SOCIALIZING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:
HOW COGENERATIVE DIALOGUES WITH EARLY ADOLESCENT BLACK MALES
FOSTER RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IN A LARGE, SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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To the Black boys in my school whose name will someday be chosen as a pseudonym too
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Mom, for giving me life. You did all the work and each August, I get the party and presents. You’ve always been my number one fan, and I love that you’re one small step away from tattooing my face on your arm. That level of unwavering support has allowed me to overcome life-threatening illnesses, reach for my dreams, and do it all with a confident smile. Regardless of my government name, you can always refer to me as Dr. Katz, your favorite child. Please feel free to copy this acknowledgment and share it publicly on your Facebook page.

Thank you, Dad, for taking a break from defending our country to come to meet me the day after I was born. Even without the 23andMe results, we always knew that I was “your kid” because of my stubbornness, resemblance to your sisters, and the myriad of health afflictions we share. You’ve set higher expectations than anyone else in my life, and because of you, I knew that failure was never an option. You exemplify a life committed to service, and I hope that future generations will be as proud of me as I am of you. The University of Florida and I also really appreciate how you, Mom, and the Visa Fairy covered my tuition for all three degrees.

Although you forgot to thank me in your dental school speech and after your residency, I’d like to thank you, Adam. I did my best to hold it together at work, and you still loved me when I unleashed everything at home. Between the constant affirmations, time and space to complete my work, and attention to my mental and physical health, you’ve been an excellent partner. Once this is over, I promise to help with the cooking and cleaning that I’ve neglected over the past three and a half years.

To all of my friends who supported me when I went MIA, I’m back! Your level of love, support, and pride is almost to the degree of my mom, and I’m eternally thankful. Throughout this process, I’ve never once felt alone.
Finally, I’d like to thank Johns Hopkins University for rejecting my application to their doctoral program. Without you, I might not have found my way back to the University of Florida’s exceptional commitment to cultivating scholarship, dynamic pedagogical practices, and demand for equity. I am grateful to all of the professors at the University of Florida’s College of Education but would be lost without Dr. Chris Busey. I thought that I had never learned more than in your course, Teacher Learning and Socialization in High Poverty Schools. I was wrong. Having you as my dissertation chair has genuinely changed my life. You are an exemplary model of how to teach with genuine care. You pushed me further than I ever imagined I could go all the while paying close attention to my needs as a person beyond the realm of graduate school. I will always be grateful for your support along this journey and feel lucky to call you my friend.
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<tr>
<td>CDP</td>
<td>Census Designated Place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cogen</td>
<td>Cogenerative Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Crisis Prevention Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English Students of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARMS</td>
<td>Free And Reduced-price Meals System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Instructional Leadership Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>In School Suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEPD</td>
<td>Job-Embedded Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>Out of School Suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDT</td>
<td>Staff Development Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>SERT</td>
<td>School Energy and Recycling Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIP</td>
<td>School Improvement Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWIS</td>
<td>School Wide Information System</td>
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<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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SCHOOL

By
Rachel Hope Orgel

December 2019

Chair: Christopher L. Busey
Major: Curriculum and Instruction

According to a 2016-2017 school student survey initiated at Martin Hope Elementary, almost 15 percent of students of color and students impacted by poverty stated there was either no or only one adult in the building in which they can trust. While this number may not appear alarming, this is almost double the percentage of white middle-class students who expressed the same sentiment. Perhaps symbiotically, in addition to a lack of trust, there is also a discipline gap at Martin Hope Elementary. The literature is evident in demonstrating that a racial chasm often leads to mistrust in addition to culturally incongruent school structures, and misapplied norms that lead to the discipline gap. Such is the case for Martin Hope whose teachers—similar to many U.S. schools—are predominantly white women. As the Staff Development Teacher at Martin Hope Elementary, one of my major duties is to design and implement professional learning for the staff; perhaps more importantly and salient to this research study, my position as Staff Development Teacher requires that I directly address issues concerning teacher relationship building with Black male students at Martin Hope Elementary. Thus, recognizing my influential role to potentially ameliorate the many racial inequities that exist at Martin Hope Elementary the purpose of this practitioner-research study was to work towards building the capacity of teachers
so that they could strengthen relationships of trust with our marginalized Black male students. Drawing from social design-based research, this study brought together Black male students and their teachers to create a social ecology in the school that would work towards building trust with teachers and eliminating racial discriminatory school practices. To carry out this study, educators and students at Martin Hope Elementary participated in cogenerative dialogues (cogens) which broker an opportunity to work together and learn from each other with their voices holding equal power. In addition to cogenerative dialogues, I conducted individual interviews with teachers, focus group interviews with students, and collected observational data from classrooms of participating teachers. Analysis of the data revealed three findings consistent with current research related to Black males’ educational experiences and anti-Black school environments. First, findings illustrated that societal constructs of race impact relationships at Martin Hope. Second, Black male students at Martin Hope expressed the need for and appreciation of teacher care. Finally, conversations with and observations of teachers at Martin Hope demonstrate that teachers feel constricted by the pressures of mandated academic curriculum linked to high stakes testing. This research study is significant in demonstrating how reality pedagogy can work towards improving the everyday school practices that foster distrust and denigrate the humanity of Black male students not only at Martin Hope Elementary but also in U.S. schools across the country. Moreover, cogenerative dialogues may serve as the path in which Martin Hope Elementary can build stronger relationships between Black males and teachers, and, in turn, improve the school experience and school outcomes for all students. This study also has implications for practitioner and teacher inquiry research. A social design-based research approach to teacher inquiry can foster multi-level transformation for inequitable school conditions that disproportionately impact the school experiences of students of color.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A little less than an hour outside a major U.S. city, Martin Hope Elementary School\(^1\) is situated within one of the largest public school districts in the nation. With an enrollment of over 850 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade, Martin Hope is also one of the larger elementary schools in our district. Martin Hope Elementary has a diverse student body with 30 percent identifying as Asian, 25 percent as Black or African American, 17 percent as Hispanic/Latino, 19 percent as white, and 9 percent as two or more races\(^2\) (School District document, 2017). Martin Hope also contributes to discourses of district-wide achievement as the elementary school won a National Blue Ribbon Award for our high levels of student achievement. In addition to nationally recognized awards, the district boasts an average 89.5 percent graduation rate amongst all 25 high schools.

