heading on the page. They can use the time however they please, but it is an easy way for them to get clarification, as well as position themselves to earn the highest grade possible for the assignment. Ms. Dantley confirmed:

It's not something I do all of the time, but if I know that, looking around, most of my kids are going to take low scores—that's not what I want. I want them to learn the material. I don't want them to fail.... The five

minutes is enough time to, like I said, those excuses vanish. They don't argue with you.... They still had to do something before they got there. This option helps to limit the excuses students can make should they earn lower grades in her course. She further concluded, "I've come to realize that students do forget their homework. They leave things at home. And they end up freaking out about zeros. And for me, I don't like to accept late work so I don't want to give student an opportunity to do an entire assignment in a few minutes." It is unclear exactly when and what criteria she uses to determine when students get to have the "first five" and when they don't. She is thinking ahead and intervening in a way that positions each student to be academically successful. She emphasized that, like Ms. Arnold, it is important for each of the students to pull their own weight, but that she is willing to go the distance to meet their need.

Ms. Dantley and I discussed one Black male that is a star athlete and "nice kid" by her account. He is a senior with college acceptances that is failing English. He failed the fall semester and is on track to fail the second semester if he doesn't quickly turn things around. Ms. Dantley questioned him and catches the young man up in numerous lies. To debrief this incidence, Ms. Dantley underscored the importance of understanding a child's history and then using that knowledge to devise instructional strategies to facilitate his learning opportunity.

Ms. Dantley revealed that she does tend to give more reminders about completing work and getting things submitted on time to her Black male students. She wants them to be successful in her class. Ms. Dantley explained, "I like to keep my reminders and keep on them as far as like, 'Hey don't forget.' I'll remind them twice, 'Rough drafts due

tomorrow. Don't forget.'" She creates ample opportunity for the students to access the material and meet her expectations for academic performance.

Furthermore, she stressed the importance of making students aware that she is available to them for any form of help they may need. This includes answering questions of importance to the student, even if the question(s) are outside the scope of the course content or lesson objectives. She expounded by saying,

You know, I always kind of establish at the beginning of the year like,  
'Hey if you ever have a question, ask it because there's probably someone  
else in the class that doesn't know the answer either.'... I don't get mad if  
we get off topic sometimes because I think some of your best  
conversations and your best days in class kind of spiral out of something  
that you didn't expect.

She is okay with the unknown. Ms. Dantley establishes classroom community by allowing the classroom to be a space of free inquiry. She constantly has to evaluate what questions she has time to answer and which ones will distract the class too much. Admittedly, it's a fine line.

In reference to her Black males' academic challenges in her English class, Ms. Dantley emphasized, "I think talking is something, you know, like if every assignment they could just tell you what they meant instead of writing it down, I think a lot of times we'd have those good results." She tries to capitalize on student strengths as much as possible. Ms. Dantley used class discussion frequently as a way to bolster student confidence as well as to systematically walk the students through the process of translating their thoughts to paper. "I try to let

them know like, ‘You know it.’... So, with just talking and having the discussion, I feel like there’s more confidence. And when a student is more confident, you do see more success.” Some of Ms. Dantley’s Black male students are more successful than others, but she is constantly finding ways to support how they translate their knowledge of the content into their writing. Staging class debates and discussion is one strategy she uses followed by individually coaching students by offering strategies to get their ideas on paper. She is constantly negotiating how to keep them motivated when it comes to tasks that they believe they are not particularly strong in.

Ms. Dantley had at least one or two talkative Black males in each of the four classes that she teaches. Talking is a good thing when it is productive. There is one particular student named James (pseudonym) that likes to talk too much. She admitted, “I mean, from August to the end of February to just listen to the same stuff and have it not really change has been difficult for me.... I do try to have positive interaction with him.... It kind of, it’s like, ‘Oh what kind of day or mood is James in today?,’ and that’s, I guess, how I’m going to, how I figure out how to deal with him for that particular day.... I don’t feel like I’m super effective yet.” She grapples with supporting James’ ability to stay on task by regularly changing her approach to working with him. She might change his seat, make him work in isolation, or downright ignore his misbehavior and instruct the class to do the same. She admitted that it’s not simple, but that she is not willing to give up trying new approaches of interaction with him. Some days she’s successful at accomplishing the intended outcome of her behavioral interaction with James and some days she’s not.

Ms. Dantley usually has her cup of coffee and begins class by giving important announcements. In contrast to Ms. Coleman, she isn't smiling all the time. She maintains a fairly serious demeanor, but is kind and approachable. When asked about her approach to interactions with Black male students, Ms. Dantley informed me:

I'm not the huggy, touchy-feely, gonna shake everyone's hand when they walk in the room and give them a pat on the back type. That's just not me. And there are teachers that are like that, and I just cringe at the thought of it.... With my classroom, I mean, I think the fact that I'm able to joke around with them a little bit but then I can switch to serious in three seconds, you know, we get back on task, I think that they like that about me.... I'm not trying to be anybody that I'm not, you know. I don't try to act cool or, you know, I guess, talk like them, act like them. I use, like, their slang to almost make myself look silly because I think that they get a kick out of it and think I'm a funny person.

Ms. Dantley would joke with students, but does stay fairly distant in terms of her physical position in the classroom to her students. She taught from the front of the classroom with little movement around the class, even during independent practice time. This was due largely to the set up of the room. The desks were in straight rows and the size of the room is not conducive to much movement. Even with these physical barriers, it is Ms. Dantley's intention to communicate to the students that she cares about them both as intellectuals and individuals.

Still, Ms. Dantley is not comfortable being too relational with the students. There are limits and parameters to her willingness to be open to students. How she determines her boundaries is less clear. She emphasizes:

Like, I'm not going to talk about my romantic relationships and those types of things. But yeah, I'll make jokes about my cats or, like, things that don't really let you in too much of my personal life.... I've learned in the past, however many years of teaching, just that if you give them a little about yourself, they feel like, "Oh, you know, Ms. Dantley isn't that bad. She's probably really nice at home."... So, that's kind of the motivation there is that it allows the kids to feel like you care. And I feel like they act better in class.

She recognized that students want very much to get to know their teacher. Part of the way that they connect is when teachers divulge aspects of their lives to the students. Again, Ms. Dantley's priority is a well-managed classroom. Therefore, she will do whatever it takes to keep kids focused on learning.

Her Black male students were very comfortable walking up to her to ask for help, or getting up to sharpen a pencil, going to the trash can, or getting extra help from a classmate during their independent practice time. The freedom students have in her class to move around is supported by Ms. Dantley's philosophy of classroom management, as acted out in the various interactions she was observed having with Black male students. She emphasized that, "I can get more done, get more across when my classroom is under control.... I mean, they are young adults. They should be able to get up and get tissue...I kind of want them to be able to feel like they can move around and they don't have to just

sit there.” She had made her expectations clear from the beginning of the school year. Ms. Dantley does not want students to feel “controlled” or as if they are in prison (a point that the Black male students say they dislike). She does, however, set the parameters for the freedoms the students enjoy in her class. She admitted that the degree of freedom varies by grade level. She teaches seniors and sophomores. Seniors get more freedom than the sophomores, mostly because the seniors tend to be more mature. Nevertheless, she has to demonstrate a fair amount of flexibility to maintain her threshold of comfort for having a well-managed classroom.

One Black male was scolded for being obnoxious and a distraction with his candy bar in class during one observation. I shared with Ms. Dantley that I did notice she is fairly lax about having students eat in class. I wanted to know more about why she allowed students to eat in class and if that was something that the school allowed. She argued:

I guess the school’s rule of thumb is that they can’t eat. You know, I don’t feel like, well, I’m the teacher. I can have my drink up here and my snack, and you can’t. I mean, I just don’t think that’s fair. I never thought that was fair as a student. So, it doesn’t bother me that they eat in class.... You can’t eat anything annoying and you must clean up after yourself.

She placed parameters on this freedom, but she paralleled her experiences with the student’s desire to eat. “If kids are hungry, they should be able to eat.” She doesn’t like the Frooties, a small fruity flavored Tootsie Roll candy. She exclaims, “I want to stop the Frootie people, so I don’t let them eat those in class. You can’t eat sunflower seeds.” She structured her class in such a way that students have freedom within reason. She has



to judge fairness based on her interpretation of the student's situation. Her ultimate intention is to eliminate anything that may distract the student from being maximally focused on the learning tasks, which include hunger and/or obnoxious eating habits.

Additionally, during class time, she was not averse to carrying on extemporaneous conversations with Black male students. "I feel like you can have a better relationship with your students if they feel like you care about what they have going on.... If they feel like, you know, you're not all business all the time. And I get more respect." Like the other three teacher participants, Ms. Dantley engaged in social/relational interactions regularly with students to keep a pulse on what matters to them. This is a necessary component for maintaining such a class culture according to Dantley. Building relationships with students, in turn, also supports the implementation of high-quality instruction.

Ms. Dantley, like her counterparts in this research study, is deeply committed to equitable learning opportunities for Black male students. She is not willing to water down how students meet those expectations. On the contrary, she works very hard to guarantee that students have access to the tools and opportunity they need to maximize learning outcomes. Her approach to doing this is by first ensuring that her classroom is well organized and conducive to learning. She is personable without being too personal. Students feel comfortable in the class, but Ms. Dantley challenges them to think critically and holds them accountable to putting their best foot forward in class. She is honest with students and that is what they like about her. She is flexible with how students meet the expectations, but will not make concessions for the expectations themselves.

Each interaction with students is an opportunity to learn and assess what that student may need in future interactions moving forward. The application of empathy to those interactions by any one of the teacher participants is a personal experience. Each teacher is taking the knowledge they have of students and then making important decisions in interaction to hopefully produce outcomes that will most benefit the child. Empathizing is personal because of the teacher's own personality, priorities, intentions, and personal life experiences. Each of these things intersects with how she applies empathy in interaction with students. It is also personal because of each student's differing personality and set of lived experiences. No one interaction will look exactly the same. Therefore, empathic concern and perspective taking is only a part of the task of empathizing. What teachers do with that information is equally important, and becoming an expert at figuring out what to do may come over time.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Empathy is a concept subject to one's individual interpretation and often confused with other notions such sympathy and caring. The understanding of empathy guiding this research project is shaped primarily by Davis's (1994) multidimensional framework and its intersection with the four teacher participants' conceptions documented in chapter four. I record the application of empathy by first describing how this group of White female teachers nominated for their exemplary teaching practice conceive of empathy in chapter four. In the current chapter, I provide snapshots of each teacher's actual interactions with Black male students. Taken together, we get a much better sense of how these teachers use feelings of compassion or sympathy as well as their knowledge of student social and cultural perspective to negotiate various interactions with Black males.

The final stage is to explore, then, the utility of empathy. This is the task taken up by chapter six.

This chapter produces several major findings. The first finding is that the application of empathic concern and perspective taking takes on multiple forms. Both dimensions of empathy are important for obtaining information that teachers then use to organize learning experiences and interactions that produce favorable outcomes for youth. Another finding is that the application of empathy is deeply personal. Personality, life experience, and an understanding of students' social interaction preferences for motivating them will be different for each teacher. Likewise, the outcomes may be different as well, even if, for example, the teachers each took the same action with the same student. How students perceive the teacher's intention shapes how the teacher, in turn, responds or participates in the interaction with each student.

Finally, the teachers' acquisition and subsequent leveraging of student social and cultural frames in the academic, behavioral, and social/relational interactions produces three important themes. The interaction narratives show that the four teacher participants tend to be flexible in how they communicate and respond to the social and intellectual needs of their Black male students. They take multiple risks in terms of how they adapt the learning experiences for each individual student based on what she knows about that student. As a result, these teachers have strong classroom communities and are likely to devise academic and behavior interventions that preempt student failure. The teachers partner with students to achieve academic goals, emphasizing the important role students have in becoming academically successful.

The four teacher participants in this study come from varying socio-economic backgrounds, viewpoints, philosophies, and priorities for the work they do in schools. Yet, they each purport to care that Black male students receive a high-quality educational experience. Interpretation of and the approach teachers take to demonstrate their care for students (and the work of educating them) contrasts widely among the four women. The diversity of interaction examples emphasizes that one size does not fit all. Findings suggest that the modifications and adaptations teachers make to meet student needs based on students' perspectives of their own needs likely improves how teachers build community and trusting relationships with students. Further, these findings imply that teachers are very proactive, always thinking about ways to support student outcomes most favorable for the student, not the practitioner. Regardless of whether the intended outcomes are met or not, making decisions like the ones these teachers have to make to negotiate productive interactions with Black males has required a significant degree of flexibility on their part. Their flexibility and subsequent vulnerability communicates their willingness to take risks.

In the final chapter, I describe how these findings answer the question of empathy's utility for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with Black male students. The chapter includes considerations for the application of empathy in three particular areas of a teacher's professional teaching practice. Additionally, there is a discussion of the implications of this research for education practice, both in-service teachers and teacher preparation for practitioners interested in multicultural education settings. Finally, chapter six includes specific recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 6 – Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations**

In this final chapter, I briefly summarize, analyze, and discuss the findings in chapters four and five with respect to this study's research questions. I also discuss implications of those findings for practice and the imperative for the field to further explore the utility of empathy as a professional disposition of culturally responsive teachers. Research literature suggests that the adoption of students' social and cultural perspectives, as well as the demonstration of empathic concern, can humanize the learning experience for students. This is especially the case for students who have been traditionally underserved by their public schools. My intention in this study was to describe and analyze the practice of a small cohort of White female teachers considered by Black male students and school administrators as effective teachers or Black students. This study included a total of four practicing classroom teachers. Therefore, my findings are limited in scope. Much more research must be done to make generalizable claims about teaching and teacher preparation.

The primary research question for this project is *What is the utility of empathy for helping a select sample of White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students?* I answer this question by first asking how a sample of teachers think about or conceive of empathy and its application to their work. An empathy survey distributed widely to a sample of seventy-three teachers provides findings for whether there are significant differences by race, gender, and income for teacher conceptions of empathy and their scores on an empathy assessment. School stakeholders (i.e., school administration and Black male students) helped me identify the four teacher participants in the study. I interviewed the teachers to understand how they define empathy, conceive

of its development, and how they envision its application to their interactions with Black male students. Finally, these individuals completed an empathy survey that included both a questionnaire and an assessment of their ability to empathize with others. The implications that are drawn for K-12 education and teacher education are speculative, but useful for sustaining an important dialogue for how to further humanize teaching and learning.

Another important question pursued in this study was what value do students place on their teacher's ability to "understand" them. These data help to open a discourse about how teachers think about the application of empathy as a professional competency. The findings not only triangulate the data set, but they help shape an understanding of empathy's application in the classroom that we currently do not have in the literature.

Findings from chapter four are taken primarily from initial and exit interviews with the teachers, as well as focus group data. Findings from chapter five include primarily classroom observation data combined with follow-up interview data, results from administration of the IRI, and data from the focus groups at each school. This chapter is an attempt to synthesize the data to answer the aforementioned research questions.

### **The Utility of Empathy: Framing Empathy's Application to Teaching Profession**

The purpose of this research study was to identify the benefits, profitability, and/or usefulness of empathy for White female teachers negotiating interactions with Black male students. In order to answer the question of empathy's utility as a professional disposition I had to first examine empathy's application. This examination includes investigating evidence of empathy in teacher-student interactions based on both

the teachers' personal perspective (teacher conceptions) and a more standardized perspective (Davis's multidimensional framework) of empathy.

To review, I define empathy in this study as both emotional and intellectual using Davis's (1994) multidimensional framework. The emotional dimension is introduced in chapter two and referred to throughout this paper as empathic concern, while the intellectual or cognitive dimension is referred to as perspective taking. Davis is a social psychologist whose work on empathy is most complete for grounding an understanding of empathy appropriate to an analysis of social interactions.

In addition to Davis's definition, I use several other sources to guide my understanding of empathy's application in the professional context. The work of Batson (1991) and his colleagues related to the expression of empathy as a catalyst for authentic altruism (Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis), as well as the teacher participants' own conceptions of empathy. Also, included in the development of a definition of empathy appropriate to examining student-teacher interactions are findings from studies in the helping professions, including education, and the reflections on empathy from multicultural education scholars, including Dance (2002), Howard (2006), Howard (2010), Ladson-Billings (2006a), and Milner (2010).

### **Defining the Application of Empathy in the Professional Practice of Teachers**

When considering Davis's (1994) definition of empathy as a stand-alone concept paired with the teachers' conceptions described in chapter four, their interactions in chapter five, and the various aforementioned literatures, I come to see empathy operationalized in the professional classroom context as the ability of teachers to appropriately respond to students' social and cultural needs, interests, and learning

preferences. The teacher's application of empathy includes adopting or acquiring student social and cultural perspectives by a) outwardly demonstrating feelings of compassion and care congruent to how students receive or experience care as evidenced by the feedback they provide the teacher; and b) strategically organizing learning experiences and/or engaging in interactions with students and families that expose the teacher to the various contexts (i.e., social, racial, historical, cultural, gendered, and political) shaping how Black male students navigate the world around them. The application of empathy in the professional context, then, includes holding students accountable to rigorous standards for academic and behavioral performance while also being willing to adapt the various processes necessary to meet those standards as appropriate for each student. The assumption is that teacher-student relationships *are indeed* helping relationships, and that teachers care deeply about the outcomes associated with the interactions they are having with students. This is based on findings from both the pilot study and the current study that suggest each White female teacher participant entered the teaching profession largely because they wanted to "help" students.

The theme of care and helping surfaces frequently throughout this study. It is important at this juncture to delineate empathy from these two concepts. Help is the teacher's professional intention to produce outcomes for students that will ultimately improve their quality of life. The teachers in this study and the pilot study take serious the charge they have to provide the highest quality education experience possible for each one of their students. Scholars such as C. Daniel Batson (1991) with his colleagues (1991) and those in the helping professions argue that empathy is the catalyst to authentic help. Without adopting the perspective of the individual one intends to help, it is difficult



to ascertain whether the help will accomplish the goal of the action put forward by the empathizer. In essence, the help being offered is based on the idea, perspective, and agenda of the empathizer, suggesting that the help is ill informed and thus, not help at all. In other words, empathy precedes helping. If teachers are serious about helping Black male students, he or she must have a nuanced knowledge of the type of help that is needed, whether he or she has the skill or competency to actually provide the help required, and the teacher should have some inclination of the possible outcomes of that help.

Davis' (1994) defines empathy as intellectual *and* emotional. The emotional dimension of the empathy process is empathic concern. Empathic concern is described by Davis and likened in the literature to sympathy. Demonstration of empathic concern is one's ability to share affect and exemplify compassion for the circumstance of others. The teachers agree in their conception of empathy from chapter four that caring is essential, but second to holding students to high academic expectations. Teachers who apply empathy to their interactions with students balance (to the best of their ability) communication to the student that they care deeply for the student, but that the student is responsible for putting forth his or best effort always.

Lastly, differentiation of care and empathy is similar to the difference between empathy and helping. Caring is only caring when the individual being "cared for" receives it as such. Knowing what care means to any student requires that the teacher has some perspective of that child's conception of care. The only way to know the child's conception is to go about the task of adopting his or her social and cultural perspective. Hence, underlying any teacher's ability to demonstrate care in a culturally appropriate

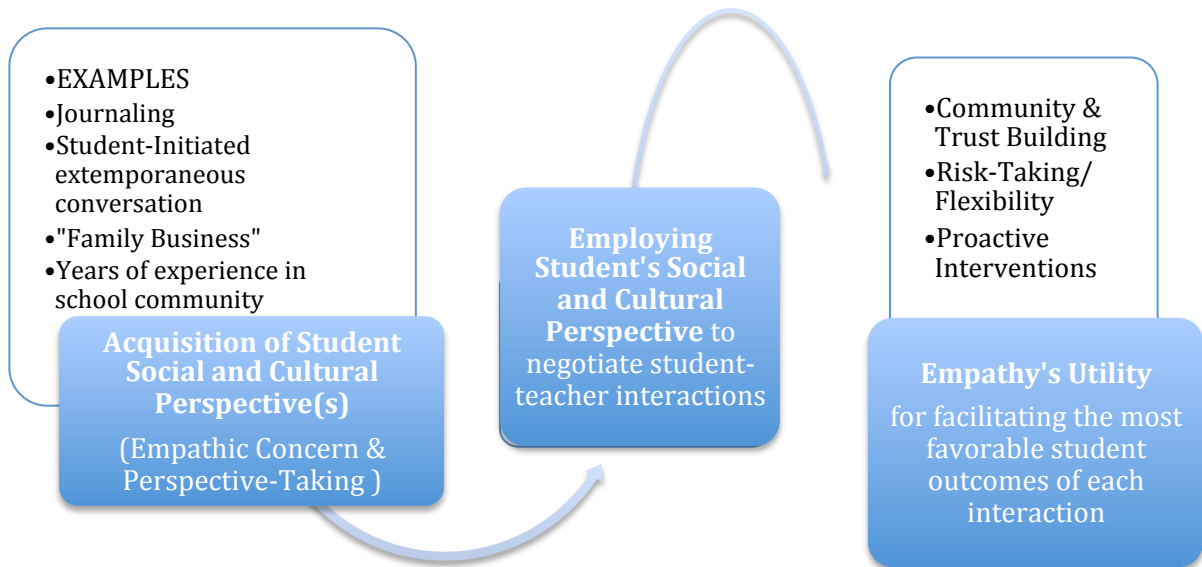
and valid way is his or her ability to take perspective. There is further discussion of empathy and caring later in the chapter.

### **Defining Empathy's Utility**

Empathy's utility for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions begins with what the teachers *do* to demonstrate empathic concern and perspective taking. Next, I move from what the teachers did to acquire perspective to examining *how* they leveraged the knowledge gained from employing the two dimensions of empathy in their interactions. Demonstrating empathic concern and perspective taking are communication processes inclusive of dialectical feedback between student and teacher.

Teachers recycle the knowledge gained in subsequent interactions with students to hopefully produce positive outcomes with each type of interaction. This is what I deem as the *application of empathy*. The action teachers take to thoughtfully apply or use student social and cultural perspectives to make decisions about how to communicate and respond to students' needs is the "negotiation" of the interaction. So, to finally answer the question of empathy's utility, I took the data to identify the areas of each teacher's professional practice where empathy was of greatest consequence to student outcomes, or the areas where the teacher seemed to use her knowledge of students the most. See the conceptual model below for an overview of the process described here.

**Figure 6.1** *The Application of Empathy to Interactions with Students*



As Feshbach and Feshbach (2009) point out, “The crux of teacher empathy lies in the interaction of the teacher with the student” (p. 88). Thus, it is the interactions these four teachers have with their Black male students that best illuminate how empathy intersects one’s overall teaching practice. The next section is a description of three areas I argue empathy of greatest value.

### **Empathic Interaction: Utility of Empathy**

Davis’s (1994) definition, when combined with the teachers’ conceptions of empathy, coheres to form the understanding of empathy used in this study. The utility of empathy, or empathy’s usefulness for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with Black male students, manifests itself in three important ways. Empathy supports each teacher’s willingness to take risks and be flexible in their interactions with

their Black male students. Empathy is also useful for facilitating how teachers build classroom community and develop trusting relationships with their Black male students. The third and final dimension of empathy's utility facilitates the teacher's ability to be proactive in her negotiation of each type of interaction. I describe the three types of interactions in chapter three under the methods for classroom observations. Each dimension of empathy's utility identified in this study will be described in detail in this section.

**Table 6.1**  
***Teacher-Student Classroom Interaction Types***

<b>Interaction Type</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>
<b><i>Academic</i></b>	Content knowledge acquisition and/or student intellectual development
<b><i>Behavioral</i></b>	Modification in behavior or conduct for the purpose of improving the rigor of the academic environment
<b><i>Social/Relational</i></b>	Development of positive relationships with students

*Risk-Taking/Flexibility* (RTF), the first and most important of the three domains of empathy's utility is each teacher's willingness to violate personal, as well as school social and cultural norms, to ensure the most favorable student outcomes. Ms. Arnold,

Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley surrender control and become vulnerable to student needs to the degree each is comfortable being uncomfortable. In other words, these teachers break some rules and do some bending of their personal preference to facilitate learning experiences that directly cater to the needs of their Black male students. RTF is the intentional effort put forward to cultivate an academic space where students can be themselves, even if it compromises what is considered “good” or “appropriate” for the academic setting. These instructional efforts are innovated and created based on an acute, ever-growing knowledge of the social and cultural capital students bring to school. Risk taking is going against the grain if it means supporting students, without assimilating them, to meet high expectations. Flexibility is the willingness to be uncomfortable, to accept pertinent personal and professional change, and to center the intellectual enterprise on student learning preferences (i.e., truly student-centered classroom learning environments). The two operate collaboratively and synergistically.

The second domain, *Community & Trust Building* (CTB), is each teacher’s tendency to adapt her personal behavior or social philosophies to better cater to students’ social interaction preferences. The four teachers take building strong classroom community serious and they each make modifications to her personality and/or personal approach to social interactions to appropriately respond to student needs. The teacher’s community and trust building practices are in large part based on her knowledge and awareness of the personal character traits Black male student’s value in their teachers.

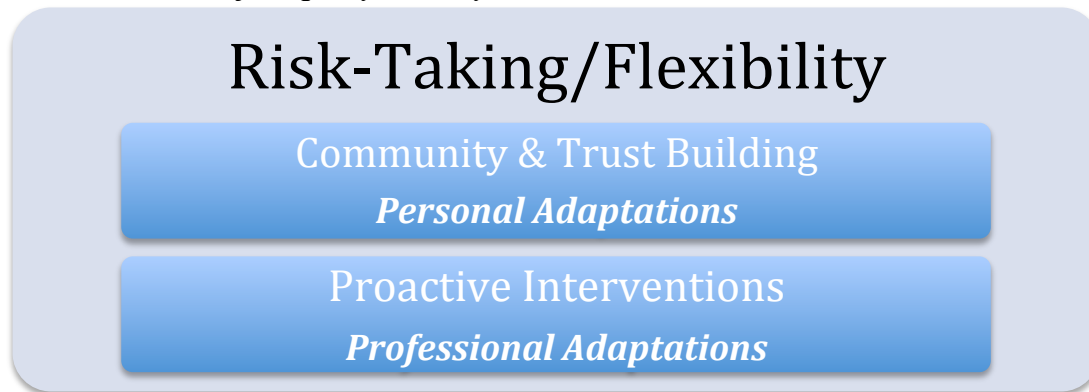
The final domain of empathy’s utility is each teacher’s *Proactive Interventions* (PI). Proactive interventions are each teacher’s thoughtful, forward-thinking, creative, innovative, and open-minded approach to designing an instructional program centered on

her critical knowledge of student learning preferences. These interventions are attempts to preemptively modify intellectual tasks to best suit students' social and intellectual needs without compromising rigor. The teachers take steps to learn from and about students, and then enact that knowledge to guide important instructional and professional decision making to ensure the most favorable student outcomes.

I measure the utility of empathy by how each teacher participant responds to student needs. This includes the way she applies her critical knowledge of students to the subsequent adaptations made to her person or the instructional processes for which she is responsible. *Personal Adaptations* are modest modifications each teacher makes to her personality, thinking, philosophy concerning a certain idea, or approach to social interactions with students. *Instructional Adaptations* are accommodations the teachers make to the processes that pertain to instructional planning, class assignments, requirements for student's class participation, and lesson presentation.

Both types of adaptations were made in the multiple interactions with Black males observed and discussed in interviews with the teachers. Findings from the data sources for this project had considerable overlap across the three interaction types described in table 6.1. The RTF, CTB, and PI have some overlap as well. Therefore, the *type* of adaptation previously described helps to further differentiate each domain. RTF is a delicate combination of both personal and instructional adaptations, while CTB is primarily personal adaptations and PI are primarily instructional adaptations.

**Figure 6.2**  
*Domains of Empathy's Utility*



### **Risk-Taking/Flexibility**

The most salient theme of empathy's utility across the multiple data sources was each teacher's demonstrated personal flexibility and her willingness to take multiple risks to meet student needs. After synthesizing observation and interview data discussed in chapter five, I found that these teachers make all sorts of personal concessions to ensure students attain the intended outcomes of each interaction. In many cases, the teacher took an approach in her interaction tailor-made for the particular Black male student or group of students involved. Her adoption of student social and cultural perspectives led each teacher to modify subsequent interaction in some way or another. Many of those modifications include some flexibility or risk-taking on the teacher's part. What the data says is that one size does not fit all. If this is the case, the teacher has to be willing to step out on a limb if he or she is to create an equitable learning environment, responsive to individual students.

The risks the teachers take come in multiple forms. Some are personal. Some are at the classroom level, while others are school level risks. For example, at times teachers were drawn into conversations about sports or popular culture, topics they had no prior knowledge or interest in, like Ms. Coleman. Data suggests that the teachers aren't afraid to engage students in conversations where they lack expertise. All four teachers confirm it's okay to make mistakes, that "trial and error" is a part of their learning curve. The risks are also at the school level. For example, Ms. Babcock's "family business" can sometimes take up a significant amount of instructional time. She assures me that sometimes it is longer while other days it's extremely short. If a school administrator were to observe, she could potentially be reprimanded for her use of the time. Finally, conflict in class is a possible risk to the productivity of a class when the teacher makes certain allowances for particular students.

The teachers agree that empathy requires relevant action and the ability to "change" and modify their "opinions" or "approaches" if necessary to meet the needs of others. The teachers do this in several ways with their Black male students. Consider the Black male in Ms. Arnold's class who needs his headphones to focus or BJ, the Black male in Ms. Babcock's class who needs to move and be active during instruction. Then there is the loquacious, but thoughtful student Vernon in Ms. Coleman's class who is easily bored when not intellectually stimulated. There is also the Black male student(s) in Ms. Dantley's class who have the desire to eat in class. How the teachers negotiate each of these interactions is based, at least in part, on their knowledge of students obtained either through the demonstration of empathic concern or perspective taking. The teachers could negotiate any one of the interactions with the student differently than



they do. Ms. Babcock could follow school rules by requiring BJ stay seated and Ms. Dantley could disallow any eating in class. Ms. Arnold doesn't have to permit the student to wear his headphones in class, nor does she have to make the agreement with his other teachers that she will make sure he gets any assignments he misses when wearing his headphones in their classes. However, I'm not sure that the outcomes for the student's academic success would be the same.

Any one of these cases could pose a potential threat to the learning environment. Anything a teacher allows students to do, or liberties given to certain students and not others could ruin classroom culture. Still, the teachers don't necessarily view the students as the problem to be solved. The problem is how to structure their interactions so that they effectively respond to students' needs while not compromising rigorous expectations.

Students and teachers each bring a degree of power to every interaction. Teachers have the power bestowed to them as representatives of the education institution. They make judgments about student academic and behavioral performance daily. They have tremendous agency for negotiating how their students experience school, at least in his or her classroom. Within the professional context, teachers have the upper hand. They set the tone and parameters for the climate of that classroom, including what will be tolerated and will not. Also, students have power also over whether to comply or abstain from submission to the authority of the teacher. Students who have been labeled "at-risk" and been traditionally underserved both inside and outside of schools, like too many young Black males have, also leverage their power in deciding what they will or will not do. Knowing this, teachers have to decide then how to broker the interaction so that the

intended outcomes keep the student engaged and performing at his maximum capacity. Negotiating interactions, then, is accounting for student's power and personal preference. Then, it's finding a compromise that meets the needs of all parties involved, including the need of teachers to accomplish the learning goals or mandates of her school and district.

Part of the way that each teacher participant finds that compromise is by conscientiously and strategically adapting her personal and professional decisions to align with what she knows about the preference(s) of the Black male student. Ms. Babcock allows BJ to get up when he feels the need, to sit at her desk, or to bounce on the big ball near the smart board where she is teaching. She runs the risk of his being a distraction to the class, to her teaching, and to himself. She is flexible with him requiring that if he is going to move around, that he must also show evidence that he is getting all of the notes and completing every assignment. He does have a part to play and expectations to meet. He has to partner in his success. BJ is earning a high B in the class and during one observation, he was the first in the class to identify each stop on the blood's flow through the heart. This happens to be a student who sat out of school for a year due to a disciplinary infraction. Ms. Babcock offered, "I'm not scared of change, you know. Like that doesn't bother me so I'm kind of like 'Let's try it.'" She's willing to acquiesce to the need of the student and it is working to both of their advantage. Not only do they have a great relationship, but also the student is performing academically and Ms. Babcock is reaping the benefit of high student achievement in her classes.

Similar things can be said for the other three teacher participants. As a former teacher and school administrator, I know intimately the difficulty in allowing students to be themselves and not all do the same thing. It is more work for the practitioner to have

to cater to many different personalities when he or she has been trained to “manage” a classroom. Classroom management may mean different things to different people. Ms. Dantley is the only teacher in the study who explicitly states that classroom management is a priority. The other three teachers are equally concerned about a well-organized, well-ran classroom, but their approaches look different. The point is that taking risks requires a comfort with change and uncertainty in the learning environment. It’s a release of control and the ability to truly partner with students to accomplishing the same goal. To do this, the teacher has to account for the diversity of experiences and expectations even within the group of Black males he or she teaches. Each Black male student will not need the same thing. So, not only does the teacher take risks in terms of her allowances, but she has to be flexible when things don’t work out as expected or when the allowance being made poses a threat, requiring that the teacher make yet another adjustment.

By the sixth month of school, when I began observing, I’m sure I missed much of the difficulty the teachers endured to work out an appropriate compromise with the students. It would be interesting to have seen how interactions with certain Black males changed or progressed over time. It would be beneficial to have a better sense of how long it takes the teachers to obtain the perspective they need to begin taking the risks that I describe in this section and in chapter five. Nonetheless, there were times when I heard the teacher reprimand certain students for abusing a privilege they’d been given. Students have to hold up their end of the bargain. If they don’t, they too, must suffer the consequences of their actions. Not every Black male student is passing each teacher participant’s class. There is a role each student has to play to ensure his academic success. The question still remains, for those Black males, what more is left for the

teacher do? The application of empathy as a means for risk-taking/flexibility may be only one component of the student-teacher interactions needed to produce favorable student outcomes.

Again, it is worth reiterating that this domain of empathy's utility lies heavily in one's willingness to accept change and difference as standard conventions of the pedagogical process. This is especially true for those individuals teaching across difference in a multicultural class setting. The four teacher participants admit that they do not make all of the right decisions in interaction with any of their students. Each of the teachers, but Ms. Arnold in particular, was hesitant to single out Black males because they pride themselves on "treating all students the same." They didn't actually treat all students the same. What they refer to by saying they treat all students the same is that they differentiate interaction, not the effort they expend to ensure students connect with the intended outcome. This is an important point when attempting to make sense of one's willingness to take risks and be flexible. It is not as much about equality, giving students the same attention, as it is about giving each individual student the type of attention he needs. This is the essence of being flexible.

The degree of energy and effort devoted to meeting each child where he is must be the priority. For White teachers, that means stepping completely outside of the social and cultural norms familiar to his or her lifetime membership in the dominant class. It is learning to embrace the unfamiliar. As the field continues to grow in its knowledge of empathy's application by White teachers in particular, new light can be cast on how empathy may begin to expose teachers to their own whiteness. Further, how that whiteness limits their ability to connect with students in truly authentic ways. This would

address O'Brien's (2003) concern of White antiracist's "false empathy" (Delgado, 1996). Ms. Babcock admitted "trial and error" and "trying something new" is important to her development as a teacher. Ms. Coleman admitted that her first year teaching at West High School was very challenging. She almost quit because she didn't know immediately how to connect with her Black students after teaching in the predominately White high school. Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley also commented in my interviews with them that it took time to develop their ability to understand how to best interact with students that didn't produce negative outcomes. Part of their growth process was their willingness to take risks by being transparent, sharing personal experiences as appropriate, and by being flexible in their interactions.

Any one of the teacher interactions previously described in this section could be easily categorized as indicative of any one of the other two domains of empathy's utility. For this reason, as I show in figure 6.2, risk-taking/flexibility is foundational to community and trust building and the proactive interventions domains. The slight difference is that risk-taking/flexibility speaks to one's character and internal resolve, whereas, the other two domains are outputs of that internal resolve. Both are discussed in the next two sections.

### **Community & Trust Building**

Establishing a positive classroom community and building trusting relationships with students are considered imperative to a culturally responsive teaching practice (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2010). It's acknowledging as a non-person of color that you carry the "language of power" and that when you silence students, that "language" becomes dominant and oppressive (Delpit, 1995, 2012). The approach Ms. Arnold, Ms.

Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley take to build community in their classrooms is unique by each teacher. Classroom community and trust are intimately linked together, and they both matter for how teachers negotiate interactions with the Black male students.

Findings from chapter four and five suggest that Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley effectively utilize their knowledge of students acquired through the application of empathic concern and perspective taking to develop trusting relationships with students. The focus group data suggests that students do value teachers whom they can trust. Trust is developed, in part, by the teacher's personal and professional stability. Students like to know that the teacher is going to be a consistent force in their lives. Students also cite the importance of a teacher to take her time to teach and to not be easily frustrated, but patient with them throughout the learning process. As the students talk about their many negative experiences with White female teachers, they name these four teachers because of their demonstration of the aforementioned traits. Each teacher had been teaching at his or her particular school at least four years.

Teachers who completed the empathy survey affirm that empathy is most useful to building personal relationships with their Black male students. The data hints that empathy is most valuable when teachers are forced to interact with the humanity of their students as a means for understanding student behavior. Developing trust between teachers and students means that teachers have demonstrated that they have knowledge of students and then use that knowledge in interaction with them. Ms. Babcock said enthusiastically:

I really just want to get to know the kids because it provides insight into their [lives] so that I know how, what makes them tick...whether it be a from a motivational piece or from an instructional piece.... If students like you as a person, they work for you.... I've heard kids say, "Well, I didn't want to upset you. I didn't want to let you down".... Students don't give up in my class. They work for me.

Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley do not say explicitly that relationships are important, but they engage in similar behaviors as Ms. Babcock and Ms. Coleman as it relates to getting to know students. The cornerstone of these relationships is trust. It is built over time, but once students trust the teacher, they are loyal. The application of empathy is an important way for earning their trust because it improves how teachers communicate and respond to students. The process becomes less about the teacher and more about the students. The students pick up on the teacher's intention. As a result, the student is better motivated because they *feel* understood.

Findings from chapters four and five also teach us that for the four teacher participants, the application of empathy is selfless, but not without the investment and partnership of the student. Trust in this respect goes both ways. Teachers need to trust students and students need to trust teachers. The difference is that the teachers in this study I find are willing to prove their trustworthiness to students. They are intentional about earning student trust by building a classroom community that values the questions and ideas important to them. A student in the focus group mentioned in a very frustrated tone, "We always have to understand them in order for them to understand us," in

reference to prior experiences with his White female teachers. The students are asking for a degree of humility that teachers should have when negotiating various interactions.