While statistics are indicative of how schools and school districts have normed success, issues relevant to inequity and racism often persist on and below the surface. To highlight who might be underserved it is imperative that educators dig into the often overlooked details of the context as a simple description of a context is insufficient when conducting equity-oriented research (Gutiérrez, Engestrom, & Sannino, 2016). Such is the case especially when educational contexts are examined through the lens of Black males, who are underserved by schools and school districts (Howard 2008). For example, when compared to other large, urban districts with more than 10,000 Black male students, Baldwin County Public Schools\(^1\) also graduates a higher percentage of Black males than any other district in the country (Schott Foundation, 2015). Yet a closer look at the data reveals that there is a 20 percent gap between

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\(^1\) All names have been changed to protect the privacy of participants.

\(^2\) Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Less than 5\% of students identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.
Black and white males (Schott Foundation, 2015). The Baldwin district may graduate more students, but the data reveals a disturbing and persistent trend.

It is also important to examine contexts beyond high school completion, which reveals that inequitable schooling practices manifest at the elementary level for Black males (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Martin Hope Elementary—where I currently serve as a Staff Development Teacher—is not exclusive from some of the racially discriminatory trends that remain untroubled by a cursory glance at the statistics. Although most, if not all, of Martin Hope’s teachers come to work with the best intentions, a racial and gender divide exists that cannot be ignored. In fact, faculty and administrators gain further insight into the problem when student voice is prioritized in the school improvement process (SIP). To do so, Martin Hope anonymously surveys all students in grades kindergarten through fifth-grade on an annual basis. Surveys from the previous two years asked students about instructional practices, school safety, and relationships. A question on the 2016-2017 survey asked, “Is there an adult in the building you trust?” with possible responses as: “There are many adults I trust”; “There are a few adults I trust”; “There is one adult I can trust”; or, “There are no adults I can trust.” In the 2017-2018 survey, the question was revised as follows: “Is there an adult in the building you can talk to when something is wrong?” with possible responses as: “There are many adults I can talk to”; “There are a few adults I can talk to”; “There is one adult I can talk to”; and “There are no adults I can talk to.”

Although the Instructional Leadership Team³ (ILT) examined all of the data, we focused specifically on groups of students who have traditionally been underserved in schools due to

³ Members of the instructional leadership team include the principal, assistant principal, staff development teacher, school counselor, reading specialist, an elected faculty representative, an elected support service representative, the special education team leader, the ESOL team leader, and team leaders from each of the kindergarten through fifth grade teams.
race, language, ethnicity, or income. Hence, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) compared responses between the entire school and our “focus” students; focus students for the previous two school years included all Black or African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, students receiving ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) support, and students receiving FARMS (free and reduced-price meals system). Members of the instructional leadership team noted the discrepancy between responses from our focus students and the remainder of the student population for this question. During the 2016-2017 school year, almost double the number of focus students compared to non-focus students stated there was either no or only one adult in the building to trust. The 2017-2018 survey resulted in small improvements; however, 16.8 percent of focus students stated they still had only one or no adults to trust compared to the 11.9 percent of non-focus students with only one or no adults to trust. Table 1-1 and Table 1-2 display these data below. The ILT demonstrated concern that any student in our building would respond that there were no trusted adults. As a result, they requested additional professional development on relationship building with students.

Table 1-1. 2016-2017 Student-Adult Trust Item Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Students n=770</th>
<th>Non-Focus Students n=385</th>
<th>Focus Students n=391</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No adults</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One adult</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few adults</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many adults</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>232</td>
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Table 1-2. 2017-2018 Student-Adult Trust Item Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Students n=790</th>
<th>Non-Focus Students n=351</th>
<th>Focus Students n=439</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No adults</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One adult</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few adults</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many adults</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>174</td>
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<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related issues persist at Martin Hope Elementary with regards to race and inequity. In addition to the student input data described above, School-Wide Information System (SWIS) database records show that our Black and African American students are seven times more likely to receive office disciplinary referrals than our White students. Perhaps symbiotically, in addition to a lack of trust, there is also a discipline gap at Martin Hope Elementary. The Discipline Gap is a term that describes the racial disparities between disciplinary referrals (Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2013). Howard, Douglas, and Warren (2016) recommended investigating disproportionate discipline when this ratio is 2:1 or higher; Martin Hope Elementary has tripled this ratio. Unfortunately Martin Hope Elementary is not unique as a well-established canon of research affirms that Black students, regardless of socioeconomic status or grade level, are disproportionally represented in this group (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott,
While male students, regardless of race, receive more disciplinary sanctions than females (Gregory et al., 2010), Black male students are at a significantly increased risk of being removed from school due to disproportionate disciplinary measures (Gregory et al., 2010). Rather than creating systems and procedures to reduce undesirable behaviors, the adults act on an impulse to establish control. Following these reactive disciplinary models, our students, like so many others, become daily victims of gender discrimination and systemic racism.

**Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

At the most basic level, Black male students are humans, and nationally, their fundamental human rights are denied through these disproportionate disciplinary measures taken against them in U.S. schools. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) specifically addresses the right to education stating that elementary education should be without cost, and must “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups” (UN General Assembly, 1948, p. 7) working towards peace. Using the “Will and Skill Matrix,” Howard et al. (2016, p. 6) explained that teachers are unaware and/or do not care about inequities for Black males, have either the will or the skill to address inequities, or possess both the will and skill to act on behalf of the rights of students. Given my three years interacting with teachers at Martin Hope Elementary in my role as Staff Development Teacher where 88 percent of the full-time professional staff remained constant, I approximate that the majority of the teachers in my school fall into this middle category where they care about the students but are unsure of how, when, and where to act.