Each of the four teachers described some activity they do at the beginning of the school year to get to know students. Activities include Ms. Coleman's letter writing and Ms. Babcock's personality inventory that she administers. It also includes the informal conversations that Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley have with students about whether or not they believe their English teacher is a "bitch" prior to having her in class. The result of these actions to obtain student social and cultural perspectives is the early establishment of classroom community built on honesty and transparency. Likewise, these actions taken by the teachers lead to the development of trusting relationships.

Also, the data suggests that the teacher's application of empathy significantly improve how the instructional environment is organized. My own subjective perspective of a strong classroom community was challenged when I observed these four teachers. Classroom community cannot be defined necessarily by how students are sitting or by how the classroom is decorated. Rather, I propose that it should be defined by the degree of productivity. It should also be measured by the degree to which students feel safe expressing themselves and contributing to the overall functionality of the class. Student voice is central to this process. These teachers were constantly getting and receiving feedback from students. The interaction narratives provide some evidence that Black male students had some say in what did or didn't happen in their classes, including the ways they were and were not required to participate.

For the basketball player in Ms. Arnold's class who was a poor reader, she was strategic about his participation requirements. She knew that if she didn't make him read,



he would sleep the whole class period. In order to keep the student from being embarrassed, Ms. Arnold would give him the shortest lines to read. It would be just enough to keep him engaged in class the entire time. Ms. Arnold lauded him for reading the few lines that he had. She made him feel like his contribution was significant because for him, it was. I didn't observe Black males being put out of class or punished disproportionately to their female and White or Latino classmates.

Even though, in several of the classes I observed, the Black males were more active or more talkative. Still, the majority of Black males in the teacher participants' classrooms contributed positively to the learning environment. Each classroom observed was very active in its own way. Ms. Arnold referred to her classroom as "organized chaos." At times, it appeared as if every student was doing his own thing, but the environment was not out of control. That is, the most important learning objectives were met.

Two teachers' classroom communities stick out. Ms. Babcock and Ms. Coleman view each of their classes as classroom "families." These rooms happened to feature a greater volume of student work than did Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley. The rooms were also more aesthetically pleasing as there were many pictures, content posters, and affirmations posted around the room. Nonetheless, it is hard to argue that their classes had more community or a greater volume of trusting relationships than did Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley's classes. They also happen to be more emotional and more relational with students. This is a function of their personalities.

In reference to how students view her classroom community, Ms. Babcock said "There are kids who really – I think they are more excited about coming to the class

because it is the class, and it's like family." The four teachers don't each use the language of family, but they are just that to their Black male students. Ms. Arnold and Ms. Babcock were described as "almost like a parent." Part of what makes one family is the willingness to surrender personal preference to cater to the needs of others in the family. There is a degree of sacrifice. Findings from chapter five provide numerous examples of the teachers making personal concessions and adaptations, including Ms. Arnold's willingness to be "Dear Abbey" and hug students who need a hug, to Ms. Dantley's tendency to go out of her way to make sure her Black males have access to any info they need to complete classwork and homework. All four teachers make themselves available to answer students' most sensitive questions.

What I've tried to describe here is each teacher participants' willingness to, in essence, prove themselves to students. The data suggests that Black male students put a greater stock in a teacher's willingness to earn their respect. Research in culturally responsive pedagogy holds that students of color take being respected very serious (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2001a). This can be considered a good or bad thing because it means that the adult has to be willing in some ways to submit to the needs of the student. When one considers how power and authority has been abused in marginalized communities, it makes sense that members of these groups require the earning of their trust before they engage blindly in relationship with members of the oppressor's class.

The teacher-student relationship can be considered a helping relationship. It is difficult to determine how to help without the perspectives of what is needed to be offered by the individual on the receiving end of the help. Likewise, the establishment of

trust and community building are products of the helper's actions that should consistently align with that of individual he or she intends to serve.

Empathy's application in the professional context leads me to believe that understanding students according to the students' own understanding of themselves firmly supports strong classroom community and trust building. Trust is built when students feel safe answering and/or discussing matters important to them (minus teacher judgment). An environment conducive to student inquiry driven by student interest forms a cohesive classroom climate that values student individuality. I infer from the data that setting high expectations for student participation and then being proactive in one's decision making to ensure each student can meet those expectations is another essential part of community and trust building, though a separate skill set altogether. I describe the final salient feature of empathy's utility in the next section.

### **Proactive Interventions**

In the previous section I describe how the teachers' application of empathy supports their building and maintenance of strong classroom communities and trusting relationships. Proactive interventions are more of the instructional and/or professional adaptations each teacher makes to help her Black male students become academically successful. The teachers make instruction accessible to students by building on students' personal learning preferences. Also, the teachers are intentional about cultivating a classroom environment that facilitates student success. The teachers do this by being creative and innovative in the instructional approaches she implements. These interventions also take the form of the student advocacy efforts of each teacher for their Black male students.

Consider Ms. Dantley's "first five" mentioned in chapter five. She could very easily say to students that if the homework is not complete and turned in on time, that she won't take it. Her approach is that she will give students the space to complete the work that they for one reason or another wasn't able to complete. As she asserts in our interview, the students have to come with something done and she only allows students the first five when she feels prompted to. Still, students have to come prepared and put forth some effort. Nevertheless, she is doing all that she can do to make sure that students are positioned with their best foot forward. The same can be said for her insistence on reminding her Black male students about assignments and keeping an assignment notebook. The expectations for submitting work on time reminds the same, but she proactively capitalizes on every opportunity to encourage, admonish, and support students to meet those expectations. These actions are preceded by what the teacher knows about how to improve the likelihood students will be maximally successful.

Ms. Babcock confirmed that there are "no excuses" in her class because she goes to great lengths to make sure students are successful. She has a website where students can collect information and she makes herself available before, after, and even during the school day. Students can be seen walking into Ms. Babcock's class constantly throughout the day, asking questions and getting information. With a smile, she stops, responds to the student's query, and keeps teaching. It could be argued that her willingness to be this flexible is a sign of low expectations. On the contrary, Ms. Babcock was clear that not very many students, including her Black male students, are earning an A in her class. She is making herself available, but again, students have the responsibility of producing. The teacher cannot manipulate what the student actually decides to do.

The expectation, for example, may be to complete all homework to earn an A. Reminding students of what they have to complete, being available to offer extra help, giving them extra time in class, and ensuring that they actually get the homework written down is not modifying the expectation. Even allowing the student to get started on the homework in class is not modifying the expectation. Each of these interventions is an opportunity for students to maximize the likelihood for excellence on the assignment and completion of the assignment. Demonstrating mastery and completion of the assignment is the expectation students must attain.

When students in the focus group talk about patience and the willingness of teachers to help them “get the work,” this is what they’re talking about. When the Black male in East High’s focus group said that Ms. Arnold might “ride you” by saying, “Get your shit together,” in the same breath he refers to her as a “motivational speaker.” She is challenging him to action, but only because she knows this is what he needs. The student Jamon from chapter four, Ms. Arnold is as hard on him but he makes it clear he doesn’t want her help. She releases him to his own devices. Ms. Dantley’s Black male students appreciate high expectations. It communicates to them her belief in their intelligence and ability to get the work done. Whereas, other White female teachers, like the one mentioned in the focus group for inflating her Black male student grades, are communicating the opposite. The students don’t want to be pitied. They want to be pushed.

Consider again, Jamon in Ms. Arnold’s class introduced in chapter five who, according to her, is throwing his life away. Intervening for her is reminding him of the consequences of his actions. She is brutally honest about what his outcomes are going to

be if he continues down the path he is taking. He respectfully listens and responds that he is well aware of his actions. What more can she do at this point to support his academic success? Not much! If he doesn't do the work, he cannot pass the course. Who knows what failing the course might do for his future decision-making. In this way, the teacher has to be objective. Similarly, Ms. Arnold advocates for the young man that is sleeping in her class. Knowing the fact that he is supporting his family moves Ms. Arnold to action. She could look at his situation and give him less work or require that he only be awake in class three out of five days of the school week, for example. Instead, she lets him know that he will fail the course if he keeps showing up and sleeping, but not before working with him to identify an alternative to help him accomplish the goal of earning his high school diploma while still providing for his family.

Intervening proactively in the academic affairs of Black males does not mean making concessions for what they have to do to pass a rigorous course. Part of dismissing the "White savior" or "White missionary" narrative characteristic of too many White female teachers is emphasizing the imperative for them to find creative methods to support how these students meet high expectations, not lowering high expectations. Every student's journey is different. Therefore, it is safe to assume that even the best teacher will have difficulty getting every single student to be an A student in his or her class. Just as Ms. Arnold asserted, every student is not going to be good at English, just like every student is not going to college because they're not college material. This was harsh to hear. Her point is that teachers must invest time in understanding what is a priority to the student. Then, he or she has to appropriate her interactions with those things in mind. Success may look very different for the student. It is okay to offer

students several alternatives. However, it is not okay to insist students conform to the teacher's own narrow portrait of success. A teacher's job is to push the student to be his or her best self. This is done, in part, by acquiring students' perspective and using that perspective along with knowledge of students' experiences to organize learning experiences that catalyze their highest potential. To add, teacher's knowledge of the social context might aid how she responds proactively. Knowledge of the political, economic, and environmental factors students contend with outside of school can be of great help to how teachers intervene in student's lives proactively.

The focus groups had students with varying academic and behavior backgrounds. The groups included a mix of honor students and those coasting with D's. Still, the discipline referral rates for these teachers are well below the school average. In my observations, there was not one Black male dismissed from class for behavior. In three of the four teacher's classes, at least 50% or better of their Black male students are earning a C or above. Eighty-four percent of Ms. Coleman's Black male students are earning an A, B, or C. Only about 28% of Ms. Arnold's Black males are earning a C or better. When I asked why the number of Black male seniors is earning an A, B, or C, she replied:

As we are nearing graduation, the students will either give up totally and get a serious F, or they will do enough to get by (D out). There are a few students who need to earn B's for the third quarter in order to make up for the F's third quarter to average to a D. Many of the same kids from semester one are in danger for semester two.... Lack of preparation and working under the illusion that right up to the very end they could still

catch up. If you've been earning 50% on your homework, one big assignment will in no way move you to a 60%. There is an epidemic of too little, too late. Not sure how to create investment in the outcome of graduation when it is 180 days away, and when they realize they need to get it together, it is often too hard to rework bad habits in study/work ethic.

There was one big project Ms. Arnold told the students about a month in advance. Even if she is proactive, there is still the sense that students have to do their part. There is a responsibility that they have to actually do the work. The teacher, then, has the responsibility to actually make every option available to the student to get the work done. Because she is teaching seniors, Ms. Arnold is a little more hands off because the students will soon be in college or the workforce. There are risks of her judgment by external stakeholders that Ms. Arnold is too tough. Still, we don't know what other factors beyond her teaching and interactions are leading to these outcomes.

Proactive interventions are important because it positions every student to be successful. A recurring theme of this study was the willingness of the teachers to try new things, to be creative, and to engage in a pedagogy of trial and error. This means that all of their curricular innovations don't have the impact the teachers envision. Nonetheless, they keep trying new things until they figure out what things they need to do to best respond to the unique intellectual and social needs of each student. It is often difficult to devise culturally appropriate interventions proactively without the proper social and cultural perspectives. The teachers gain information through the application of empathic concern and perspective taking. Then they use that information to organize their



interactions with students with an offensive approach—always thinking of how they can optimize student-learning outcomes.

I have laid out what I find to be the three domains of empathy's utility for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students. For the remainder of this chapter I will spend time discussing individual differences in operationalizing empathy in the classroom context, as well as some challenges associated with empathy's utility. I close the chapter with a brief discussion of the implications of empathizing on the teaching profession and future pathways for research.

### **Individual Differences Related to Empathy's Application**

Despite how different the four teachers in this study are, I find that the utility of empathy remains constant for each of them. Drawing on the findings from chapter four and five, this section discusses in a little more detail the considerations we must take for understanding individual differences to the actual application of empathy by the teacher participants. The section also covers the importance of embracing change when engaging in empathic interactions. Next, I expound on the implications of personality to empathy's application. Finally, several tensions pertaining to the application of empathy are explored based on the findings from the study. This section is especially important for understanding the implications of this research to the practice of K – 12 teachers and teacher educators.

The three domains of empathy's utility previously described are important for improving the likelihood that the teacher participants accomplished their intended outcomes with each type of interaction (i.e., academic, behavioral, and social/relational). It is worth noting, still, that the usefulness of empathy will depend largely on how an

individual chooses to apply their knowledge of students to their interactions with them. How one demonstrates empathic concern and perspective taking is shaped by his or her personal experiences, vulnerabilities, and the degree of personal risk he or she is willing to take. Also, the teachers separately agree that their own personal life experiences significantly determine how one empathizes with others.

For example, each teacher in the study applies empathic concern according to her comfort level with the student and her prior experience managing or dealing effectively with the student's specific issue. Ms. Coleman and Ms. Babcock had less of an issue emoting and sharing affect with students congruent with the way their students express certain emotion than did Ms. Arnold and Ms. Dantley. Ms. Dantley was almost opposed to being very emotional with students at all. This was a safeguard for her in terms of ensuring that her classroom stayed well managed as classroom management was a priority for her. The data suggests that "empathy" generally conceived as a weakness that made the teacher participants uncomfortable when they considered in the professional context. An empathetic person suggests that he or she could be easily taken advantage of. Part of their thinking is driven by the conception that empathy is primarily emotional. As they contextualized empathy within the confines of their teaching relationships with students, the expression of care in terms of an empathetic response is important, but not a substitute for high expectations.

The empathetic response might appear more affective for Ms. Coleman because she is a more emotional person. Neither she nor the other three teachers can divorce their personalities from how they interact with students on a daily basis. Hence, how the

teachers manage the balance of expressing compassion for students while still maintaining high expectations looks different for each of them.

It is immature to say that empathic interaction or perspective taking looks one particular way. There is something different each teacher brings to their particular teaching relationships that students appreciate. Part of that something, as a student in one of the focus groups commented, is the teacher's ability to be comfortable in her own skin. Ms. Dantley said, "I'm not trying to be anyone but myself." There is a boldness that accompanies "being yourself." These teachers appear to be comfortable in their own skin. They acknowledge their strengths and some of their challenges. They also know that they don't get everything right and just as they are learning, students have to learn them, too, to some degree. What is not addressed in the data is how each teacher arrives at the place of being comfortable as her, not putting on a façade to please or get students to like her. What does it mean to be one's self? I conclude what students appreciate most is the teacher's confidence and comfort with their own sense of self. Students connect with the teacher's humanity. This eliminates the invisible hierarchy created when the interaction is framed as teacher and student, or child and another adult authority figure telling them what to do.

### **Teacher Comfort with Student-Teacher Difference and Change**

When students learn what a teacher's character is like, they are fascinated by their teacher's ability to break out of her comfort zone to embrace the unfamiliar. The findings from chapter five suggest that one size does not fit all. Every student will need something different. Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley recognize this matter. They know this because they each commented to some degree

how they modified their interactions based on the different needs of students. As I mentioned in the last section, the students get a kick out of the teacher's willingness to try new things and embrace aspects of the student's culture unfamiliar to them. Students in Ms. Babcock's class love when she performs a chorus of their favorite rap song. Ms. Arnold may hug William (pseudonym) even though she self proclaims, "I'm not a hugger," but with Gerald (pseudonym) be a lot tougher on him, because he needs more of a no-nonsense interaction approach. Students recognize and appreciate that the teacher is meeting them where they are.

I don't know if Ms. Dantley would approach these students the same way. Ms. Dantley adapts in certain ways, but I'm not sure that had she been William's teacher that she would acquiesce and give him a hug because she perceived that's what he needed to be successful. She runs the risk of not getting the same response, but that is part of the growth process as well. Teachers decide where they will bend and where they don't and that's okay too. Whereas, Ms. Coleman might be a little softer on Gerald than Ms. Arnold is. How each teacher interprets the needs of the student may be different based on any number of things.

The goal is to produce an outcome most favorable to the student that has little to do with one's personal agenda. These are outcomes that position the student to receive the greatest benefits of the interactions. Just as Batson (1991) argues with his "empathy-altruism thesis," authentic empathy means serving others with little regard to one's own personal distress or discomfort. The observer, or person doing the empathizing, will respond even if getting out of the situation is a viable option. There is an intention to serve that drives the observer's response. Likewise, regardless of the change required or

the difference in opinion, the teacher must center the student's perspective in relationship to his or her response.

Ms. Arnold maintained that the substance of her expectations doesn't change. Rather, the method of her delivery does. Ms. Coleman's students know that she is not into sports and that she hasn't seen a ton of Black movies. Regardless, she is poised to enter the conversation on these topics by investing time and energy in becoming intimately knowledgeable of the student's cultural interests. As a result, her Black male students are more motivated to perform because they believe she is invested in their success, both intellectually and socially.

As I've stated previously, these teachers admit that their professional practice includes much "trial and error" in figuring out the best way to approach their work with students. The four teacher participants have at least six years of teaching experience at the time data was collected, with Ms. Arnold having about fifteen. Time in the classroom matures the teacher personally and professionally. This was the case for each of the study's teacher participants. No teacher enters his or her classroom having all of the answers immediately. Ms. Babcock created "family business" based on her desire to connect with students interpersonally because she found that to be an important component of her success with them. She is invested in learning of the whole child. It took her over two years to find a system that worked for her. Now that she has this system, she has experienced unprecedented success with Black students.

### **Intersecting Personality and the Application of Empathy**

Personality matters for how the teachers interact with students. Each teacher participant is extroverted in her own way. Ms. Babcock happens to have a very bubbly

personality. She and Ms. Dantley describe their personalities as big and that they can be very sarcastic. It works for the interactions they have with their students. Ms. Arnold on the other hand will not make as many jokes in class and may use a curse word or two in an explanation of a concept, whereas Ms. Coleman is much more of a nurturer. She will smile and use proximity much more than Ms. Dantley or Ms. Arnold when teaching. Ms. Arnold may be sarcastic but I didn't see Ms. Coleman interact with students in that way. It is outside of personality to make very sarcastic statements. Each teacher does not interact with every student the same. Some students will not want to be as friendly or personal with Ms. Babcock as many of her Black male students are with her. Two Black males in the focus groups said this. Some students don't always appreciate Ms. Arnold's word choice.

Part of having an empathetic disposition is knowing one's self, the boundaries of his or her personality, and knowing how your personality supports or distracts efforts to connect interpersonally with each student. Just because Ms. Arnold's and Ms. Dantley's interactions with their Black males may not appear to be as warm as Ms. Coleman or as jovial as Ms. Babcock, this does not make them any less empathetic. Each teacher at some point demonstrates each of these traits to varying degrees.

Ms. Coleman avoids conflict, if possible, while Ms. Dantley has much less trepidation broaching confrontation. Students pick up on these traits and are also negotiating how to engage their teacher in the multiple interactions they have with them. Additionally, each of the teachers devised a plan based on her knowledge of students to negotiate interactions that maximize the productivity of the class time. Ms. Coleman will lightly confront a student, keeping in mind his feelings, while Ms. Dantley is more likely

to be very direct, still caring about the students' feelings, but maybe not to the degree Ms. Coleman does. She will avoid conflict if she can, but Ms. Dantley is serious about helping students to see the error of their way, claiming that these contentious interactions lead to the students actually learning "life-lessons".