Much of this conjecture is substantiated by literature relevant to the racial demographic divide that also exists in schools whereby an overwhelming majority of teachers are white, and the students they teach are of color (Taie & Goldring, 2018). The literature is evident in
demonstrating that this racial chasm often leads to mistrust, culturally incongruent school structures, and misapplied norms that lead to the discipline gap (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). Such is the case for Martin Hope whose teachers, similar to many U.S. schools, are predominantly white females. We have one male teacher on each of the second through fifth-grade teams as well as a six teachers and one administrator of color. Only 8.5 percent of our professional staff identify as Black or African American, and 5.1 percent identify as Hispanic/Latino (School District document, 2017). Meanwhile Martin Hope Elementary educates a student body of 72 percent students of color. This disparity makes it especially necessary to purposefully and candidly address race.

As the Staff Development Teacher at Martin Hope Elementary, I design and implement the mandatory and voluntary professional learning opportunities for the staff, coordinate whole staff and smaller group meetings (e.g., ILT meetings), and lead grade level teams as well as professional learning communities (PLCs). I also mentor new and underperforming veteran teachers in one-to-one coaching sessions. Perhaps more importantly and salient to this research study, my position as Staff Development Teacher requires that I directly address the issues concerning teacher relationship building with Black male students at Martin Hope Elementary. Thus, recognizing my influential role to potentially ameliorate the many racial inequities that exist at Martin Hope Elementary the purpose of this practitioner-research study is to work towards building the capacity of teachers so that they can strengthen relationships of trust with our marginalized students and understand the uniqueness of each, especially Black male students.

Martin Hope Elementary has a problem. The state certified all teachers at Martin Hope as qualified educators; the teachers productively engage in professional learning on equity. Yet we,
the teachers in the building, are not developing a culture conducive to improving student-teacher relationships. Emdin (2011) acknowledged the value of both culturally relevant and critical pedagogy; however, he noted that neither offers distinct strategies for teachers to move from theory to practice. As the leader of adult learning in the building, I’ve often included elements of both culturally relevant and critical pedagogy in my PD (professional development) sessions. Emdin’s (2011) reality pedagogy borrows the culturally relevant pedagogy’s focus on student communities and the critical pedagogy’s emphasis on open dialogue around inequities. In reality pedagogy, Emdin (2011) outlined the following five practices where teachers and students work together to improve the learning experiences: cogenerative dialogues, coteaching, cosmopolitanism, context, and content. Each practice utilizes the realities of the specific students in the classroom, rather than broader generalizations, to inform teacher instruction. Beginning with Emdin’s (2011) first C in reality pedagogy, cogenerative dialogues, this research aims to provide a concrete tool for the teachers at Martin Hope to build relationships with their most marginalized students.

There is a tendency of the dominant culture to see Black males as a monolithic group with a singular story (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, to carry out this study, I will use cogenerative dialogues (cogens) to broker an opportunity for educators and students at Martin Hope Elementary to work together and learn from each other with their voices holding equal power. Emdin (2012) argued that cogens enable teachers to improve their practice by implementing culturally relevant changes informed by Black students' voices. Simultaneously, Black male students can demonstrate their positive leadership skills and dismantle false images that play a significant role in how a majority white teacher population comes to view them and their humanity. Therefore, I pose the following research questions:
1. How do cogenerative dialogues support relationship building between early adolescent Black males and their teachers?

2. How do early adolescent Black males respond to teachers who are engaged in ongoing job-embedded professional development on relationship building?

Although my job positions me as a teacher of teachers, I ultimately work to serve the students. Fullan (2016) defined building teacher capacity as “any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning” (p. 9). The goal is to develop knowledge and competencies, resources, and motivation for the individuals as well as the collective group. I believe that cogenerative dialogues may serve as the path on which Martin Hope Elementary can build stronger relationships between Black males and teachers, and, in turn, improve the school experience and school outcomes for all students. The nature of the cogen requires teachers to engage in reflective practice, increase their flexibility, and include students in the decision-making process. By attending to the strengths and needs of the students in the cogen, other classmates with aligned learning needs are also likely to benefit from the change in instruction and routines. The hope is that this method of reflection will become part of the teacher’s standard practice with or without a formalized structure.

**Researcher Positionality**

There is a running joke that all Jewish holidays tell the same story: People did not want us to be Jewish. We were outnumbered. We fought back. We prevailed. Growing up in a Jewish home, the message of tikkun olam, or repairing the world, was ever present in my life. From an early age, my family taught us the importance of tzedakah, charitable giving, and gemilut hasadim, acts of kindness, in and around our community. This message was echoed in the overseas military communities from my childhood; it is our duty to always take care of each other. As young children, we were taught to remember the struggle of our ancestors and to fight
against hatred of all kinds. Although tikkun olam has its roots in theology, modern Jews view it as our responsibility as humans to protect marginalized people and to work towards social justice.

One might wonder how a white woman came to research with young Black boys. As far back as I can remember, I have felt the urge to speak out against injustices. I recall being the smallest kid on the playground confronting much larger children for acting cruel. If it did not sit right with me, I said something about it. I have always been drawn to people and groups often deemed as “the other.” This continued when I started my teaching career working as a special educator. In supporting general education teachers, a lot of my effort went towards dismantling myths and stereotypes while advocating for the needs of my students. I began to ask myself many questions about the roots of injustices and how to react accordingly.

“We have an obligation to ask, from where do our questions originate? And then we know, to whom we are accountable” (Fine, 2018, p. 1). Perhaps because of the overrepresentation of Black youth in special education or the fact that I once lived in a densely populated area with predominantly Black people, or maybe because of the incredible equity learning opportunities afforded in my current district, I continuously asked myself questions about racial injustices. All injustice and oppression get to my core, but the magnitude of discrimination and brutality inflicted on Black males makes me especially angry.

I have been fortunate to work with and for talented Black men who have helped me to identify and address my own racial privilege. In my personal life, I have developed deep friendships with many other Black men who demolish negative stereotypes too often held about Black people. Most importantly, I have met some outstanding young Black students over the past thirteen years in education. It is for them that I embark on this research and it is them that I
thank for bringing me to this point. I only hope that through this work I can make them as proud of me as I am of them.

My position as a researcher is guided by the intersectionality of my being. I am an educated, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, Jewish female. Where most of my identity places me in the dominant group, I am only two generations removed from poverty and immigrant oppression. I come from a home where our celebration of social and economic advancement is interlaced with memories of adversity, struggle, and genocide. The history of my family acts as a reminder of not only from where we came but also where so many families exist today. As a white woman, I acknowledge the limitations of legitimacy in researching outside of my own racial group. My intention is not to speak for the young Black boys in my school or any school. Bhopal (2010), asserted that "all qualitative research is predicated on establishing personal, moral and political relationships of trust between the researcher and the researched" (p. 194). Framing the research with social design methodology and drawing mostly upon academics of color, I view this study as a unique opportunity to learn from and with the young Black males of Martin Hope Elementary.

**Significance of the Study**

This research study is designed to improve the everyday school practices that foster distrust and denigrate the humanity of Black male students not only at Martin Hope Elementary but also in schools across the country. Therefore, while this practitioner-research study is ultimately relevant to Martin Hope, I situate this research study within the broader literature base that acknowledges historical injustices in U.S. schools while telling a story of resilience and leadership. The ever-growing canon of educational research addresses Black males with a more recent focus on the imperative for teachers to meet the learning needs of Black males (Brown & Brown, 2012; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Butler et al., 2012; Dickerson & Agosto, 2015; Emdin,
2011; Emdin, 2012; Emdin, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Howard, 2008; Howard, 2013; Howard et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Love, 2013; Rocque, 2010; Singleton, 2015). A majority of the literature typically positions researchers outside of the school setting, however, as a member of my school’s community, I have a unique opportunity to both inform my own practice and add to the literature in the field at large. My research is also significant to the canon of practitioner research which fails to adequately address trust with Black males in education (Howard, 2008; Howard, 2013; Howard et al., 2016; Milner, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

Possibly due to Roth, Lawless, and Tobin’s (2000) original research on cogenerative dialogues being set in secondary, urban science classrooms, a significant amount of research completed since then also utilized science classrooms (Bayne, 2012; Beltramo, 2017; Martin & Scantlebury, 2008; Shady, 2013; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016;), urban areas (Bayne, 2012; Beltramo, 2017; Im & Martin, 2015; Martin & Scantlebury, 2008; Shady, 2013), and secondary education classrooms (Bayne, 2012; Beltramo, 2017; Higgins & Bonne, 2013; Shady, 2013, Sirrakos & Fraser). However, very little research, if any at all speaks to the use of cogenerative dialogue specifically with elementary students of color. Therefore, this research study will also contribute to the literature on cogenerative dialogues but will focus on fourth and fifth-grade reading, writing, and math classrooms. Emdin (2011) asserted that while much of the research with cogenerative dialogues employed science classrooms, reality pedagogy is valuable across content areas. Additionally, due to the structure of departmentalized classrooms at Martin Hope, a focus on reading, writing, and math courses allows for teaching and learning opportunities on a daily basis.
The study is limited to student participation among Black male students, as broadly defined across ethno-national lines. Throughout this research, I intentionally used a capital B when referring to Black people. A lowercase b refers to a color where the capital letter is more appropriate for a culture or ethnicity. Additionally, this style adds a level of humanity already afforded to white people. The 105 Black boys at Martin Hope Elementary include students who identify as Black, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, West Indian, African, or Multi-Racial (Interview with Martin Hope Elementary NAACP Parents' Council Representative).

Categorizing all of these students within the same group is not meant to diminish the importance of their unique heritage or essentialize their identities, but rather to account for some level of shared experience. As Delgado and Stefancic (2017) note, essentialism can result in the oversight of significant issues of race that emerge among sub-populations but is contrarily useful in establishing a collective aim as it involves racial justice. Although it addresses a void in the literature and many of the strategies may prove beneficial in other settings, my study will be designed for, and in collaboration with, the specific boys at Martin Hope Elementary. Therefore, while the findings contribute to the larger body of research, this research is not meant to become a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching Black males.

As a member of the Martin Hope community, I acknowledge the diversity of our student body, high levels of overall academic performance, and national recognition. However, I cannot ignore the racial disparities in achievement and discipline. Our students who have traditionally been underserved due to race, language, ethnicity, and income voiced a lack of trust at an alarming rate. My role as a building leader not only allows but also requires me to enact change. I designed this practitioner-research study to provide concrete practices for teachers to learn from and work with their most marginalized students to build relationships. Additionally, social-
design based research allows for teachers and students to create a social ecology with cogenerative dialogues as a mechanism for ensuring that student voice is prioritized. The following literature review demonstrates that Martin Hope is not alone. Focusing on societal perceptions of Black males, antiblack school environments, relationship building, and cogenerative dialogues, I outline a disturbingly systemic trend of racial and gender discrimination coupled with evidence of the resilience and leadership of Black males in the face of oppression.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

July 13, 2013, George Zimmerman was acquitted for the fatal shooting of an innocent and unarmed Black teenager, Trayvon Martin. Following the verdict, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatters appeared across various social media outlets to protest systemic racism against Black people. While some white Americans view the last six years as a tragic time noted by increased police brutality and violence, people of color can attest that it is the media presence that is novel rather than the injustices. With this increased attention in social media, newspapers, and on TV, there is also an increase in research addressing race, namely antiblack racism. With the abundance of research available, I focused my review on Black males school identities, the impact of teacher beliefs and antiblack school environments, relationship and capacity building across gendered and racial divides, and cogenerative dialogues. Whenever possible, I also draw on researchers of color to better tell the story.

Figure 2-1. Cycle of Antiblack Perceptions, Schools, and Punishments. Negative societal perceptions of Black males rooted in deficit thinking and false stereotypes contribute to antiblack school environments. Such schools exhibit inequity in regards to physical structures, expectations, and access. The cycle continues with a disproportionate amount and degree of punishment for Black males, and an overall lack of trust.
Societal Perceptions of Black Males

Themes of implicit bias, deficit paradigms, and dehumanization are commonplace throughout the current empirical research and conceptual literature on Black males. At the root of these oppressive beliefs and behaviors is the rejection of childhood innocence afforded to other groups. Goff et al. (2014) used four studies to compare perceptions of Black males and their white peers to determine if one group was perceived to be more childlike, the application of characteristics associated with children in both groups, and the association of Black males with apes. The first study utilized one hundred twenty-three university students, randomly assigned between three groups, to answer seven questions using a researcher-developed innocence scale. Participants used the scale for each of six age groups for either Black children and adults, white children and adults, or children and adults without a specified race. Goff et al. (2014) found that the Black children and adults were perceived as less innocent than the white or unspecified racial groups. They also found that after age nine, the age of most fourth graders, participants’ ratings were significantly disparate. There were no differences, however, between the white and general groups.