### **Challenges Associated with Empathy's Utility: Critical Race Perspectives**

The literature in critical race and whiteness studies in education provided me with important interpretive frameworks for synthesizing how each teacher participant discusses her knowledge of Black male students (see Chapter 2). Studying the work of White female teachers and the enactment of empathy in their professional practice with Black male students could not be done without understanding the centrality of race and racism in contemporary schooling. Further, this literature provided important insights regarding the social and cultural perspectives of the dominant class. This section briefly outlines specific challenges that arose from the data related to each teacher's perspective taking, demonstration of care and concern, or sympathy, and empathy's subsequent utility. There were several tensions that surfaced as the teachers discussed their journey of understanding Black culture. Empathy as I have come to understand it from this study is very personal. Critical race theorists argue emphatically that race and racism is central to the overall function of schools. Therefore, I use this literature in my analysis to raise issues pertinent to refining what the field knows about the application of empathy as a professional capacity of teachers committed to culturally responsive teaching.

Batson (2009) argues that empathy can be used for good or bad. What teachers do with the knowledge they have of students could easily be used to perpetuate deficit views and understandings of students. One way that the teachers acquired knowledge of

students was during the class period through casual conversation and special set aside time like Ms. Babcock's "family business." Creating space in the classroom, during class time regularly is a useful for counter-storytelling (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001, 2002b). The teacher has to decide what she will do with the information that she has gathered once she has it to respond in the most culturally appropriate manner while not compromising the rigor of the course. One White female teacher brought up in her empathy survey the challenge that she has with empathizing with students. She expressed concern that she may be too empathetic, thereby, lowering expectations for students, but then concedes that she may not be empathetic enough and is too hard on students. She brings up a legitimate predicament. The application of empathy requires a fine balance and this teacher's moral dilemma should be taken seriously. Her contention also reinforces the finding related to teacher conceptions of empathy, that its application is individual and will look different for each child.

The data implies that each teacher's understanding of Black culture has been developmental. The longer they each teach, the more they have learned about Black culture. Ms. Coleman was asked how she has learned of Black culture in her career to date. She affirms, "I had to *learn* Black culture... I had never, I had never known what it was like to have the Link Card...experience death a lot...people are, like, in jail.... Friends are doing drugs and the culture of girls getting pregnant." She didn't intend for her statement to be offensive. As a Black male researcher, I was struck that she didn't discuss or draw on the strengths of her Black students to discuss her idea of Black culture. The counterstory is useful in this case to offer multiple representations of culture. Ayers (1997) and Dance (2002) discuss how negative images of Black males



dominate mainstream media and the adverse effects of these images on how Black males are viewed by the public. Just because these are the images chosen to represent Black males doesn't mean that all Black males behave this way. Nonetheless, Ms. Coleman was simply stating the truth of her experience as it relates to the trends that she has observed in her career. It is deficit perspective like these that likely skew how one might interpret student ability, intention, behavior, or motivation. Adopting student perspective means looking past what you see to understand how these things came to be.

Delpit (2012) points out in her latest book about raising academic expectations for students of color that negative outcomes exhibited by a culture group, similar to the ones described by Ms. Coleman, is not indicative of one's culture. These things are a response to oppression experienced outside of school. The behaviors Ms. Coleman discussed are not indicative of Black culture. These experiences are a response to societal ill and the oppression associated with being a race and/or gender minority in a system of disadvantage. Ms. Coleman's observation is not malicious. It is, however, misinformed. This knowledge does in some way influence how she thinks about and arranges learning experiences in her classroom. Framing interactions around one's unconscious deficit understandings can potentially reproduce inequity for the students. Whiteness studies scholarship in education warns us of the ease with which White people can make swift, inaccurate judgment due to a deviance behavior from norms manufactured by whiteness. This is a matter of development. Even though Ms. Coleman has demonstrated her ability to be an effective educator of Black males, her reflections demonstrate that she needs more development in terms of her understanding of Black culture.

Three of the four teacher participants described negative experiences, attitudes, or behaviors when asked to describe how they feel they enact empathy in their practice with Black males. Ms. Dantley paralleled her own experiences with tragic death as a means for understanding how students may feel. Ms. Babcock cited her knowledge of the “culture of poverty” (Payne, 1996), welfare, and broken homes as a way of “understanding” student’s problems.

Ruby Payne provides one perspective for understanding poor, Black families. Though Ms. Babcock may consider consumption of her work as important to her professional development, Payne’s perspective is very limited and is not supported by this study. Critical race theory informs us that experiential knowledge and the counternarrative are important knowledge sources for making sense of the realities of traditionally marginalized groups. It is problematic to take a text written from the perspective of one White woman to make wide-scale generalizations of entire culture group for which she is not a member. Payne’s work has come under considerable scrutiny for its misrepresentation of culture (Ahlquist, 2011; Bomer et.al, 2008; Gorski, 2006). In essence, Ms. Babcock’s admission of her use of Payne’s work reifies dominant narratives of impoverished people of color as truth in the mainstream. Engaging the literature of *insiders*, or members of the people group in question including scholars of color writing about these same issues may be of even greater use to Ms. Babcock as she continues to develop professionally. Making note of this data is important for recognizing that though these four teacher participants are further along on their developmental journey to be effective teachers of Black males, they are not perfect, and that is okay.

Furthermore, sharing similar experiences to those of their students may make teachers more sensitive to student plight. However, the adult's experience with death, for example, is going to be vastly different from how the student experiences it based on any number of factors. Factors that include what the consequences of the death are for maintaining economic stability and family structure. Mental health outcomes and access to support networks may be very different between teacher and student experiencing death. How someone dies relative to the social and historical context of one's family and home environment may widely differentiate how teachers and students experience death.

These are just a few mentions for how the same life occurrence can be experienced completely by members of different culture groups. As the Whiteness literature argues, White people take their privilege and membership in the White race for granted. It normalizes them in a way that easily inhibits their ability to be able to make sense of another person's reality. Whiteness is a bubble that imposes a standard of living that limits the interpretive accuracy of a White person for the situational consequences relative to a person of color in the same "hypothetical" boat, so to speak. In how the teacher participants respond in this study, it is never their intention to be oppressive or to subordinate youth. Still, to believe that "you get it" just based on your experience maintains hegemony in a way that is not easily noticed, even when you have primarily positive relationships with people of color.

Paralleling personal experiences with perceptions of students like Ms. Dantley and Ms. Arnold, or noting the challenges students face and naming those challenges as "Black culture" like Ms. Coleman, or using one of the most widely-critiqued books for its deficit-based representation of impoverished people like Ms. Babcock, severely limits

how much each teacher can know about students' lived realities. The concern is that these perspectives will function as *dominant* to students' own social and cultural perspectives. In other words, if the teachers foreground the aforementioned frames of reference for understanding the lives of their students, they may continue to unintentionally perpetuate racist ideology similar to those White female teachers in Marx's (2006) and Lewis' (2003) studies. Critical race studies reminds us that a commitment to social justice teaching includes privileging the voice of historically marginalized groups to actively disrupt master narratives commonplace in America's schooling systems. This takes considerable vulnerability on the part of the teacher. In terms of each teacher's developmental process, the data suggests that they are open and willing to make the necessary changes were they ever to be made aware of the aforementioned tensions.

I'm reminded of the quandary of whether or not it is possible for an individual to empathize with others who are very different. The key is adopting perspectives that inform and enlighten what one thinks they know and then thoughtfully contemplating that information to organize a response. Obtaining information from multiple sources is critical to make better sense of a person's condition. This is especially true in a school. In a school, the child is the first source of information about his or her own life, experiences, and the influences that make them who they are. As it turns out, if students are allowed to speak long enough, they will tell the teacher where to look for more information. Ms. Coleman spoke of the importance travel, cultural immersion in the country of Mexico, and her graduate courses. The social context is only comprehensible when the individual actively engages him or herself in that context. CRT scholarship

insists that alleviating racism in schools requires action and a social justice orientation. An individual saying he or she is not racist means little if their actions do not align with their lip service. Books and personal experience are useful and a good first step. Teachers must be cautioned in their application of empathy not to substitute their own dominant, abstract constructions for students' real life.

I had a related conversation with a White female high school teacher where I lectured recently. She taught special education in the same high school she had also attended about a decade earlier. She admitted that early in her career she perceived her relationship with students of color to be stronger than they really were. She remembers believing that attending the same high school as her students was a point of connection between her and the students. The teacher realized later on that her experiences as a middle class, White female attending high school in the nineties could not be compared to the experience of her working class Black males attending high school in 2005. Her history, her economic status, her familial makeup, for example, in no way compares to that of her students. This disconnect led to major conflict in her interactions with youth.

Milner (2010) asserts that the teacher's ability to locate personal experiences similar or congruent with students was important for helping them become effective teachers. Two of the teacher participants in this study also mention the importance of paralleling experiences as a way to negotiate positive interactions with students. It makes sense for an individual attempting to cultivate an empathetic disposition to identify how their lives may intersect with the students. Teachers also have to see how their experiences *do not* intersect, why, and to identify ways to mend the disconnect that

empowers students without holding them in contempt because they don't respond the way that the teacher would in the same situation.

Thus, how the four teachers make sense of student experiences through these perspectives can skew how they approach interactions with students. Learning experiences as Delpit (2012) argues need to be based on the assumption that each child is smart and capable. Empathizing with others means understanding their truth and not substituting one's own version of truth with that of the student. The meaning of poverty for one student will be completely different for another. For teachers like Ms. Babcock, who mentioned reading one "catch all" text like Payne's (1996) book (she may have read others that we did not discuss) on the culture of poverty, it is important to remember that this text is only one viewpoint. It cannot adequately explain every poor person's experience. Critical race literature underscores the necessity to acknowledge racism and its intersection with multiple other oppressions. Recognizing the centrality of race in the teachers' own experiences with poverty or gender discrimination may tell a different story than if poverty is isolated. Also, moving outside of the Black-White binary to understanding the poverty from multiple other viewpoints is needed as well.

Similarly, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley alluded that being from the same area where their students attend high school helps them connect interpersonally to their students. This is true to a degree. It is important that the teachers have knowledge of the area, including where the kids hang out after school and what activities they engage in outside of school in the community. Still, there are dimensions of the child's experience that the teacher cannot know simply because she was born and raised in the area. As Ms. Coleman revealed, "When I was a student here [at the high school

where she teaches], it was a primarily White, blue-collar school.... There were some African-American students but... I really don't remember... I had Black friends but they were from being in sports and there weren't a whole lot of African-American students in my class." It is likely that her experience in high school was vastly different from that of the Black peers she interacted with on occasion. They sat in some of the same classes and walked the same halls, but their experiences and memories of high school are likely to be very different. It is also likely that the challenges the Black students faced as a race minority in a predominately White high school were outside of Ms. Coleman's experiences in high school. Therefore, to make judgments about youth *only* using one's personal experience regardless of how similar they are can pose significant challenges for producing the intended outcomes of each interaction.

Indexing one's degree of empathetic regard is peripheral to the question of empathy's utility. More important is the recognition that empathy is personal. It will look differently based on one's personality, his or her personal experience, and the individual's understanding of the social context. This can pose a challenge to any teacher looking for a strong model of empathy. The three domains of empathy are adaptable, as they ought to be. How Ms. Arnold develops trusting relationships and communicates behavior expectations to students looks very different from the other three teachers. It was clear from the data that students knew what the expectations were. Whether or not they chose to meet those expectations is a drastically different story.

The strategy associated with the application of empathy matters for how the teacher negotiates interactions so that students actually meet the expectations. The teachers in this study each have at least six years of teaching. I am confident that time

and their insistence on becoming more effective teachers of Black males and Black students is a significant factor for their regard by stakeholders as exemplary teachers. The more clarity the teacher has of her pet peeves, insecurities, and the aspects of interaction most uncomfortable for her, the easier it is for her to know how to adjust. Then, she is able to manipulate how she uses student perspective, ideally in a way that puts students first, and the teacher's ego last.

Loving to teach and loving students are two separate professional orientations. They both are necessary to be a good teacher. Still, there has to be a balance as not to substitute the purpose for one's work with an agenda that is unintentionally oppressive. Ms. Coleman emphatically declares, "I love my job...I need them [students] and they need me." She has a strong affinity for her students and many of them for her. The intimacy associated with getting to know students personally makes both students and teachers vulnerable, but students have much more to lose in this scenario.

A caution to any person empathizing with students from traditionally marginalized groups is not to essentialize, have pity on, or trivialize student's lived realities. This is part of the uncomfortable nature of empathizing with students because some teachers can't turn off how much they care. Caring too much can lead to what Figley (1995) refers to as *compassion fatigue*. This phenomenon is characterized by the stressed caused to a helping professional due to the overexertion of themselves in regards to their output of care. The application of empathy requires that one demonstrate caring from the perspective of the person receiving the empathetic response. I see this being more of an issue for Ms. Coleman. She is the only one of the four teacher participants who identifies herself as more emotional. This can make her more vulnerable. Knowing



too much about a student can hurt interactions with that student. Adopting their perspectives means understanding exactly how their own viewpoints of their condition shape the way they negotiate the circumstance, as well as what social and cultural capital they possess enabling them do so. There is little evidence that this issue is especially pertinent to White teachers or if this may be an issue for teachers of any race.

In closing, it cannot be expected that each teacher's application of empathy will look exactly the same. That is okay. Empathy in multicultural classroom settings is a form of social justice. This practice honors the diversity students bring to school. Literature in critical race theory underscores the importance of one's experience in contrast to the dominant narrative. Empathy's application centers an individual's experience to determine the appropriate response to the needs of that individual. Each interaction, response, and outcomes may be different even if the issues are similar. This may be a significant challenge for determining how to cultivate empathy seeing that this is a developmental task. Hence, one cannot walk into any teacher's classroom, out of that room, and into another room and compare the amount of empathy one teacher has over the other. Instead, what the utility of empathy does is provide a baseline for discerning the quality of teacher-student interactions, especially when significant social and cultural differences exist between teacher and student. Identifying the teacher's willingness to take risks, be flexible, establish trusting relationships, develop a strong classroom community, and his or her capacity to intervene proactively are of greater consequence to student outcomes. Therefore, these are things that should be judged. Empathy just supports their enactment.

## **Empathic Interaction:**

### **Implications for K – 12 Education and Teacher Preparation**

Definitions of empathy by individuals may be largely subjective, bearing little evidence of exposure to the professional literature on the concept. Much like the teachers in this study and the pilot study, definitions of empathy may change with time, age, and experience. This suggests that cultivating an empathetic teacher and becoming truly culturally responsive is developmental, beginning in one's preservice teacher program and continuing throughout his or her tenure as a classroom teacher. General discussions of empathy with teachers may have little impact on developing strategies for supporting their cultivation of an empathetic disposition. Nor is it beneficial to attempt to package empathy and standardize its application because of the personal nature of empathic interaction. If these findings were to hold up for a greater sample of teachers, these implications would be more generalizable than they currently are given my primary sample of four.

Developing a definition of empathy relevant to the work of teachers supported by empirical research of empathy's application is of greater consequence for determining empathy's utility as a professional capacity of culturally responsive teaching. As the teacher participants' contextualized their understanding of empathy within the interactions they have with students in their workplace (i.e., school), there was consensus around a couple of details worth noting. Data from chapter four and five first suggest that compassion for students is important. High expectations are equally important. The two are not mutually exclusive. They are interdependent of one another. Next, empathy requires some action on the teacher's part. Teachers have to take relevant action based

on what they know about students. Knowing is not enough. What one does with that knowledge is paramount to ensuring the appropriate outcomes for students. Finally, empathy is both a professional and a personal capacity. It requires a significant degree of vulnerability on the part of the empathizer. The priority for empathic interaction is considering the dimensions of the target's perspective before determining a response. I close the section with a discussion of what I find to be a significant variable affecting the quality of student teacher interaction (perspective divergence), and why empathy may be an important tool for mitigating its negative effects.

### **Becoming a “Down” Teacher**

The aforementioned themes emerged from the interview data, focus group data, and the classroom observation data. Students in the focus groups value teachers who are “down to earth” and “themselves.” “Patience” is also a desirable virtue and they maintain that it is important to them to feel heard and seen in class. These findings are consistent with Dance's (2002) findings that the Black boys in her study responded most positively to the character traits of their “down” teachers. *Down* teachers are individuals who humanize the learning experience by allowing students to be their authentic selves. Part of communicating an empathetic response is receiving feedback and allowing the student to “feel seen” (Dance, p. 73, 2002). This is the essence of demonstrating care and concern for students.

In my observations I note the body language of the teacher and the many different ways they made their Black male students feel seen. Teachers gave eye contact to students affirming them by nodding their heads when students spoke and, in some cases, moving close and personalizing the communication response. They asked the students,

especially the boys, questions about sports and what they did over the weekend. They may give a hug or become “Dear Abbey” because “[the teacher] know it’s what [the student] needs.” They routinely engage in extemporaneous conversations with students about “Ocean [OSHA] rules” even though it has nothing to do with English content learning objectives, but because the student finds interest in it. “I just want them to walk away having learned something,” Ms. Dantley says. They allow the infectious energy and inquisitive nature of a couple students to be channeled towards making the course more rigorous rather than becoming frustrated when the student doesn’t do exactly what she wants him. Though, this happens too.

Teachers must diligently seek to understand the strengths of the culture students bring to school and be open minded to the inquiry they engage in class, even if it’s outside the scope of the teacher’s content expertise. By doing so, the teacher is better positioned to create a learning environment that appreciates what students can do instead of responding to what they can’t. Down teachers in many ways learn to go with the flow. This can create very strong, trusting relationships and classroom community. This does require the teacher be flexible and that he or she is willing to take some risks.

Negotiating interactions with Black males should be driven from *both* high expectations and the aspects of their personhood that make them unique from other students. Empathy is a first step to doing this. Empathic concern and perspective taking may significantly improve teacher interpretations and discernment of student needs. It is necessary to demonstrate compassion and make students feel cared for and respected. Perspective taking allows the teacher to adopt student social and cultural perspective, and then use those perspectives to gauge their own intention and ability to interact with

students. *Down* teachers interact with students in a way that consistently and intentionally leverages students' social and cultural perspectives. More often than not, they are accomplishing the intended outcomes of each interaction type without diminishing students' sense of self. When they miss the mark, they keep trying something new.

Building relationships and care are major tenets of culturally responsive teaching. *Down* teachers are teachers who care immensely about the work, but they are teachers who care in ways congruent with how students understand and receive care. There is no way to understand how students interpret care unless the teacher has acquired student social and cultural perspectives on the concept of care. Per the teachers' conceptions of empathy in chapter four, caring for students is important, but caring should not take away from the necessity to hold students to high expectations.

Moreover, teachers—regardless of what they know about students or the communities that they come from—must see students as capable. They must expect students to behave and be intellectually engaged in the educational process. Caring cannot be one-dimensional (Valenzuela, 1999). White teachers in particular have to be critical of the dimensions and how they direct care towards marginalized groups of students (Gay, 2000; Marx, 2008). Care can easily be framed from a Eurocentric point of view, or from the viewpoint of power rather than the viewpoint of the student. For care to matter with students, they must receive it as such.

Nadine Dolby (2012) in her recent monograph argues the importance of empathy for the predominately White preservice teacher population in today's U.S. teacher preparation programs. She maintains that it is not enough to care about an issue and to

respond based on one's own conception of what that response should be. The response must be informed by a concrete knowledge of the multiple needs of the population. Down teachers have an acute understanding of how their care about students and the issues that concern them actually produces tangible outcomes and the consequences associated with those outcomes.

### **Empathy as Agency**

As each teacher concluded in her own way, empathy is about not just taking action, but taking *relevant* action. Responding to student needs requires some “digging” to figure out the root of the student's challenge. Teachers have to learn how to ask the appropriate questions to get the answers needed to make sound decisions when negotiating various interactions with students. This is a trait that students agree is valuable. The Black males in one focus group insist they think highly of teachers who ask questions as to avoid making swift judgments. From their experience, swift judgments have led to punitive, undeserved consequences. The action means nothing if it does not produce outcomes for the student that positions him or her to be successful in the classroom. Teachers have to gather as much information as possible before, during, and after taking action in communication and response to students. Part of risk-taking is going out on a limb to do what one feels is best and then being okay if it turns out that the action doesn't produce the outcome intended.

Ms. Arnold teaches seniors only. Many of her Black males are not faring well academically in her class. There are likely multiple reasons for this, and an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing their failure falls outside the specific focus of the study. She was adamant that students must partner in their academic success. This

philosophy drives many of her interactions with students, particularly because many of them already eighteen and will soon be out on their own. She emphasized that because they are seniors that there needs to be a large degree of autonomy. Ms. Arnold insisted that she would help students if they need it, but she has to know that there is something else going on with the student preventing them from many expectations.

She is constantly making judgments, arguably some good, and some bad depending on who is being asked. She confirmed, “If I think something is going on, I will move to the other side pretty quickly.” Students commented in the focus groups that how Black males present themselves in class matters for how White teachers from their experiences interact with them. There are strengths and weaknesses to her approach. Nonetheless, she prioritizes getting the facts straight, creating opportunity for students to access success, and then allowing students to make their own decisions. The issue is making sure that the teacher is gathering all relevant information necessary to make an informed decision for how to negotiate the interaction. There is only so much then that can be done by a teacher in one classroom.

Data from this study suggest that if teachers are applying empathy to their interactions with students, that there would be evidence of its application. Empathetic teachers should have classrooms with a strong sense of community and trust. They may refer to their class as a “family” or not. In either case, students should feel safe, respected, and perceive that the teacher values their presence in his or her class. Teachers should show signs that they are willing to take risks with students, extending themselves to ensure students are best positioned to be successful based on student learning preferences and interaction styles akin to (and/or that at least considers) the cultural

norms students bring to school. Finally, teachers should have organized, systematic methods for acquiring student perspective. That may be journals, attending one social/extra-curricular school event a month, coaching or sponsoring a school club etc. Then, they need to use that knowledge to develop methods of intervening in students' lives prior to their failure and not in reaction to their impending failure.

### **Making the Personal, Professional: How Schools Support the Application of Empathy**

As stated before, the utility of empathy in the three areas I identify as advantageous for the application of empathy will look differently for each teacher. Due to the personal nature of the many human interactions teachers have with students daily, it is beyond the parameters of this inquiry to be able to qualify definitively how empathy should look, per se. There are features of its application that should be expected and teachers should be able to articulate how those features inform their negotiation of interactions. Recognizing strong classroom communities, teachers with strong rapport with students and families, who is a flexible thinker, and is constantly thinking of ways to prevent student failure, are possible indicators of an empathetic disposition.

None of this is possible without the support of institutions actively working to build its teachers' capacity to empathize. Adopting student perspective(s) and then using that knowledge to improve outcomes as a result of negotiating positive interactions requires an informed understanding of the multiple factors shaping students' lived experiences. There are historical, ethical, political, and moral dimensions forming students' social and cultural lenses. The four teachers in this study spent substantial time



in the communities (or communities very similar) where they taught. Three of the four teachers attended high school in the same district where they taught.

These teachers sharpen their ability to apply empathy to their interactions with Black males based largely on their personal and professional life experiences over time. The capacity of a teacher to cultivate an orientation towards empathetic interactions with youth must be understood as developmental. Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley are four teachers, each on her own developmental journey towards becoming highly effective teachers of Black students. It is unreasonable to conclude from this study which teacher is furthest along. Nor is that a priority. Energy must be focused on the task of helping educators become adept at demonstrating care and adopting social and cultural perspectives congruent with perspectives and expectations of their culturally diverse students.

Additionally, as mentioned numerous times, the objective of the study and of any professional attempt to qualify empathy as professional competency cannot and should not be aimed at making teachers more empathetic people per se. That is peripheral to the more urgent task of helping teachers become more *aware*. That is, be more aware of how their personal identities, experiences, prejudices, and moral convictions shape who they are and the decisions they make in their practice. Schools must facilitate multiple opportunities for teachers to recognize and capitalize on the reflexivity of knowledge in the classroom. Pedagogy of any teacher claiming to be culturally responsive must foreground learning as both a student *and* teacher act. Knowledge capital is transferred both ways.

It can then be expected that teachers, wherever they are in their careers, fall between a continuum from preservice teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. Whether they enter the school building as a newly minted teacher candidate, a veteran, or someone who recently changed careers to teach, each brings a set of experiences to the workplace that will either improve or inhibit application of empathy. They will develop the capacity to understand the multiple contexts of the school and interact empathetically with students each at his or her own rate. School stakeholders, namely the school leaders, should anticipate and insist that teachers do demonstrate evidence of growth over time, but I warn against developing overly simplistic evaluation tools because each person's application will look different.

As an alternative, schools should develop systematic approaches to include student voice in shaping what the school wants to know about its teachers. Students, like the young men in this study, will excitedly divulge what teachers in the building “know them” and “get them” and those that don't (and don't make the effort). They will point out the teachers who are “teaching for teaching's sake versus those who want [kids] to learn.” Administrators, parents, and advocates must take student concerns seriously and consider how their perception(s) of the school should inform improvement efforts. Findings from this study (i.e., the maintenance of strong, trusting relationships, the development of cohesive classroom communities, and the espousal of high-academic expectations) might be powerful indicators of each teacher's developmental progress. Schools should also look to Ladson-Billings' (2006), Howard (2010), and Milner's (2010) contention that empathetic teachers establish productive partnerships with students and families to ensure academic success as a means to assess progress. Create

open lines of communication that center discussions with teachers on understandings of the “other” that avoids the trap of developing false empathy (Delgado, 1996).

Moreover, institutions need to allow teachers to be creative and to make mistakes. Schools must be professional learning communities where teachers can learn from one another through thoughtful and honest reflection on the personal, human interactions they are having with students. Professional development should incorporate space and time for teachers to discuss with their senior peers important research related to understanding how race, class, gender (and other forms of difference) impede the communicative process between teachers and students. This time is important for helping teachers examine their interactions with students.

Teachers need culturally rich, appropriate, and culturally affirming theoretical frames for which to interrogate their own actions. The culture of the school must promote the ideal that teachers should not fear failure. As I’ve mentioned several times, trial and error was important to helping the teacher participants becoming more effective. School leaders must structure the learning community to support new teachers by giving them opportunities to be critical of their practice with teachers who may be further along in their career. The school will need to build on the expertise of teachers who students identify as exemplary. Students bring a significant degree of expertise for determining good teachers from the not so good.

Ms. Coleman cited earning a master’s degree as an important component of her development. Developing teacher’s ability to discuss race, class, power, and privilege, and then to critique their own positions in the oppression of others is important to developing an empathetic disposition. By doing so, the school leadership likely improve

the teacher's comfort with engaging students across difference and being vulnerable to them. The idea of surrendering control to students is antithetical to most teachers' professional teaching training. However, embracing students' social and cultural perspectives does mean privileging how they see the world over one's own conception of what is right for them. Financing advanced education for teachers and developing incentives for graduate study could be an important contribution of institutions of education. Finance may be an issue to some districts. In this case, creating professional learning communities where teachers discuss issues of difference in school. Books like *Courageous Conversations* by Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton (2005) may be important resources for supporting initiatives such as this one.

Finally, invite students to become a part of the major decision making processes in the school. Allow students and/or their parents/guardians to have representation in staff meetings and school leadership caucuses. It seems futile to expect teachers to work towards incorporating student perspectives into their work when there are not school structures in place that support the inclusion of student voice at every stage of the school's operation. This is how stakeholders may go about dealing with some of the attitudes, policies, and traditions steeped in decades of institutional racism. Perspectives of the marginalized will point out what in the school is oppressive. Scholars agree that White people don't know their racist until a person of color reveals it to them (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2002, 2009). Teachers have their role to play, but school leadership must partner with teachers and other school stakeholders to cultivate a school culture that best reflects and esteems the individuality and genius of Black students.

### **Perspective Divergence**

I define *perspective divergence* simply as the disjointedness between the social and cultural lenses two or more people groups employ to interpret ideas and behaviors in a controlled condition or situation. In essence, it's the difference of opinion about anything shaped by one's subjective identities (e.g., gender, race, religious affiliation, class, etc.). Jones and Nisbett (1971) refer to a similar concept as *actor-observer difference*. The two social psychologists convincingly argue that the incongruence in perspective is due largely to the vastly different perceptions of the actor and observer of the cause of the actor's behavior. The observer will judge the actor's behavior based on the personality or habits of the actor. The observer's judgment only accounts for the physical actions of the actor and nothing else, whereas, the actor attributes his or her actions(s) to external conditions. These are conditions outside of the target's immediate control (see Jones & Nisbett, 1971).

Much like any relationship adults have with others, when viewpoints differ, there can be considerable conflict for accomplishing a task. The two parties have to find some common ground (or at least one has to be willing to compromise) if the interaction is to be a fruitful one. The divergence of perspectives on a specific topic or decision will either ruin the relationship or improve its quality *over time*. Ms. Babcock emphasized that the difference between her and the Black male students she teaches is a strength. This difference "brings them together." She viewed the divergence in this case as an opportunity for her to learn more about the students and the students to learn more about her. This approach emphasizes the reflexivity of knowledge. This approach also presupposes that power is reflexive and that she is okay surrendering some of hers to students in order to learn more about what makes them different. This point should be

considered to maximize the utility of empathy for making the classroom a place Black students thrive academically and socially.

The outcomes of student-teacher interactions are most impacted by both the power and privilege of the teacher. There is a clear power differential between teachers and students, just like there is a power differential between teachers and school administration. What motivates one to conform or compromise will vary. It is my contention that teachers have a responsibility to adopt students' perspectives and to start the process of converging perspectives from day one. In other words, getting to know students immediately must be a priority.

As a practicing teacher, one always has a choice of how he or she will respond to student needs. Teachers have a decision with every interaction, whether they will see the facts from the child's perspective or if their decision will be based primarily on what they think or *feel* is right. It's a fine balance. It's easier to do what one already knows to do based on prior experience or what feels natural.

Adopting student perspective to address the divergence means incorporating students' frames of reference regularly. It also means juxtaposing that perspective with the knowledge of one's intended outcomes and the expectations of the institution. Additionally, addressing the divergence of perspective includes an accounting for the social, economic, and political structures infiltrating the teaching and learning process. It's knowing about what is happening outside of the school building and how those things shape the perspectives students use to negotiate their own understanding of the people, policies, and practices they encounter inside the school building. The teachers in this study ultimately made decisions they thought best for the student. Their decisions are

full of risks, including that students won't respond positively and/or that the results won't match the intended outcomes.

As the teacher participants comment throughout the study, there is a lot they had to learn about students over time. Delpit (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1994) confirm that it does take time to learn students and to resign the language of power when seeking to build a culturally responsive teaching practice centered on the culture of students. This line of research is ill equipped to make definitive judgments about the depth of the teacher's knowledge of student culture. Solving this problem of perspective divergence in some way requires that one party adopt the perspectives of the other for the outcome to be considered an effective one. Students have been conditioned to learn and teachers to teach. The roles have been fully defined limiting how teachers and students might renegotiate the terms of engagement. As the field's understanding of empathy from an empirical standpoint as a professional capacity develops, scholars may be better equipped to determine empathy's influence on narrowing the perspective divergence between school stakeholders, students, and their families. This process may very well begin in teacher education programs.

### **Teacher Preparation**

The synthesis of the research study has several implications for teacher preparation. First, the selection of teacher candidates and their subsequent clinical preparation are important for their development of an empathetic disposition. This may include screening for individuals who demonstrate evidence that they are very self-aware. This may also include admitting students on a probationary status to give them time to demonstrate evidence of a strong self-awareness. Second, the academic program can

treat the cognitive side by helping students make sense of their readings through actual experiences in traditionally underserved and marginalized communities. Clinical experiences should begin early in the teacher preparation programs, and these field experiences should help students better discern the utility of empathy in the professional setting as a tool of cultural responsive pedagogy. Third, the field work can address the practical application of empathy by a) training field supervisors to look for it and to discuss it with student teachers in their observation conferences, and b) training cooperating teachers to be able to identify potential challenges student teachers may have applying empathy to student-teacher interaction in their future professional practice. Fourth, both the academic and clinical sides can intentionally deepen teacher understandings of how Black boys and other student populations experience the world so that informed perspective-taking can take place. Teachers need access to texts and intellectual discourse in the social foundations that exposes them to the sociology, philosophy, and history associated with being Black in America, for example.

Finally, given the data from this study, teacher educators and those responsible for organizing preservice learning experiences must consider that teachers entering these programs are also on a professional development continuum. They bring experience to the program that must be acknowledged and accounted for in their professional preparation. It is reasonable to assume that the matter of perspective taking for example, will not be fully developed upon a student's graduation. Life experience, as the data from this research suggests, is pivotal for the type of development that empathizing maturely requires. Opportunities to engage conflicting and/or competing social and cultural perspectives held between one's sense of self and the "other" populations they



will teach are a valuable beginning point for each teacher candidate on his or her development of an empathetic disposition.

Individuals preparing to teach in culturally diverse school settings need ample opportunities throughout their teacher preparation programs to critically examine their own histories. Hence, an examination of what brought them to the teaching profession and how their sexual, racial, and gendered identities influence their understanding of culture are important to their development of an empathetic disposition. This awareness is also key to shaping how preservice teachers conceptualize what it means to be a teacher. They need to engage with traditionally marginalized groups on their terms, not just read about them or tour their neighborhoods. I envision that developing empathy for culturally diverse students may come through in-depth, prolonged apprenticeships similar to the professional development completed by teachers in McAllister and Irvine (2002) study. It is likely that asking critical questions to assess one's awareness of how their personal social and cultural perspectives influence future teaching of students different from them would be ideal for identifying individuals to enter preservice teaching programs.

Coursework must include reflection exercises that push preservice teachers to interrogate why they think the way they think about school and the schooling process. Becoming a reflective practitioner cannot be limited to ruminating over the difficulty of writing lesson plans and managing a classroom. Field experiences should be disaggregated based on asset-based notions of culture and why some students continue to fail in school and why others continue to be successful. In essence, reflecting on how one's own personhood, history, ethnic and cultural heritage, for example, contributes to

the problem or its solution. It should be compulsory that teacher candidates spend as much time in the social institutions that surround schools, as they will in schools. Teacher candidates should then be challenged to question how their various identities shape the way that they interpret the behaviors of the individuals that they interacted with in those spaces.

Student teaching supervisors and other field personnel should look out for how the teachers ponder how their various identities interface with the decisions they are making in interaction with youth. Each teacher in this study thought deeply about their past, what they have done and been through, what worked, and what didn't when determining how to create equitable learning experiences for their Black males. Learning experiences in teacher education programs must integrate how teachers' personal beliefs, attitudes, and social philosophies about being the "other" networks with that individual's notion of multiculturalism and cultural responsiveness.

The teachers in this study also admit that it has taken time to learn how to interact with their Black male students meaningfully. This points again to the argument of one's professional development being developmental and ongoing, never really ending as long as that person is a practicing teacher. The teachers in the pilot study I reference in chapter three each had less than three years teaching experience. They were still early in their development. They discuss the challenge of figuring things out on the spot and feeling overwhelmed by how to respond to what they perceived students *didn't* have. Identifying strategies and refining their cultural competency were daily tasks. There is a need to develop practices in preservice teacher education that improve the likelihood of teachers to be adept at negotiating productive interactions earlier in their career. This is another

reason why early, frequent field experiences are important. The four teachers in this study were well versed about the communities where they taught. This knowledge helped them to better negotiate social interactions in particular. It also provided them with the lenses for better interpreting how and why students behave and respond in class the way that they do.

Understanding empathy as both an emotional and intellectual response process is another important implication for how teachers are prepared. Communicating and responding to students across differences requires that teachers flexibly exercise both dimensions of empathy. Some students are more emotionally fragile, placing a demand on the teacher to appropriate his or her emotions to match. Underlying any response (emotional or not) is some form of perspective taking (Davis, 1994). Thus, even the act of imagining one's emotion in order to respond is an indictment on the degree of the teacher's ability to take perspective. Future research will need to be done that investigates closely this developmental process and how teachers can be trained to acquire student social and cultural perspective.

As this line of research progresses, teacher educators may be better positioned to understand the multidimensionality of empathy. As they understand, they will be more apt to develop activities that get teacher candidates to think strategically about how to use the perspectives of others necessary for organizing a culturally responsive pedagogy. This may include giving preservice teachers opportunities to role-play in class. These role-plays should be based on potential real-life interactions. They may include vignettes from student teacher field experiences or adapted from fictional experiences similar to the teacher training programs discussed in chapter two (Aspy, 1972). These experiences

would facilitate a dialogue that helps teachers to process how they might respond in similar situations. Teacher educators should call attention to a response that not simply minimizes the consequences of the act, but relevant action that produces outcomes most beneficial to the student to accomplishing specific academic and social milestones.

Teacher preparation programs may have a limited impact on how teachers are prepared to teach in multicultural education settings. Time in the field will always be the best teacher. Nevertheless, the priority of these programs should be to identify teacher candidates who have a strong awareness of self, including how their various identities (i.e., racial, gendered, religious orientation, class, sexual orientation) shape the way that he or she sees the world around them. Teacher preparation programs then move from being oversaturated with methods courses to including more opportunities in each course to explore how one's *self* matters to the teaching and learning process. What makes an individual who they are should be discussed. Those who seem obstinate to change early in the teacher preparation process might be individuals flagged for intervention, including being counseled out of teaching.

In sum, findings from this study are useful for giving more thought to the personal nature empathizing and the expertise required to improve student outcomes in interaction by leveraging perspective in each type of interaction. That is, interactions that humanize the learning experience for teachers and students. This point is in many ways contradictory to the high-stakes testing climate of contemporary schools. Nevertheless, if we're not rethinking our approach to educating underserved student populations, I fear we will have more of the same outcomes. Twelve years after its legislation, there is no significant evidence that No Child Left Behind has done anything more or less for closing

the “achievement gap.” Teacher preparation programs need to weave throughout their curriculum benchmarks for helping teacher candidates: to connect a strong self-awareness to cultivating their ability; to take multiple risks in classrooms; be flexible thinkers and problem solvers; establish trusting student-teacher relationships; develop strong classroom community; and innovate proactive interventions and solutions. These are the things that they need to be evaluated for, not necessarily how empathetic they are. How empathetic they are will shine through how well they are able to use students’ perspectives for organizing high-quality culturally responsive learning experiences for youth. The development of an empathetic disposition is in teaching teachers to look at themselves using the lenses of those they are charged with educating, and responding appropriately.