In their second study, Goff et al. (2014) randomly assigned fifty-nine university students within a two by three mixed-model design addressing misdemeanors vs. felonies (2) crimes and white vs. Black vs. Latino (3) races. Researchers showed participants pictures of males within a single race group aged ten to seventeen with an accompanying description of a crime and asked for an estimated age of the supposed criminal. Researchers used the difference in actual age and estimated age to compile an average overestimation score. Additionally, Goff et al. (2014) used four other measures: a researcher-created culpability scale, the Attitudes Towards Blacks Scale (Brigham, 1993, as cited in Goff et al., 2014), the Personalized Implicit Association Task (Olson & Fazio, 2004, as cited in Goff et al., 2014), and the Dehumanization Implicit Association Task
(Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008, as cited in Goff et al., 2014). Researchers found that participants overestimated the age of felony suspects more than misdemeanor suspects with Black males, where there was no difference for white or Latino suspects. Additionally, Black felony suspects were rated as older than white or Latino felony suspects. It is essential to include the degree of overestimation as well. Black felony suspects were perceived to be more than four and a half years older than their actual age meaning elementary and middle school Black boys are viewed as legal adults. Goff et al. (2014) also found participants to rate Black males more responsible for their actions than Latinos who were already rated more culpable than the white males. Goff et al.’s (2014) research provided evidence that by merely being born a Black male, the general public holds you more accountable for your actions. Further applications of Goff et al.’s (2014) research also demonstrate that Black males are denied the privilege of innocence afforded to other racial groups which results in violent discrimination.

As with Goff et al.’s (2014) findings, a larger body of educational research also explores biased perceptions, deficit thinking, dehumanization of Black bodies, and the denial of childhood innocence. Howard’s (2013) review of scholarly literature scoured research conducted in the United States between 2000 and 2012 that specifically named African American or Black males, rather than males of color, and included data reporting high levels of achievement. In reviewing the literature, he asked the following questions: How does it feel to be a problem? What does it mean when you are viewed as a problem? How does it affect one’s behavior? How does one develop coping strategies? How does it influence teacher behavior? How does it affect placement for special and gifted education? How does it influence one’s pursuit of academic success and social inclusion? According to the U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Howard, 2013), White males, eligible for free or reduced-price meals outperformed Black males
who were not eligible for free or reduced-price meals across the nation in math. “Thus, even the so-called privileges that accompany social and economic mobility do not seem to thwart the presence of race and racism when it comes to the schooling experiences of Black males” (Howard, 2013, p. 62). Howard (2013) denounced the singular interest of an overwhelming amount of researchers who centralize discussions around poverty and urban neighborhoods. A lack of racial consciousness and an influx of cultural ignorance is present across geographic regions and socioeconomic communities (Howard, 2013). Howard (2013) pointed to Critical Race Theory (CRT) having explanatory power for the experiences of Black male education which posits that racism is not only prevalent in American society, but it is an integral component to continue the status quo of racialized power (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, as cited in Howard, 2013).

Educational researchers also conceptually explain perceptions of Black males in educational contexts. Emdin (2012) illustrated how public images of Black males often use negative and stereotypical aspects of Black culture in entertainment which not only reinforces the false perceptions, but also contributes to hostile environments created for, not by, Black males. Ladson Billings (2011) described this dichotomy as a love-hate relationship where the public is infatuated by, and profits from, Black male culture yet simultaneously creates an erroneous typecast of what it means to be a Black male. Across America, and even internationally, non-Black youth use baggy pants, basketball and football paraphernalia, and tattoos to look cool, yet as Goff et al. (2014) substantiated, a Black male with the same appearance is hated, feared, and seen as the problem in society. “Thus, in many ways, this love-hate affair represents the illogicality of how many Black males are viewed within mainstream society” (Howard, 2013, p. 55). Historically, false stereotypes of Black males as dangerous
arose from the need to control enslaved people and was perpetuated by the early cinematic imagery of Black men as a rapist in films such as Birth of a Nation (Carter et al., 2016). One and a half centuries after the end of the Civil War, through legislation, policy, and the media, stereotypes of Black males are now ingrained as part of everyday American culture (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005, as cited in Carter et al., 2016). Like Goff et al. (2014), Dumas and Nelson (2016) emphasized the magnitude of dehumanization asserting that it goes beyond prejudicial thoughts and actions by creating a divide so sharp as to lose humanity. They contend that “Black children are among the most invisible, the most underrepresented and misrepresented, of all” (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 33). Love (2013) used the work of Patricia Williams to describe the same concepts of otherness and dehumanization. Williams (as cited in Love, 2013) called it spirit-murdering because by objectifying Black males, we deny their fundamental rights for safety, support, and acknowledgment. Schools characterized as dehumanizing, othering, and spirit-murdering maintain discriminatory cultures. Denying children their basic rights for opportunity, respect, and humanity are essentially antiblack school environments.

**Antiblack School Environments**

Third grade marks a time where most students are shifting from learning how to read into a phase of reading to learn; for Black boys, this age also marks where the public shifts their thinking of them from cute and innocent boys to criminalized men to be feared (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Emdin 2012; Goff et al., 2014; Love, 2013). Through successive racial profiling, the public often views Black males as deviants, criminals, threatening, or different (Brown & Brown, 2012; Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, & Pollock, 2016; Love, 2014;). As the research makes clear, there are parallels between societal perceptions and educational contexts for Black males, which results in subhuman treatment in schools. In addition to racial disparities along academic
lines, antiblack schooling also includes the variations in disciplinary practices, rates of school closures, access to cultural arts and advanced or culturally relevant academic courses, community fundraising capacities, quality of school facilities and supplies, teacher to student ratios, student demographics, rates of referral for special education and gifted, and graduation rates (Carter et al., 2016; Dumas, 2014; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Love, 2016).