### **Future Research**

More research needs to be done that further examines the utility of empathy by directly focusing on its application. Specifically, research needs to document what teachers do to acquire perspective and record the multiple ways they leverage student perspective to improve the quality of the learning experiences provided to traditionally marginalized youth. The work needs to center around the practice of exemplary teachers to ensure that the research is asset-based. Also, research must include the voices and input of students throughout the data collection process. The design of this study is such that it should be replicated in many different classrooms. Studying award winning teachers of multiple ethnicities teaching in failing school districts, for example, might be a place to start. More classroom observations and interviews of exemplary teachers in

different regions of the U. S. can significantly improve what the field knows about the application of empathy.

Additionally, continuing research in this area will include observations and more detailed participation of teachers from multiple races, ethnicities, and both genders. There is difference that exists between any teacher and student. How different teachers negotiate this difference is of importance to further shape the field's understanding of empathy's utility. More surveys distributed widely would be useful for gathering insight about how larger portions of today's teacher workforce think about or enact their understandings of empathy. Studying strong teachers in many different types of schools that teach various grade levels would add significantly to the field's knowledge of empathy as a professional capacity. I have a very small population of participants from one district, making it challenging to assume that my findings are truly generalizable.

Future research should further center the voices of traditionally underserved student populations to naming empathy's utility. There was much information to be gleaned from the focus group participants in this study. More focus groups with Black male students to discuss the value they place on White teacher's ability to "understand" them is important for moving the conversation forward. It's also useful to hear from them the bad experiences they have had with White female teachers to better understand what teachers should not be doing.

I would be more systematic about the selection of students to the focus group. I would conduct multiple focus groups with students. I would also conduct follow-up interviews with Black male students in each teacher's class to gather their perspectives on the interactions they are having with their White female teachers. I may ask them some

of the same questions I asked the teachers in follow up interviews concerning observations of the various academic, behavioral, and social/relational interactions they are having with students. Future research might include training teachers to acquire other's perspective in a professional development series and the impact on their student outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

This research is an early attempt to empirically ground an understanding of empathy's utility for improving how teachers communicate and respond to students across multiple differences, namely race, class, and gender. The four teachers in this study are not perfect. As a former teacher and school administrator, there were things that I saw that I would do differently to respond to student needs. That is the nature of empathy, in that, it is not as much about standardizing a response as it is digging into the perspectives of the individual for whom the response is meant; then appropriating a response that directly meets the needs of the person who the help is intended for with little regard for what is easiest for the empathizer. Since every student and every teacher is different, it is reasonable to expect that communication and response orientations of the teacher will also be vastly different. What is more important is that practitioners focus intentionally on strategic ways to acquire perspective and then enact that understanding in subsequent interaction. This is not a perfect process, so individuals can expect to get better at this task over time.

Black males are smart and capable, deserving of teachers who have a deep, abiding knowledge of their strengths. The Black male student participants in this study were passionate, articulate, and extremely clear about what characteristics they value in a

teacher. The focus group allowed for much agreement amongst students. The Black male students who I observed in interaction with the White female teacher participants are like students in other schools I have experienced. Some were very focused. Some were not. A majority of them participated regularly in class and some sat off to the side silent unless they were called on. Some wanted a lot of attention, some were independent workers who don't fare well when forced to participate in cooperative learning activities. The diversity among them was tremendous, and part of responding appropriately is recognizing how that diversity influences one's approach to negotiating positive, productive interactions with them. Their stories both inspire and challenge us to do our part to provide high quality, equitable, and culturally responsive schooling for *all* students.

From this study, it is important to note that empathizing with others is very personal. Empathy humanizes the teaching and learning enterprise. It's about putting one's self out on a limb and doing whatever it takes to ensure students have high-quality learning experiences. Empathic interactions are about caring for the whole child. They are about taking risks and being flexible to the possibilities. Ms. Arnold, Ms. Babcock, Ms. Coleman, and Ms. Dantley teach us that the application of empathy to multiple interactions with youth is not a perfect process, but that it requires partnership. That partnership cannot be framed directly by the adult, but rather by the child. This is shifting of the locus of power and control between the teacher and student to produce outcomes most beneficial to the student, even when it may sometimes makes the adult uncomfortable. They teach us that connecting to students means taking an interest in them and using what one learns to arrange a personally relevant and culturally responsive



learning environment. Finally, this work reminds us of the work we have yet to do to create equitable learning conditions for all students. The four teacher participants are not perfect people. Their reflection and simple willingness to show up everyday despite how challenged they feel about the work is key to their success. Empathic interaction is a step in the right direction for reversing the trend of Black male school failure, one (White and female) teacher at a time.

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## Appendix A

### Empathy Survey

Thank you for your participation in this survey. It should take less than 10 or 15 minutes to complete. Please answer each question honestly and completely. This survey will help me to understand how you conceive of empathy and its role in your professional teaching practice with Black male students. Also, the survey will solicit some demographical information, however, no questions will require any personal identifying information. Your identity is anonymous and the data collected will be kept completely private. Follow directions at the end of the survey to be anonymously entered into a raffle for one of four \$25 gift cards.

D1. How old did you turn on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_

D2. Sex: (please circle one) **MALE** **FEMALE**

D3. Are you White, Black or African-American, Latino/a or Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander, or some other race

- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ Latino/a or Hispanic
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ From multiple races

Some other race (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

D4. Read the following definition: A professional teacher is defined as any individual hired as the person solely responsible for the day-to-day instruction of a roster of youth. To be considered a professional teacher, the following conditions must be met...

- Teach a specific subject area or cadre of subjects for a specified grade level (or grade levels)
- Teach in a state-accredited and recognized school.

This definition excludes any years you may have worked as a tutor, teacher's assistant, teacher's aide, intern, volunteer, or student teacher.

Given this definition, how many years have you been a professional teacher including the current school year? (Please use whole number of years) \_\_\_\_\_

D5. The school where you are presently teaching can best be described as a:  
(Please circle one option)

**a) Charter School**

- b) Traditional Public Neighborhood School
- c) Magnet School (i.e. Gifted, Classical, Selective Enrollment, etc.)
- d) Vocational/Technical School
- e) Private/Religious School
- f) Speciality School (please fill in the specialty):  
\_\_\_\_\_

D6. Would you say that you teach a majority of Black children (i.e. over 50% of your class(es)

are Black children)?

(Please circle one) **YES NO**

D7. Please read the choices below and choose the one that best describes the setting where you are currently a professional teacher (Please circle one)

Rural

Suburban

Urban

D8. What grade(s) are you currently teaching?: \_\_\_\_\_

D9. What subject do you currently teach? (If you teach multiple subjects, please list each subject you are responsible for teaching. If you teach all core subjects, please write ALL on the 1st line)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E1. Write your personal definition of empathy in only one sentence using the space provided below

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E2. Read the two statements below and select the statement that best describes what you think of when you hear the word "empathy" (Please circle one)

a). **"Having some kind of emotional reaction that would be similar to [the emotional reaction of] another persons in [the same] situation"**

b). **"Putting yourself in someone else's shoes and attempting to feel what they feel in that moment"**

E3. Choose the statement that best describes how you feel about the acquisition of empathy

(Please circle one)

a) Everyone is born with the ability to empathize. Empathy is cultivated over time.

b) Everyone is not born with the ability to empathize. Empathy is a learned behavior.

E4. Based on the personal definition you just provided, complete the following sentence with the appropriate selection:

**“Empathy is \_\_\_\_\_ in my work as a classroom teacher”**

(Please circle one option only):

- ☐ **of great importance**
- ☐ **important, but not a priority**
- ☐ **not important at all**

E5a. I personally consider empathy to be a necessary disposition for teachers of Black students?

(Please circle one)   **Strongly Agree**   **Agree**   **Disagree**   **Strongly Disagree**

E5b. I personally consider empathy to be a necessary disposition for teachers of Black male students?

(Please circle one)   **Strongly Agree**   **Agree**   **Disagree**   **Strongly Disagree**

E6. In general, I consider the student-teacher relationship I have with the Black male students I

currently teach to be a positive one

(Please circle one)   **Strongly Agree**   **Agree**   **Disagree**   **Strongly Disagree**

E7. Read the following definition: Cultural competence in the context of teaching Black children encompasses:

a detailed understanding of the the various ***intellectual and societal contributions*** of Black people

a fluid knowledge of the ***cultural preferences, values, interaction, and communication styles*** of Black children

the ability to ***connect academic instruction to a greater awareness of social and political issues*** relevant to the Black children you teach

Given this definition and your personal understanding of empathy, would you say that empathy (can/does) significantly improve an individual's cultural competence?

(Please circle one)   **Strongly Agree**   **Agree**   **Disagree**   **Strongly Disagree**

E8. Based on the personal definition of empathy you provided above, choose the option that best describes the frequency with which you apply empathy to various aspects of your teaching practice. Think about your application of empathy as it specifically relates to the Black male students you teach

Honestly describe your application of empathy by writing one of the following letters:

**F for Frequently, S for Sometimes, R for Rarely, or N for Never** next to each of the following items:

a) The application of empathy when planning learning experiences and activities for groups of students that include Black males: \_\_\_\_\_

b) The application of empathy when grading the homework & classwork assignments of the Black male students you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

- c) The application of empathy when communicating work and behavior expectations to the Black male students you teach: \_\_\_\_\_
- d) The application of empathy when disciplining the Black male students you teach: \_\_\_\_\_
- e) The application of empathy when building personal relationships with the Black male students you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

E9. In the space provided, please reflect on and briefly write the areas of your professional teaching practice where you feel like you apply empathy for your students the most. If you don't think you apply empathy at all, please write N/A.

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B1. How many individuals currently live in your household including you? (Please also account for a partner, spouse, children, and/or any dependents living with you) \_\_\_\_\_

B2. How many individuals including you, were your parents/guardians financially responsible for when you were in middle school and high school? (Please include your parents/guardians in this count) \_\_\_\_\_

B3. Please choose the option that best describes the net combined annual income of your current household? (Please circle one)

- a) \$125,000 or more
- b) \$100,000 - \$124,999
- c) \$75,000 - \$99,999
- d) \$50,000 - \$74,999
- e) Less than \$50,000

B4. Please choose the option that best describes your parents/guardians net combined annual income when you were in middle school and high school? (Please circle one)

- a) \$125,000 or more
- b) \$100,000 - \$124,999
- c) \$75,000 - \$99,999
- d) \$50,000 - \$74,999
- e) Less than \$50,000

B5. Did you grow up with both parents in your home for all or the majority of your childhood (birth to 18 years old)? (Please circle one) **YES NO**

B6. Please choose the statement that best describes the amount of personal interaction (that you can remember) you had with Black males when you were growing up

- a) I had frequent personal interaction with Black males growing up
- b) I had some personal interaction with Black males growing up
- c) I had very little interaction with Black males growing up
- d) I had no personal interaction with Black males growing up

B7. Please select the option that best describes the general racial make-up of the student body of the schools you attended growing up. (Note: If you went to multiple schools for any one category below, reflect on the school for that category where you spent most of your time in attendance)

Write **A** for All White, **M** for Mostly White with small group(s) of other racial groups, **R** for Racially Diverse, and **O** for Other

- a) Elementary (PreK-5th): \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Middle School (6th-8th): \_\_\_\_\_
- c) High School (9th-12th): \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Undergraduate: \_\_\_\_\_

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter on this sheet next to the item number. **READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING.** Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

**ANSWER SCALE:**

A	B	C	D	E
DOES NOT				
DESCRIBES ME				
DESCRIBE ME				VERY
WELL				
WELL				

1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. \_\_\_\_\_
5. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. \_\_\_\_\_



7. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. \_\_\_\_\_
8. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. \_\_\_\_\_
9. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. \_\_\_\_\_
13. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview based on information that you provided in this survey with the Principal Investigator (PI) of this study?

(Please circle one) **YES NO**

If Yes, please provide your email on the line provided and the PI will contact you should you be chosen for the interview:

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To be entered into the raffle for one of four \$25 Visa Gift Cards, copy the CODE "ICTES2011" and email it as the subject line to [empathyquestionnaire@gmail.com](mailto:empathyquestionnaire@gmail.com). The researcher wants you to maintain complete anonymity as it relates to your survey responses. By sending an email to the aforementioned address, you completely separate yourself from your survey responses. The researcher will contact you should you win. Thank you for completing the survey!

## **Appendix B**

### Teacher Initial Interview Protocol

**R:** What is your first and last name?

(Each teacher will be given a Participant alphabet so that I can code their data in relationship to the data provided by her professional colleague interviews)

**R:** What grade do you teach?

**R:** How many years have you been teaching?

**R:** Tell me about yourself, your background, and your route into teaching

**R:** If you had to assign a definition to the word empathy, what would that definition be?

**R:** How did you derive that definition?

**R:** Is empathy learned or something that everybody is born with?

**R:** Finally, how would you rate yourself on the empathy scale of very low empathy to very high empathy and why?

### ***GIVE THE EMPATHY SURVEY and give results***

**EXPLAIN** The empathy ratings range from very low empathy to very high empathy based on a combined score of empathic concern (“I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective”) and perspective taking (“I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.”) The results of these scores will not be shared with anyone, except for possibly my faculty advisor, and you will not be personally identified in the writing of the final report. Every step has been taken to eliminate any potential risks on your part. Thank you again for agreeing to participate. With that being said, it is very important that you be as honest and forthcoming as possible. Do you have any questions?

**R:** Do not answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. Do the results surprise you? Why or Why not?

**R:** What were you thinking about when you were answering the questions

**R:** Have your views changed about empathy and its definition after taking this assessment and seeing your results?

**R:** Do you believe empathy is important for building relationships and interacting with Black males? How would you describe empathy’s impact in your classroom?

**R:** Lastly, from your perspective, what impact does empathy in general and your own ability to engage empathically, have on your ability to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices if any? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?

**R:** Thank you for your participation. Are there any final questions for me?

## Appendix C

### Teacher Exit Interview Protocol

First of all, thank you very much for allowing me into your classroom this semester to watch and learn from you. The intention of the research is to better understand how empathy is useful for improving the quality of student-teacher interactions with Black male students. Your participation in the project has helped me to operationalize the application of empathy to various domains of a teacher's professional practice. This exit interview is a way to bring closure to the project. Again please answer each question, openly and honestly.

Say your full name...

Other than teaching, in what other ways are you involved in the school?

- 1) What do you think it means to demonstrate care to your students/Black males? How do you know when you have been successful at demonstrating care?
- 2) Is there a difference in the way that interact with older students vs. younger students that you teach?
- 3) How might your Black male students needs differ from those of the females? Other race of students?
- 4) If you had to rank priorities in your classroom between Building Relationships, High-Quality Instruction, and Disciplining Students, what would be most important?
- 5) How have has your knowledge of African-American culture and the unique needs of African-American children changed from your first year to this one?
- 6) How would you best describe your personality? How do you believe your personality influences the way that you interact with your Black male students in particular?
- 7) If you had to identify the top 3 ways you get to know your students, your BM students in particular if there are specific strategies you use with them, what would they be?
- 8) Do you believe empathy for students is best/most expressed in general with the whole class or with individuals? Can you give me examples of both?
- 9) There may be some tensions that come out that may make you uncomfortable...They are not personal indictments, but necessary for learning and moving the conversation forward. What are your thoughts about this?
- 10) How do you think that this process has influenced your conceptions of empathy? Has your thinking changed at all?
- 11) What is your greatest hope for the Black male students you teach? What is your role in helping them meet your expectations of them?

Questions for me?

I will be in touch with you in the next few weeks (by phone or by email) to ensure the accuracy of my perception of what I've heard you say and seen you do. Is that okay?

## Appendix D

### School Administrator Interview Protocol

**R:** Hello, my name is Chezare Warren and I am a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This study will inquire as to how White female teachers conceive of empathy and the utility of empathy in helping them successfully negotiate teacher-student interactions, specifically as it relates to Black male students. I plan to observe the interaction of 1 or 2 White female teachers who have some demonstrated success with Black male students as described by you and a group of Black male students in your building; and then analyze those interactions for instances of the teachers' application of empathy. If you allow me into your school to complete the study and your school is chosen, I will talk to a group of Black male students and based on their nomination compare the list of teachers they recommend to the list that you recommend. The teacher or teachers whose name appears on both lists will be invited to participate in the study. I will spend the fall semester observing these teachers and interviewing them to get at how the application of empathy is factor of their professional practice. So, today I would like to ask you a few questions that will help me to further determine whether your school is an appropriate fit for the study. Are you willing to participate?

**R:** Great! What is your first and last name? School name?

**R:** How long have you been the administrator in this building or affiliated with this school?

**R:** What percentage of your students are African-American? Of those, boys?

**R:** Think about the White female teachers working in your building, would you say that you have any that are academically successful with Black students (Black male students in particular)?

**R:** How do you know? What measures are you using to classify that success?

**R:** Again, thinking about the White female teachers only in your school, I will read this definition of cultural competence while you read it to your self... Cultural competence in the context of teaching Black children encompasses:

- a detailed understanding of the various *intellectual and societal contributions* of Black people
- a fluid knowledge of the *cultural preferences, values, interaction, and communication styles* of Black children
- the ability to *connect academic instruction to a greater awareness of social and political issues* relevant to the Black children you teach

Based on this definition, would you say that any of your White female teachers are culturally competent?

**R:** Would you say that these White female teachers work hard to connect the learning in their classrooms to a greater social and political awareness for their students?

**R:** Finally, would you say that the White teachers that you have in mind have generally productive and positive interactions and relationships with the majority of their Black male students?

**R:** Now, I would like to actually write down the names of the teachers you had in mind when answering these questions that you would agree meet the criteria described here. Their students are academically successful for the most part, the teacher is culturally competent, connects learning to a larger social and political awareness, and has generally positive and productive relationships with their Black male students. What is the first and last names of those teachers?

**R:** a) How long has each teacher taught in your building? b) What does each teacher teach?

**R:** This project has the potential to help all teachers to develop dispositions that may significantly improve the way they work with and respond to the needs of Black males and students of color in general. It is important to me to highlight the work of White teachers who are exhibiting success and tell their stories. I greatly appreciate your support thus far. Would you be willing to have a research project of this caliber in your building?

**R:** My plan for data collection is to hold focus groups with students within the first 3 weeks of school before or after school in safe space in the building. The students will develop a list similar to what we've done today and I will compare the list they develop to the list that you gave me and the teacher(s) name who appears on both lists will be invited to participate in the study. I will make contact with that teacher towards the end of September to solicit their participation in the study. If they agree, I plan to begin interviewing and observing them the last week of September through the end of November. I will be done collecting data in your building in the fall. I will write up my final report in the spring. If your school is chosen, we will need to set up a follow-up meeting to discuss logistics and parameters for my time in the school. At this point, what questions do you have for me?

**R:** There is an empathy survey that I would like to give to your entire faculty at a mutually agreed upon time. It takes just 10 minutes and can happen at the end of a faculty meeting. I will use this data in my dissertation as well, but all surveys are completely anonymous and will be completed electronically. It is completely voluntary and they can opt out if they do not want to participate. Would you be willing to allow your teachers to participate?

**R:** Do you have any colleagues that you could refer me to in other high-need suburban areas who you think might be interested in a project like this one? Where and can you give me their contact information?

**R:** I appreciate your time and help. I will let you know in the next two weeks whether or not your school has been chosen at which time we will set up another meeting to discuss data collection. Any other questions for me?

**R:** Thank you again.

## Appendix E

### Student Focus Group Protocol

My name is Mr. Warren. I am here to listen and learn as much as I can from you about your experiences in school. I am doing some research to learn how White teachers understand and interact with Black male students. Anything you say here will be kept in the room. I will not share any information with your teachers or the school administrators. Feel free to be as open and vocal as you would like. Does anybody have any questions for me?

(Students will be given an opportunity to ask questions)

I will record our conversation so that I don't mix up your words and to ensure that I catch everything. Lets begin...

1) I would like each of you to say your full name and the number of years you have attended this HS

2) Tell me about some experiences that stick out in your mind with White female teachers since being in middle school and high school

PROBE: Would you say the majority of your experiences with these teachers have been positive or negative?

PROBE: For the most positive experiences with any one White female teacher, how did the teacher act towards you? What types of things did she have a habit of saying or doing?

PROBE: Do any of you share the same experiences?

3) What do you think about when you hear the word empathy?

PROBE: What picture comes to mind?

PROBE: Is that the same for all of you? What aspects of \_\_\_\_\_ do you agree with the most for a teacher's ability to empathize (Get the students to settle on an understanding)

Lead conversation by asking students to talk freely about what comes to mind when they hear the words below. Facilitator will then use the ideas students' talk about in conversation to extend the discussion. (Understand Perspective Interpretation)

4) Is it important for your teachers to empathize with you? To understand you? Why or why not?

5) Do you think that there are any White female teachers in this school who do a good job empathizing with you?

Who are they?

LIST:



6) If you had to assemble this list in order beginning with the most empathetic as #1, what would be the order?

7) Are there any stories or experiences that any one of you can share about Teacher #1, 2, or 3 that have made them a particularly strong candidate for this list?

Unfortunately, we are almost out of time. Let me repeat the main points you gave in your responses (Talk about the responses from 2, 3, or 4)

(Ask particular people clarifying questions as a way to member check if necessary)

I want to thank each of you for sharing your time and thoughts with me today. I learned a tremendous amount about the importance of a White female teacher's ability to relate to Black males and how empathy may be helpful in doing that. Again, I want to remind you that nothing we discussed today will be shared with your principal, any teacher, student, or any other staff person. I ask that you keep our conversation confidential as well to respect the privacy of your classmates.

## Appendix F

### Classroom Observation Protocol

Interaction Narrative			
<b><u>Academic</u></b>			<b><i>Questions for Follow-Up</i></b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b><u>Behavioral</u></b>			<b><i>Questions for Follow-Up</i></b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b><u>Social</u></b>			<b><i>Questions for Follow-Up</i></b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal</b>	<b>Interpersonal</b>	

<b>Antecedents:</b>	Outcomes	Outcomes	
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			
<b>Time:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b>	<b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>	
<b>Antecedents:</b>			

**Miscellaneous Notes/Thoughts:**

## Appendix G

### Empathy Rating Scale

Teacher participants received an empathy rating on a five-point scale from Very High to Very Low for the dimensions of Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking based on their scores from the IRI.

Teachers received an empathy rating for discussion purposes during the initial interview for the dimensions of **Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking** based on their scores from the IRI.

- i. Seven items per subscale (Perspective Taking & Empathic Concern) = 14 total items with a potential minimum score of 7 and a potential maximum score of 35 for each scale for each participant.
- ii. A score from the dimensions of Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking are below:

#### **WOMEN**

**Empathic Concern** M = 21.67 SD = 3.83 (Davis, 1980)

**Perspective Taking** M = 17.96 SD = 4.85 (Davis, 1980)

<b><i>Empathic Concern Score</i></b>	<b><i>Domain Rating</i></b>	<b><i>Perspective Taking Score</i></b>
29 or higher	<b>Very High</b>	29 or higher
26 – 28	<b>High</b>	24 to 28
18 – 25	<b>Average</b>	14 to 23
15 – 17	<b>Low</b>	9 to 13
14 or lower	<b>Very Low</b>	8 or lower

<b>Combined Score</b>	<b>Empathy Rating</b>
57 or Higher	Very High Empathy
48 to 56	High Empathy
31 to 47	Average Empathy
23 to 30	Low Empathy
22 or lower	Very Low Empathy

## **Appendix H**

### **Empathy Survey Recruitment Script**

#### **Colleague:**

**Please consider participating in an important research study investigating how teachers understand, define, and apply empathy to their professional teaching practice. Your response will be very helpful to understanding how empathy can be utilized to improve the multiple interactions teachers have with students of color. Participation is completely voluntary and NO identifying information is required.**

**By completing the survey, you are eligible to be entered into a raffle for one of four \$25 Visa Gift Cards to Office Depot. Follow the simple directions at the end of the survey to be entered. You have about a 5% chance of winning.**

**Please click the link below to complete the survey. Thank you in advance for your participation.**

**<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/M2VJQWH>**

**Feel free to forward this survey to all of your friends, families, and colleagues who are practicing classroom teachers**

## Appendix I

### School Administrator Recruitment Script

#### Telephone Script

Hello, my name is Chezare Warren. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago, former teacher, and Chicago Public School administrator. I am conducting my dissertation research study to fulfill requirements for completion of the PhD of Policy Studies in Urban Education. This study will inquire as to how White female teachers conceive of empathy and how their conceptions are enacted in various aspects of their professional teaching practice, specifically as it relates to Black male students. I want to observe the interaction of 1 or 2 White female teachers who demonstrate some success with Black male students as described by stakeholders; and then analyze those interactions for instances of the teachers' application of empathy. Before I can begin the study, I need to identify a school where I can complete the study.

I am currently reaching out to the administration of local traditional public neighborhood high schools to determine a site to complete this research project. I need very little of your time to assess whether your school is a suitable fit for this project. I am reaching out to you because your school does meet preliminary qualifications for inclusion in the study. I would like to conduct a very brief interview (10 - 15 minutes maximum) with you. I will ask a few questions to help me further evaluate whether or not your school would be an appropriate site for completion of the research project.

Participants in this study will have their identities protected, including yours. Agreeing to meet with me is not a commitment for your school to be the site for data collection. Your responses in the interview will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. The raw interview and empathy assessment data of this study will not be seen by anyone except for the principal investigator (Chezare Warren). All names will be omitted from the final report and be replaced with pseudonyms. I will not divulge any aspects of our communication with any teacher or student participants should the decision be made to complete the study in your school. Participation is completely voluntarily and you may discontinue participation at any time throughout the process as well as any other teacher or student participant.

**Option 1:** Are you interested in participating?

- **If yes,** "What is your first and last name, email address, and current phone number?"

**Researcher:** "As I stated before, the study aims to better understand how White female teachers conceive of empathy and how their conceptions are enacted in their everyday professional practice with Black male students.

**Researcher:** During the time that we meet, I will ask you a series of questions about the school, your teachers, and your student population to assess the feasibility of completing my study in your school. Following your interview, I will explain to you how I plan to collect data and give you an opportunity to ask me any questions you want about the

project and express any concerns you may have. Finally, we will discuss several alternatives for how I can volunteer in your building to support the academic and instructional goals of your faculty. I will need ***no more than*** 15 minutes of your time to do all of this. (**Participant Response**)

**Researcher:** Lastly, I will contact you in the next 2 weeks if I don't hear from you first to get a final decision as to whether or not you would allow me to complete my study in your building. I will follow up with you within 7 days of that communication to let you know if your school was chosen for participation in the study. At that time, we will also plan another brief face-to-face meeting between myself and someone from your administrative team to discuss how I can volunteer in your building. Do you have any further questions at this time? (**Participant Response**)

**Researcher:** Thank you for your time and I will email you in the next 24 hours to confirm a meeting time with you.

- **If no**, “Do you know of an administrative colleague who might be interested?”
  - **If yes**, “What is their name and email address?”
  - **If no**, “Thank you for your time”

#### **Email Script**

Hello, my name is Chezare Warren. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago, former teacher, and Chicago Public School administrator. I am conducting my dissertation research study to fulfill requirements for completion of the PhD of Policy Studies in Urban Education. This study will inquire as to how White female teachers conceive of empathy and the utility of empathy in helping them successfully negotiate teacher-student interactions, specifically as it relates to Black male students. I plan to observe the interaction of 1 or 2 White female teachers in 3 – 4 different schools who have some demonstrated success with Black male students as described by stakeholders; and then analyze those interactions for instances of the teachers' application of empathy.

Your school meets preliminary eligibility requirements for participation in this study. I would like to set up some time in the near future to talk with you more about the project and conduct a very brief interview (10 - 15 minutes maximum) with you. First, I will explain to you in detail the specifics of data collection for this project and I will follow up the conversation by asking a few general questions about the professional teaching practice of the White female teachers in your building.

All participants in this study will have their identities protected, including yours. Agreeing to meet with me is not a commitment for your school to be the actual research site. Your responses in the interview will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. The raw interview and empathy assessment data of this study will not

be seen by anyone except for the principal investigator. All names will be omitted from the final report and replaced with pseudonyms. I will not divulge any aspects of our communication with any teacher or student participants should the decision be made to complete the study in your school. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time throughout the process.

If you are willing to meet briefly with me for the interview, simply respond to this email or call me ([773-495-8155](tel:773-495-8155)) with a few times that you are available for a chat in the next 7 days. I can be very flexible with your schedule. Thank you in advance for your help and consideration.

If you are sure that you wouldn't like me to complete this study in your school and can refer another administrator colleague who might be interested, please provide me with their name, email address, school, and/or telephone number where the interested party can be best reached

Thank you in advance for your help and consideration.



## **Appendix J**

### **Student Recruitment Procedure and Script**

#### **Procedure**

- 1) Student names will be given to me by the school administration at the conclusion of my interview with them.
- 2) I will then work with the school administration to select an appropriate time that I can speak to the students they've recommended collectively in one room.
- 3) The students who the administration recommended will be invited to convene on the date, at the time, in the room the PI agreed upon with the school administration (Most likely the administration will call these students down to a specific particular room on the mutually agreed upon time. The administration will not be allowed to be in the room with students).
- 4) The PI will read the script below to the students.
- 5) The PI will answer any questions that the students ask.
- 6) The PI will distribute the parent informed consent forms and the Students 18 and over informed consent forms to the students who raise their hand to signify their interests in participating in the study.
- 7) Students will be dismissed.

#### **Recruitment Script**

Hello, my name is Chezare Warren. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago, former teacher, and Chicago Public School administrator. I am conducting a research study to fulfill requirements for completion of the PhD of Policy Studies in Urban Education. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the importance of empathy in how well White female teacher teaches Black male students. I would like to invite each of you to participate in this study by being apart of a student focus group. A focus group is when a group of people sit down together in a room to have a detailed discussion about a specific topic. I would like you and your classmates in the room to discuss your experiences with White female teachers and to find out from you all the importance of a teacher's ability to have an accurate understanding of his or her students—understanding of student likes or dislikes, neighborhood, culture, and family. At the very end of the focus group, you will have an opportunity to nominate 3 – 5 teachers in your school who you think are excellent empathizers.

The focus group will take between 1 to 2 hours to complete. I will be the individual leading the focus group and I will also be the only adult in the room with you during the focus group. No teachers or administrators will be allowed to sit in the room with us. Anything that we talk about will be completely confidential. Therefore, nothing you say will be held against you, nor will I share anything that we talk about with your teachers or administration following the focus group. If you choose to participate in the focus group, you can stop at anytime and leave the room. If you choose not to participate today, there are no negative consequences for that decision. Whatever your choice, there will be no impact on your relationship with the school, teachers, administration, or staff.

If you choose to participate, you will have their identity protected. Also, your name will be omitted from the final report and replaced with a pseudonym. Remember, you can opt out of the focus group at any time with no penalty, but your participation is very much appreciated. To protect your privacy, I'm asking that you not discuss this research, what we've discussed today, or anything about your participation with anyone other than your parents/guardians.

Does anyone have questions for me? (Students can ask any questions they have about the project)

Please raise your hand if you would like to participate in the focus group for this research study? (I will pass out parent consent forms and the students 18 and over informed consent forms).

Please return the consent form to me only, signed by you and your parent/guardian on the day of the focus group. The focus group will be held on \_\_\_\_\_ in room \_\_\_\_\_. You must have your informed consent form signed by a parent/guardian in order to participate unless you are 18 or older. If you are 18 or older, you just need to submit the informed consent form that you just received.

If you have any questions between now and then, please write down my name, phone number, and email address (I say and print my contact information on the board). I will be happy to answer any questions you or your parents/guardians may have about this focus group process.

Thank you for your time.

## **Appendix K**

### **Teacher Recruitment Procedure and Script**

#### **Procedure**

- 1) Teacher will be recruited after cross-checking teacher names provided by school administration and the student focus group.
- 2) I will then look up the teacher's email address from the high school website or request it from the school administration (This is usually public knowledge).
- 3) I will make contact with the teacher to invite her participation in the research project using the script below.
- 4) If the teacher replies and is interested in being apart of the study, she will reply with some times for us to complete the initial interview
- 5) At the initial interview, the teacher will sign for informed consent.

#### **Recruitment Script**

Hello, my name is Chezare Warren. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Illinois-Chicago, former teacher, and Chicago Public School administrator. I am conducting a research study to fulfill requirements for completion of the PhD of Policy Studies in Urban Education. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the importance of empathy in how well teacher teaches Black male students. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. You were chosen to participate because of your reputation as an exemplary educator based on the nomination of both your school administration and a group of students. Your participation includes participation in at least 3 and no more than 5 short interviews, an empathy assessment, and some classroom observation.

If you choose to participate, you will have your identity completely protected. Also, your name will be omitted from the final report and replaced with a pseudonym. You can opt of participation in the study at any time with no penalty, but your participation is very much appreciated. The time commitment is minimal and negotiable. The study will greatly improve the education field's knowledge of how empathy is effectively operationalized in multicultural classrooms. Also, I am hoping that this research will add to what we know about training, recruiting, and professionally developing teachers to be successful in urban classrooms with students of color and Black males more specifically. Choosing not to participate in this research will in no way have negative implications on your relationship with the school, students, families, or administration.

If you are interested in participating, I would like to begin with a short interview and administration of a brief empathy assessment. This should take no more than 1 hour. Are you available in the next week to meet? I would like to give you the specifics for this project and answer any questions that you have. This is an exciting opportunity. Congratulations for being chosen and for being so highly regarded in your school.

You can email me at [cawarren@uic.edu](mailto:cawarren@uic.edu) or call me at 773-495-8155. I do hope you consider participating in this important study. Thank you in advance for your time.

**Informed Consent Form***Teacher***Principal Investigator:** C. Warren M. A., Doctoral Candidate**Institution:** University of Illinois at Chicago**PI Contact Information:** [cawarren@uic.edu](mailto:cawarren@uic.edu) 773 – 495 – 8155

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chezare Warren of the University of Illinois at Chicago under the close supervision of faculty in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. In this research project, we hope to learn more about how teachers conceive of empathy and the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers in urban schools negotiate interactions with Black male students. You have been selected for participation in this study due to your professional teaching qualifications, recommendations from school stakeholders, and your fit within the parameters for physical criteria for teacher participant selection (i.e. White female teacher).

Participation in the study includes taking an empathy assessment, receiving an empathy rating, participation in a post-assessment interview, follow-up interviews, and classroom observation. Your interview and observations may be audio recorded, but you will not be videotaped at any time. The entire duration of your post-assessment interview (not more than 1 hour), follow-up interviews (not more than 30 minutes), and each classroom observation (not more than 50 minutes per class period) will be audio recorded. Data collected from the empathy assessment, interviews, and observations are kept confidential, protected by a password protected virtual storage space, and will only be made accessible to the principal investigator. You can plan to be observed (1 entire class period each time) for no more than a total 20 hours over the course of the semester. You will spend no more than 1.5 hours completing the empathy assessment and our initial interview. You can expect to discuss your route into teaching, your definition(s) of empathy, and the impact of empathy on your professional practice with Black male students in the initial interview. You will also be asked to participate in no more than 3 brief follow-up interviews and one exit interview at the conclusion of the data collection period. The follow-up interviews will be for the Principal Investigator to clarify and ask any questions he has based on classroom observations. The exit interview will be an opportunity for you and the Principal Investigator to reflect on the entire data collection, for you to get clarification and check accuracy of Principal Investigator data collection, and to ask any final questions about the final research report. These subsequent interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time at a location of your choosing. The principal investigator will observe you no more than 2 times in any given week for the duration of the data collection period.

This research presents minimal risk to you due to the potential for a breach of privacy and/or confidentiality. Your name and/or other personally identifiable information will be withheld from the final report and substituted with an appropriate pseudonym. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study and the final write up of the report. You will be entitled to a personal copy of the final report once it is complete. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. This research project will inform the field of education and teacher preparation of the potential usefulness of applying specific dimensions of empathy by teachers to their professional teaching practice with

culturally diverse students. Your refusal to enroll in the study will not impact your relationship with the school.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Warren at the contact information listed above or the faculty advisor Steve Tozer, PhD at [stozer@uic.edu](mailto:stozer@uic.edu). Additionally, you may contact the UIC IRB/OPRS if you have any questions regarding your rights as research subjects at 312-996-1711 or [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu). Also note that UIC OPRS and the State of Illinois auditors may review to see how the research is conducted. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this important study.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THE ABOVE AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. YOU ALSO AFFIRM THAT YOU UNDERSTAND PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY DISCONTINUE PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME.

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name

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Principal Investigator Signature

---

Date

**Informed Consent Form***Administrator***Principal Investigator:** C. Warren M. A., Doctoral Candidate**Institution:** University of Illinois at Chicago**PI Contact Information:** [cawarren@uic.edu](mailto:cawarren@uic.edu) 773 – 495 – 8155

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chezare Warren of the University of Illinois at Chicago under the close supervision of faculty in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. In this research project, we hope to learn more about how teachers conceive of empathy and the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers in urban schools negotiate interactions with Black male students. You have been selected for participation in this study because of your relationship to the teacher and student participants, the eligibility of your school for participation in the study, and your initial willingness to participate in the study as confirmed by our previous phone/email communication.

Participation in the study includes one interview only. Your interview may be audio recorded, but you will not be videotaped. Data collected from the interview will be kept confidential, protected by a password protected virtual storage space and will only be made accessible to the principal investigator and his faculty advisor. You can plan to spend no more than 30 minutes completing the interview. You will identify a cohort of White female teachers in your school who you believe are culturally responsive based on the Principal Investigator's questioning. At the end of the interview, you can expect to provide a list of these teachers to the Principal Investigator. This research presents minimal risk to you due to the potential for a breach of privacy and/or confidentiality. Your name and/or other personally identifiable information will be withheld from the final report and substituted with an appropriate pseudonym. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study and the final write up of the report. You will be entitled to a personal copy of the final report once it is complete.

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. This research project will inform the field of education and teacher preparation of the potential usefulness of using specific dimensions of empathy as an early indicator of a teacher's propensity to become a culturally responsive teacher. The principal investigator will not disclose anything we discuss or any other information obtained from your participation with any teacher or student participants. Your refusal to enroll in the study will not impact your relationship with the school.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Warren at the contact information listed above or the faculty advisor Steve Tozer, PhD at [stozer@uic.edu](mailto:stozer@uic.edu). Additionally, you may contact the UIC IRB/OPRS if you have any questions regarding your rights as research subjects at 312-996-1711 or [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu). Also note that UIC OPRS and the State of Illinois auditors may review to see how the research is conducted. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this important study.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THE ABOVE AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. YOU ALSO AFFIRM THAT YOU UNDERSTAND PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY DISCONTINUE PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME.