There exists a delicate balance of acknowledging the needs of our students without unintentionally stereotyping Black males as requiring intervention. Emdin (2012) asserted that Black males are in a perpetual dilemma between “fitting into expectations embodying these false characteristics” (p. 14) and seeking out opportunities to counter the narrative. As is the case with Black males, Yosso (2005) claimed that deficit thinking is one of the most rampant forms of racism in contemporary schooling. For example, by blaming students and families of color, rather than the oppressive system that created the inequities, educators reinforce and rely on the erroneous stereotypes to continue the cycle of oppression. Dickerson and Agosto (2015) illustrated how marking Black males as at-risk positions the student at fault and results in ineffective teaching that contributes to lesser academic outcomes.

Antiblack schooling practices are perhaps most evident in disciplinary procedures, which mirrors the disproportionate punishment and treatment of Black males by the criminal justice system. Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, and Hughes (2014) used a hierarchical linear model to study racial disparities in disciplinary practices and possible impacting variables. They based their research in a midwestern state pulling data from all 1,720 public and charter schools. Additionally, they utilized student demographic data and an adapted version of the Disciplinary Practices Survey (Skiba, Edl, & Rausch, 2007, as cited in Skiba et al., 2014) to provide further insight. Their study found that race, over any other characteristic, predicted the most significant
odds for a student to receive out of school suspension (OSS) as compared to in-school suspension (ISS). Skiba et al., (2014) also found that schools with higher levels of academic achievement afforded students an element of protection as they were less likely to suspend or expel students. Disturbingly, the racial demographics of the school’s overall enrollment, not individual student demographics or severity of the behavior, foretold the likelihood of OSS. “Rich and poor schools alike, regardless of one’s gender, one’s school achievement level, or the severity of one’s behavior, simply attending a school with more Black students substantially increases one’s risk for receiving an out-of-school suspension” (Skiba et al., 2014, p. 661).

Where there were more Black students in a school, a student was more likely to endure OSS rather than ISS.

Looking closer at schools with majority Black student populations, Kennedy-Lewis (2013) studied discipline during early adolescent years where students transitioned from elementary to middle school. She asked, “How does the nature of these students’ discipline experiences change during the transition to middle school?” (Kennedy-Lewis, 2013, p. 100). In one of the largest school districts in the United States, Kennedy-Lewis (2013) researched one school with over 1,000 students where 60 percent of the students were Black. She interviewed four boys and seven girls identifying as either Black or multi-racial and had at least two OSS before April during the 2010-2011 school year. Kennedy-Lewis (2014) used semi-structured interviews to ask students about their school experiences related to academics, discipline, relationships. Across the interviews, students expressed a need for improved relationships with better understanding, boundaries, high expectations, and presumed innocence.

As part of a large-scale ethnographic study, Allen (2014) interviewed academically successful Black male students from a large suburban high school to better understand their
perspectives on the connections between race and education. Consistent with related research, the students shared their experiences with antiblack school environments including prejudicial practices and low expectations. Conversely, the participants also commented on teacher qualities that created a conducive environment for success. The students recognized teachers with asset-based views who provided rigorous and relevant coursework, high expectations, and genuine care. Allen (2014) found that the students expected teachers to demonstrate care for the profession of teaching as well as their students. Participants in the study noted multiple ways that teachers built relationships including helping before and after school, enforcing accountability, challenging unmotivated learners, and teaching beyond the baseline standards. The students in Allen’s (2014) study expressed a sense of comfort in specific classroom environments contrary to otherwise volatile spaces often created by antagonistic teacher-student relationships (Allen, 2014). Although the literature indicates a concerning pattern of dehumanization, othering, and discrimination, research also exists on how to dismantle this antiblack school culture.

**Relationship Building with Black Males**

Relational teaching requires educators to use accumulated personalized knowledge of their students to inform their instructional practices. These well-developed relationships that go beyond the typical imbalance of power between teachers and students result in improved learning outcomes and are especially crucial for Black males (Howard et al., 2016) A cadre of teachers committed to building effective relationships can establish and uphold a relational school climate. Howard et al., (2016) described capacity building as a way to bolster Black male success by developing people, institutions, and ideologies. My role as the SDT is to create conditions that allow teachers to examine, question, and interrupt norms that sustain inequity.
In her research with boys transitioning from elementary to middle school, Kennedy-Lewis (2013) found that as boys changed settings, they experienced an abatement in quality relationships due, in part, by the increased number of teachers with larger class sizes. Building relationships under these circumstances are, however, possible. Reichert and Hawley (2009) conducted a large-scale international study using data from thousands of boys and their teachers in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Great Britain, South Africa, and Australia. Across regions and cultures, they found three permeating themes to teach boys successfully: relational learning, a non-verbal feedback cycle, and transitivity (Reichert, 2015; Reichert, 2016; Reichert & Hawley, 2009; Reichert & Hawley 2013). Reichert and Hawley (2009) reported that the majority of their student participants cared about academic success and relationships with teachers who supported and believed in their students. In fact, many students described the relationships as the “make-or-break dimension” (Reichert, 2016, p. 24). Reichert (2015) described the relationship as a “working alliance” (p. 45) where students and teachers shared a common objective to develop academic mastery, and teachers exhibited flexibility and reflection. The second theme present in successful relationships involved teachers reacting to the students’ cycle of nonverbal feedback. Simply put, the boys were engaged in lessons where teachers used effective strategies and disengaged without them. Teachers should use this dynamic feedback to inform their instruction. Reichart and Hawley (2009) described the final theme of transitivity as an element of teaching, such as movement or an unexpected surprise, that maintains students’ attention.

Employing a critical ethnographic study, he found that Reichart and Hawley’s (2009; 2013; 2014) strategies for relational teaching supported the Black males in their learning which also worked to counter many false stereotypes associated with Black males. Nelson (2015) reported four themes attributed to relationally effective teachers: “(1) reaching out and going beyond; (2) personal advocacy; (3) establishing common ground; and (4) accommodating opposition” (p. 13). Counter to that, when describing ineffective relationships, the boys often used the term disrespect (Nelson, 2015).