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name

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Principal Investigator Signature

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Date

**Informed Consent Form***Students 18 and Over***Principal Investigator:** C. Warren M. A., Doctoral Candidate**Institution:** University of Illinois at Chicago**PI Contact Information:** [cawarren@uic.edu](mailto:cawarren@uic.edu) 773 – 495 – 8155

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chezare Warren of the University of Illinois at Chicago under the close supervision of faculty in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. In this research project, we hope to learn more about how teachers understand empathy and the usefulness of empathy for helping White female teachers in urban schools have more positive interactions with Black male students. You have been invited to participate in this study because you were recommended and you meet gender, race, and grade level eligibility requirements.

Your participation in the study includes participating in one focus group session to happen outside of normal school hours (Most likely at the very end of the school day). The focus group will include at least 5 and no more than 15 students including you and be conducted on school property in a large group session. Your focus group participation may be audio recorded, but you will not be videotaped. You will be asked to discuss your personal experiences with White female teachers. While you will not be asked to reveal names during this particular portion of the focus group, there is no guarantee of confidentiality. The Principal Investigator will specifically ask you about the importance of your teacher's ability to understand or empathize with you. Then, you along with the other focus group participants will nominate a list of teachers who you think empathizes with students very well. Data collected from the focus group are kept confidential, secured by a password protected virtual storage space, and will only be made accessible to the principal investigator. You can expect that you will not be held more than 2 hours for participation in the focus group.

This research presents minimal risk to you due to the potential for a breach of privacy and/or confidentiality. Your name and/or other personally identifiable information will be withheld from the final report and substituted with an appropriate pseudonym if necessary. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study and the final write up of the report. You will be entitled to a personal copy of the final report once it is complete. There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study. This research project will inform the field of education and teacher preparation of the potential usefulness of applying specific dimensions of empathy by teachers to their professional teaching practice with culturally diverse students in general, and Black males in particular. Your refusal to enroll in the study will not impact your relationship with the school.

If you decide to allow to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Warren at the contact information listed above or the faculty advisor Steve Tozer, PhD at [stozer@uic.edu](mailto:stozer@uic.edu). Additionally, you may contact the UIC IRB/OPRS if you have any questions regarding your rights as research subjects at 312-996-1711 or [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu). Also note that UIC OPRS and the State of Illinois auditors may review to see how the research is conducted. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this important study.



YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THE ABOVE AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. YOU ALSO AFFIRM THAT YOU UNDERSTAND PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY DISCONTINUE PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME.

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name

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Principal Investigator Signature

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Date

**Informed Consent Form***Parent***Principal Investigator:** C. Warren M. A., Doctoral Candidate**Institution:** University of Illinois at Chicago**PI Contact Information:** [cawarren@uic.edu](mailto:cawarren@uic.edu) 773 – 495 – 8155

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chezare Warren of the University of Illinois at Chicago under the close supervision of faculty in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. In this research project, we hope to learn more about how teachers understand empathy and the usefulness of empathy for helping White female teachers in urban schools have more positive interactions with Black male students. Your child has been invited to participate in this study because he meets gender, race, and grade level eligibility requirements.

Your child's participation in the study includes participation in one focus group session to happen outside of normal school hours (Most likely at the very end of the school day). The focus group will include at least 5 and no more than 15 students including your child and be conducted on school property in a large group session. Your child's focus group participation may be audio recorded, but he will not be videotaped. The students will discuss their personal experiences with White female teachers with the Principal Investigator. While this particular portion of the focus group, students will be asked not to reveal names, there is no guarantee of confidentiality. The Principal Investigator will specifically ask students about the importance of their teacher ability to understand or empathize with him. Then, the focus group participants will nominate a list of teachers who they think empathize with them very well. Data collected from the focus group are kept confidential, protected by a password protected virtual storage space, and will only be made accessible to the principal investigator. You can expect that your child will not be held more than 2 hours for participation in the focus group.

This research presents minimal risk to your child due to the potential for a breach of privacy and/or confidentiality. Your child's name and/or other personally identifiable information will be withheld from the final report and substituted with an appropriate pseudonym if necessary. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study and the final write up of the report. You will be entitled to a personal copy of the final report once it is complete. There are no direct benefits to your child's participation in this study. This research project will inform the field of education and teacher preparation of the potential usefulness of applying specific dimensions of empathy by teachers to their professional teaching practice with culturally diverse students in general, and Black males in particular. Your refusal to enroll in the study will not impact your relationship with the school.

If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your permission and to discontinue your child's participation at any time without penalty. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Warren at the contact information listed above or the faculty advisor Steve Tozer, PhD at [stozer@uic.edu](mailto:stozer@uic.edu). Additionally, you may contact the UIC IRB/OPRS if you have any questions regarding your rights as research subjects at 312-996-1711 or [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu). Also note that UIC OPRS and the State of Illinois auditors may review to see how the research is conducted. Thank you in advance

for considering your child's participation in this important study.

**Parents please be aware that under the Protection of Pupil Rights Act.20 U.S.C. Section 1232(c)(1)(A), you have the right to review a copy of the questions asked of or materials that will be used with your students. If you would like to do so, you should contact Chezare Warren at 773 – 495 – 8155 to obtain a copy of the questions or materials.**

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Yes, I agree to have my child participate in this study

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No, I do not give consent for my child to participate in the study

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Print Student Name

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Parent Signature

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Date

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Print Parent Name

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Principal Investigator Signature

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Date

**Informed Consent Form***Online***Principal Investigator:** C. Warren M. A., Doctoral Candidate**Institution:** University of Illinois at Chicago**PI Contact Information:** [cawarren@uic.edu](mailto:cawarren@uic.edu) 773 – 495 – 8155

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chezare Warren of the University of Illinois at Chicago under the close supervision of faculty in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. In this research project, we hope to learn more about how teachers conceive of empathy and the utility of empathy for improving how teachers negotiate interactions with Black male students. You were selected for participation because you are presently a practicing K-12 classroom teacher.

Participation in the study includes completing the following survey by answering each question honestly. The survey should take less than 10 or 15 minutes to complete. This survey will help me to understand how you conceive of empathy and its role in your professional teaching practice with Black male students. Also, the survey will solicit some demographical information, however, no questions will require any personal identifying information. Your identity is anonymous and the data collected will be kept completely private. Follow directions at the end of the survey to be anonymously entered into a raffle for one of four \$25 gift cards to Office Depot. Winners will be drawn at the end of March 2012.

This research presents minimal risk to you due to the potential for a breach of privacy and/or confidentiality. There is no way for me to link your name to any responses that you provide. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study and the final write up of the report. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. This research project will inform the field of education and teacher preparation of the potential usefulness of applying empathy by teachers to their professional teaching practice with culturally diverse students. If you choose not to complete the survey now or at any point while taking the survey, you may click the exit button to discontinue participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Warren at the contact information listed above or the faculty advisor Steve Tozer, PhD at [stozer@uic.edu](mailto:stozer@uic.edu). Additionally, you may contact the UIC IRB/OPRS if you have any questions regarding your rights as research subjects at 312-996-1711 or [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu). Also note that UIC OPRS and the State of Illinois auditors may review to see how the research is conducted. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this important study.

BY CLICKING THE BOX **I AGREE**, YOU INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE READ THE ABOVE AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. YOU ALSO AFFIRM THAT YOU UNDERSTAND PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAY DISCONTINUE PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME.

☐

I Agree

☐

I Disagree

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Student Assent Form

1. My name is Chezare Warren.
2. We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the importance of a teacher to understand her students. You will be asked to talk about your previous learning experiences with White female teachers. You will also get to comment openly about whether or not it is important for a teacher to understand your point of view. At the end of the focus group you and your classmates will nominate a list of the teachers that you think do a good job understanding you.
3. If you agree to be in this study you will talk freely about your personal experiences with White female teachers in school. Even though you will not be asked to reveal teacher's names during this portion of our conversation, there is no guarantee of confidentiality.
4. The risks for your participation in this focus group are minimal. You only say what you feel comfortable saying.
5. The benefits of your participation will include helping me to learn characteristics of a teacher that make them good at their job.
6. You have already gotten permission from your parents to participate in this study, but just because they said "yes" you can still decide not to do this. This entire focus group will be audio recorded, but you will NOT be videotaped.
7. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop. Refusal to enroll will not impact your relationship with the teachers, staff, or administration in your school.
8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call me at 773 – 495 – 8155 or ask me next time you see me.
9. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age

\_\_\_\_\_  
Grade in School

## VITA

# Chezare A. Warren

2901 S. King Drive Apartment 1810  
Chicago, IL 60616  
(773) 495 – 8155

[chezare.warren@gmail.com](mailto:chezare.warren@gmail.com)

**Postdoctoral Faculty Fellow**, Division of Applied Psychology and Human Development,  
Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

**Research Fellow**, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, Graduate School of  
Education, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

### **Education**

August 2012      University of Illinois at Chicago      Chicago, IL  
Ph.D. Policy Studies in Urban Education  
Concentration: Social Foundations of Education  
**Dissertation Title:** Empathic Interaction: White Female Teachers and Their  
Black Male Students

**Dissertation Committee:** Steve Tozer, (Chair), Marisha Humphries,  
Marvin Lynn, James Moore III, and David Stovall.

May 2008      Concordia University Chicago      River Forest, IL  
M.A. School Leadership

May 2005      University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign      Urbana, IL  
B.S. Elementary Education  
Minor: Teacher Education Mathematics

### **Certification**

September 2010      Certified Teacher Evaluator, **Teacher Advancement Program (TAP)**  
[www.tapsystem.org](http://www.tapsystem.org)

May 2009      Type 75 Illinois State Administrative Certificate  
Concentration: Kindergarten – Twelfth grade general school  
administration

August 2005      Type 03 Standard Illinois State Elementary Teaching Certificate,  
Concentration: Self Contained Kindergarten – Ninth grade  
Middle School Endorsements: Mathematics, Language Arts, and Social \  
Science

### **Research Interests**

General: Social Foundations of Education; Social Context of Urban Education; Sociology of  
Education; Culturally Responsive Teaching; Critical Race Theory; Teacher Education

Specific: Utility of empathy in teacher-student interactions; Relationship building capacities of  
White female teachers with Black male students; Counter-storytelling research methodology and  
False Empathy

2012 -  
Postdoctoral Faculty University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, PA  
*Division of Applied Psychology and Human Development*  
*Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education*

2010 – 2012  
Adjunct Faculty                                      Concordia University-Chicago          River Forest, IL  
***Graduate Level Course Taught:*** FPR 6000 Ethics & Foundations in American Education

2011 – 2012  
Campus Programs Programmer University of Illinois at Chicago Chicago, IL  
**Primary Responsibility:** Conceptualize, plan, organize, implement, and evaluate a range of weekly social, educational, cultural, and recreational programs for graduate, professional, and undergraduate students.

2007	Chicago Public Schools	Chicago, IL
Principal Intern		
<b>Primary Responsibility:</b> Co-lead administrative tasks as assigned to me by school principal and assistant principal which included evaluating teachers, creating student attendance action plans, and revising the school promotion policy.		

## 2004 – 2005

Student Teacher  
Champaign-Urbana, IL  
*Edison Middle School* (6<sup>th</sup> Grade Math)  
*Prairie Elementary School* (5<sup>th</sup> Grade Self-contained)

Champaign & Urbana School Districts

2000 – 2004  
Teacher Assistant & Mentor  
Champaign-Urbana, IL  
*Edison Middle School* (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade all subjects)  
*Urbana Middle School* (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade all subjects)

Champaign & Urbana School Districts

Summer 2001 & 2004  
Teacher & Math Department Head  
Houston, TX  
*Bellaire High School* (Rising 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders from the 3<sup>rd</sup> ward of Houston)  
*Germantown Friends School* (Rising 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders from the Germantown area of Philadelphia)

Breakthrough Collaborative      Philadelphia, PA &

## **Publications**

### **Book Reviews**

**Warren C.A.** (In Press) Cultural Collision and Collusion: Reflections on Hip-Hop Culture, Values, and Schools written by Floyd D. Beachum and Carlos McCray. *Journal of Educational Foundations*.

### **Book Chapters**

**Warren, C.A.** (In Press) Being Black, Being Male, and Choosing to Teach in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Understanding My Role, Embracing My Call. *Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the Nation's Workforce* to be published in 2012 edited by Chance W. Lewis & Ivory Toldson.

### **Refereed Journals**

**Warren, C.A.** (Under Review). Perspective divergence and the miseducation of Black boys. *Journal of African American Males in Education*. **Invited**

**Warren, C.A.** (In Progress). Conflicts and Contradictions: Conceptions of Empathy and the Work Of Well-Intentioned White Female Teachers.

**Warren, C.A.** (In Progress). Celebrity Charters: One Teacher's Perspective on the Perils of Popularity

### **Conference Presentations**

**Warren, C.A.** (2012). *Empathy as a disposition of culturally responsive teachers*. Roundtable session presented at 2012 International Conference on Interpersonal Relationships in Education. Vancouver, Canada

**Warren, C.A.** (2012). "Nice White Ladies": Operationalizing the application of empathy to the student teacher interactions of White female teachers with Black male students. Paper session presented at 2012 American Educational Research Association national conference. Vancouver, Canada

**Warren, C.A.** (2012). *Understanding student perspective: The application of empathy to the student advocacy work of White female teachers for Black male students*. Paper session presented at 2012 American Educational Research Association national conference. Vancouver, Canada



- Warren, C.A.** & Milner, H.R. (Co-Chairs) (2012). *Black males in the education pipeline: Asset based pedagogy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Symposium session presented at 2012 American Educational Research Association national conference. Vancouver, Canada
- Warren, C.A.** (2011). *Teaching Black boys in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Workshop session presented at 2011 National Alliance of Black School Educators annual conference. New Orleans, LA
- Warren, C.A.** (2011). *Conflicts & Contradictions: An exploratory study of empathy and the work of well intentioned White female teachers*. Paper presented at University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education Research Day. Chicago, IL
- Warren, C.A.**, & Noguera, P. (Co-Chairs) (2011). *Reducing Vulnerability: Responding to the Challenges Confronting Black Males Through the Development of Research-based Interventions*. Symposium presented at the American Educational Researchers Association annual meeting. New Orleans, LA
- Warren, C.A.** (2011). *Assessing empathy in culturally responsive white female teachers*. Paper presented at the American Educational Researchers Association annual meeting. New Orleans, LA
- Warren, C.A.** et.al (2010). *Emerging scholars at work: Establishing a community of practice in graduate school*. Workshop session presented at the American Educational Studies Association. Denver, CO
- Warren, C.A.** (2010). *Making relationships work: Black boys and the schools that serve them*. Workshop session presented at the 2010 Black Male Summit. Akron, OH: University of Akron

### **Professional Development**

- Warren, C.A.** (2010 – 2011). Teacher Advancement Program Weekly Professional Development. Weekly professional development presented to the faculty of Mary Mapes Dodge Renaissance Academy: An Academy of Urban School Leadership (AUSL) Training Academy. Chicago, IL
- Warren, C.A.** (2010). *Being a chapter advisor: Negotiating meaningful relationships with your undergrads*. Presented to the national organization of Megistè Aretè Christian Fraternity, Inc. Chicago, IL
- Warren, C.A.** (2010). *Making Relationships Work: Managing Meaningful Interactions with Your Students of Color*. Presented to the faculty and staff of Robert Fulton Elementary School. Itasca, IL
- Warren, C.A.** (2010). *Different Strokes for Different Folks: Implementing effective differentiation and formative assessment strategies*. Presented to the faculty and staff of Robert Fulton Elementary School. Chicago, IL
- Warren, C.A.** (2009). *Integrating technology effectively into the mathematics classroom*. Presented to the faculty and staff of Perspectives-Calumet Middle School. Chicago, IL

### **Invited Panel**

- Warren, C.A.** (2012). *African-American Academic Network Career Panel*. Panel held at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Chicago, IL

**Warren, C.A.** (2011). *Black Law Student Association of Northwestern University 2011 Black History Month Education Panel included Tim King, David Chizewer, Bill Gerstein: Charter Schools & Small Schools*. Panel held at Northwestern University Law School. Chicago, IL

**Warren, C.A.** (2010). *FRESH: Focusing on the Restoration of our Education, Spirituality, and Health*. Panel held at Harris Park Community Center. Chicago, IL

**Warren, C.A.** (2010). *Is Affirmative Action a Good Thing in Education?* Panel held at Jones College Prep High School. Chicago, IL

### **Invited Lectures**

Congressional Black Caucus, ***Breaking Barriers Session***, Vancouver, B.C., April 2012  
University of Illinois-Chicago, ***Brown Bag***, Institute of Race and Public Policy, April 2012  
Evanston Township High School District 202, ***Guest Lecturer***, March 2012  
Purdue University, ***Promising Pathways: Future of Multicultural Education***, January 2012  
University of Illinois at Chicago, ***Guest Lecturer***, September 2011  
Noble Street Charter High School: Pritzker Campus, ***Guest Lecturer***, November 2010  
Salvation Army: Chicago Temple Corps, ***Guest Lecturer***, September 2010

### **Professional Service**

#### **American Educational Research Association (AERA)**

Division K Teaching and Teacher Education  
Executive Board Member (2010 – Present)  
Nominating Committee Member (2011 – 2012)  
Division G Social Context of Education  
Trueba Awards Committee Member (2011)  
Special Interest Groups (SIGs)  
Multicultural & Multiethnic Education (2011 – Present)  
Critical Examination of Race, Class, and Gender (2011 – Present)  
Research Focus on Black Education (2011 – Present)  
Sociology of Education (2011 – Present)

#### **Critical Race Studies in Education Association**

Conference Proposal Reviewer (2011 – Present)  
Graduate Council Member (2010 – 2012)

#### **Soul Children of Chicago**

Alumni Association Steering Committee (2011 – Present)  
Handbook Editor (2011 – 2012)

#### **Chicago Area Alliance of Black School Educators**

Black History Committee Member (2011 – 2012)

**National Black Graduate Student Association** (2011 – Present)

**National Association of Multicultural Education** (2011 – Present)

**Brothers of the Academy** (2010 – Present)

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Alumni Recruiter** (2009 – 2012)

### **Funding**

University of Illinois President's Research in Diversity Travel Award (**\$700 Award**) April 2012  
Division K Graduate Student Travel Award (**\$500 Award**) April 2012

Diversifying Faculty of Illinois Fellowship, <i>declined</i> (\$20,000 Award)	May 2011
University of Illinois at Chicago Abraham Lincoln Fellowship (\$31,000 Award)	April 2011
AERA Multi-cultural and Multi-ethnic Education SIG Travel Award (\$500 Award)	March 2011

### **Special Honors, Awards, and Acknowledgements**

Interpersonal Relationships Conference in Education "Best Paper" Nomination	April 2012
Division K Preconference Graduate Seminar Participant	April 2012
Outstanding Leadership Award, Dodge Renaissance Academy	June 2011
AERA Division G Featured Graduate Student	January 2011
Outstanding Performance, Robert Fulton Leadership Team	June 2010
Golden Key International Honor Society	September 2009
Invited Alumni Coach, University of Illinois Leadership Programs	February 2009
"Take Initiative" Award, Perspectives – Calumet Middle School	August 2008
"Top teachers boost poor kids' scores", Chicago Sun Times (6/9/06)	June 2006
Jean F. Hill Award, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	May 2005
Two University of Illinois Leadership Certificates	May 2005
National Dean's List	2004 – 2005
University of Illinois Top 100 Senior Honorary for outstanding graduating seniors	2004 – 2005
University of Illinois College of Education Dean's List	2003 – 2005
Ash Scholar, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign	2003 – 2005