McKinney de Royston, Vakil, Nasir, Ross, Givens, & Holman (2017) focused their research on contexts with both Black male students and teachers. McKinney de Royston et al., (2017) also emphasized a fundamental need for caring relationships with Black males. They described this work as political in nature where, by caring, teachers view their purpose as agents of social change of creating capital in a context beyond the school setting. “These educators envision education as a vehicle for racial justice and view the settings in which they work, such as classrooms and out of school programs, as sites of resistance” (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017, p. 7). Although the study included only Black male participants, McKinney de Royston et al., (2017) asserted that through scaffolding, training, and personal development, non-Black teachers could also develop relationships of politicized caring. This finding is especially important because as a white teacher-researcher using social design methodology and cogenerative dialogues, I am looking to foster authentic relationships that acknowledge the systemic oppression of marginalized students.

**Cogenerative Dialogues**

Cogenerative dialogues are the first of five Cs of reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2011); co-teaching, cosmopolitanism, context, and content round out the remaining elements. Emdin (2011) described reality pedagogy as the next iteration of culturally relevant teaching and critical
pedagogy as it focuses on the experiences of teachers and students first which, in turn, shape curriculum and instruction. Additionally, reality pedagogy provides distinct methods rather than merely theoretical ideas. The practical components convene with theory to increase teacher effectiveness and impact change. Cogens begin with a teacher and a small group of students within the same classroom who meet to discuss and collectively decide upon ways to improve the classroom environment. They differ from typical class meetings as they reflect communication styles and structures of many urban Black youth communities by including cyphers often found in hip-hop music within the dialogues. Cyphers involve highly structured turn-taking between rappers where all players form a circle and share equal opportunities to perform; topics within the cypher echo the shared experiences of the group. Similarly, cogens utilize a circular arrangement, uniform talking time where all participants have equal standing, and a goal to develop an action plan based on the collective experiences of the classroom (Emdin, 2011).

Although cogenerative dialogues are new to my district, they are not new to research. Developed initially by Roth et al. (2000), cogenerative dialoguing grew out of reflective discussions in a co-teaching model. Roth et al. (2000) designed the practice to ensure that all stakeholders, including students, had opportunities to reflect on, critique, and problem-solve classroom concerns. Although Emdin (2011; 2012; 2016) embedded cogenerative dialogues within reality pedagogy with a focus on teaching Black males, much of the extant literature addresses secondary and science classrooms. Martin and Scantlebury (2008), Bayne (2012), Shady (2013), Sirrakos and Fraser (2016), and Beltramo (2017) all researched the use of cogens in secondary science classrooms and found that by working collaboratively, students and teachers built stronger relationships and improved the learning environments.
The majority of research on cogenerative dialogues included at least three student participants within the cogens (Bayne, 2012; Beltramo, 2017; Boss & Linder, 2016; Higgins & Bonne, 2013; Martin & Scantlebury, 2008; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016) however; some cogens included only one or two students (Im & Martin, 2015; Shady, 2013). Within the research, there were a few outliers, though. Im and Martin (2015) set their focus on English Language Learners within an elementary classroom. Additionally, Boss and Linder (2016), as well as Martin & Scantlebury (2008), studied the use of cogens with university students.

Regardless of the setting, subject-matter, and age-group of the students, a few common themes emerged from the research findings. Due to the nature of cogen procedures, many of the studies discussed relationships (Beltramo, 2017; Boss & Linder, 2016; Higgins & Bonne, 2013; Im and Martin, 2015) typically noting improvement between the students and adults as well as between students within the classroom. Along the lines of relationships, power dynamics also emerged as an issue across studies. Researchers battled with how to ameliorate naturally oppressive structures as the teacher-student relationship is inherently unequal (Boss & Linder, 2016). Others noted how the use of cogens resulted in a beneficial shift in power between the teachers and students (Beltramo, 2017; Higgins & Bonne, 2013; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016) and increased agency from the teachers and the students (Boss & Linder, 2016; Im and Martin, 2015; Shady, 2013; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016). The increased agency within the students often resulted in stronger communication skills in the classroom. With the opportunity to practice equitable turn-taking within the structure of the cogen, students exhibited better collaboration and communication among peers (Boss & Linder 2016; Shady, 2013; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016). Much of the research also called out changes in pedagogical practice following the implementation of cogens. As an example, the importance of physical space and how it was
used in the classroom arose from multiple studies (Boss & Linder, 2016; Im & Martin, 2015; Shady, 2013).

The benefits of cogenerative dialogues occur across settings regardless of location, age-group, subject content, and size of the group. While each cogen adhered to a brief list of essential rules, flexibility also existed within each study. Focusing on young, Black males outside of the science classroom will add to the current literature with insights on how cogens impact the relationships between students and teachers when race is a documented barrier. Additionally, this research will add a layer of humanity through the methodology in that the researcher and participants collaborated to develop and revise processes allowing traditionally marginalized groups an opportunity for empowerment.

**Summary of the Literature**

Antiblack racism in schools is not a new trend, however, a review of current research illustrated an expanding body of literature on the topic. Emerging from biased perceptions, deficit thinking, and false stereotypes, our society dehumanizes Black males. Black children and adults are routinely perceived as older, less innocent, more accountable, and dangerous (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Goff et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Love, 2013). Schools act as a microcosm of society and echo the same prejudicial perceptions resulting in racially discriminatory discipline practices, school closure rates, and school structures; schools also demonstrate bias concerning access to advanced coursework, arts programming, and gifted education (Carter et al., 2016; Dumas 2014; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Love, 2016). Students and teachers, however, reported that building stronger relationships improved educational environments (Allen, 2014; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Nelson, 2015; Reichert & Hawley, 2009). Across settings, researchers described common themes of high-expectations, relevant pedagogy, and genuine care. Cogens offer a framework
from which to build these stronger student-teacher relationships by collaboratively reflecting, critiquing, and problem-solving towards a common goal (Bayne, 2012; Beltramo, 2017; Martin & Scantlebury, 2008; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016). Cogens are uniquely advantageous as they elevate an otherwise marginalized group, shifting power dynamics and increasing agency (Boss & Linder, 2016; Im & Martin, 2015; Shady, 2013; Sirrakos & Fraser, 2016).
CHAPTER 3
FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This research study worked towards improving the everyday school practices that denigrate the humanity of Black male students not only at Martin Hope Elementary but also in U.S. schools across the country. Therefore, while this practitioner-research study is ultimately relevant to Martin Hope, I situate this research study within the broader literature base that acknowledges historical injustices in U.S. schools while telling a story of resilience and leadership. A majority of the literature typically positions researchers outside of the school setting, however, as a member of my school’s community, I have a unique opportunity to add to the literature from within the context. My research is also significant to the canon of practitioner inquiry research which fails to adequately address trust with Black males in education.

The umbrella of research conducted at the school level covers action research, teacher research, teacher inquiry, and practitioner inquiry. All involve an intentional study by teachers in their specific classroom settings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). While academics often use the terms interchangeably, there are subtle differences to each approach. Action research typically includes a desire for change through a social justice lens; teacher research involves self-examination of classroom practices; and teacher inquiry uses a personal wondering or question to drive the research design (Dana, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Where university research is situated from an outsider perspective to advance the field with a broad impact, the teacher-researcher seeks to create change on the local level from an insider’s viewpoint (Dana, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) described the ways to view knowledge: Knowledge for Practice, Knowledge in Practice, and Knowledge of Practice. Figure 3-1 illustrates the differences between each type of knowledge. Schools with traditional models of preservice and
in-service professional development embody Knowledge for Practice. This model separates the experts giving the knowledge from the teachers receiving the knowledge. Akin to an owner’s manual, Knowledge for Practice includes a wealth of information but may prove tedious for the users to locate what is genuinely needed. Knowledge in Practice represents the craft and artistry of teaching. In this model, teachers apply previously learned information to inform everyday decisions. However, teachers do not act in isolation; Knowledge in Practice may include collaboration with mentors, coaches, or other members of a PLC. Like a Russian matryoshka doll, each experience adds to the bank of knowledge, and specific details become more precise and appealing. The third version, Knowledge of Practice, extends beyond the classroom such that classroom-based inquiry empowers teachers as agents of change. Teachers act as researchers by questioning and attempting to solve educational obstacles. With Knowledge of Practice, learning is more than a means to an end; it becomes an ongoing cycle in which we live. Analogous to a weight loss journey, someone can shed the unwanted pounds, but it is when that person analyzes the source of the problem and commits to a change in lifestyle that meaningful change occurs. This action research study aims to employ the Knowledge of Practice framework to empower Black male students and create long-lasting change.

Figure 3-1. Knowledge for Practice, Knowledge in Practice, Knowledge of Practice. Teachers at Martin Hope Elementary engage in all knowledge frameworks on both a voluntary and involuntary level.
Social Design Methodology

Before describing social-design based research, I offer a brief conversation from the study to illustrate the utility in its methodology. One student found a clever analogy to describe the participant-researcher connection used in social design studies. The dialogue below occurred during the initial fifth-grade student interview session and documents the exchange between Usain and me. As with all names in this study, Usain is a pseudonym.

Usain: Wait a sec, you know how this is for research?
Lead Researcher: Mm-hmm.
Usain: Does that make us lab rats?
Lead Researcher: Well, not really. There are different ways that you can conduct research and I'm using something called social design methodology. And in social design the participants are just as important as the people doing the research which is why I want your opinions on a lot of things. Normally lab rats, you kinda do the research to them. Where [with] this, you guys as much as possible are making a lot of the decisions. Does that work?
Usain: Wait, does that make you the lab rat?
Lead Researcher: Maybe I guess we'll all be lab rats.

With all research, there is an obligation to remain ethical and honorable. When working with traditionally marginalized groups, there is an added element of necessary accountability. Fine (2018) emphasized,

those persons and affects most viciously exiled are the soul of our moral community and they embody not only pain but desire; that privilege is relentless, and fragile, and maybe’s that’s why it is so defensive—even aware of, and ashamed by—its dependence on Others. (p.6)

In planning this study, I draw on the scholarship of Kris Gutiérrez (2016) to attempt a socially responsible method that capitalizes on assets of the community in an effort to improve outcomes for all. Social Design Research is a humanist approach that aims to create transformation within systems by empowering participants throughout the process. That is,
rather than research functioning as a colonizing tool, participants become the architects of their own destinies (Gutiérrez, 2016; Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016). Social design-based research simultaneously addresses the need for innovation, theory, authenticity, and complexity by encompassing interventions within a social agenda of equity (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016).

Gutiérrez (2016) outlined six principles of social design research: (1) history and historicity, (2) reorganization of the system, (3) a dynamic model of culture, (4) an emphasis on equity, (5) an emphasis on resilience and change, and (6) sustainable transformation. In social design research, participants become “historical actors” (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016, p. 571) by developing an understanding of their own culture based on each unique history. Rather than viewing history as a series of chronological events, social design research acknowledges the substantial influence of the past on the present so that we can work towards a more equitable future for all people. As such, social design research insists that researchers focus on the broader system rather than the individual as the source of the problem. Gutiérrez’s (2016) dynamic model of culture rejects current practices of top-down control where a lack of freedom cripples opportunities for transformation, resilience, and sustainability. Ingrained in each step from the initial wondering, to research design, to implementation, researchers must maintain a commitment to equity.

Figure 3-2. Social Design Methodology and Data Collection.
Figure 3-2 illustrates how Social Design Methodology encompassed all aspects of the study. In order to answer the two research questions, this study used semi-structured interviews, journaling, field notes, and structured observations. The questions and data collection methods supported a social design framework by using the past to inform the future, rejecting top-down approaches to change, focusing on the resilience of the participants, emphasizing equity throughout the study, and working towards a workable solution.

Why Black Males?

When revisiting the SIP each year, schools in the district are tasked to identify subgroups of students that, based on district and external achievement levels, require immediate attention. As previously discussed, the leaders at Martin Hope Elementary focused efforts on Black and African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, students receiving ESOL services, and students receiving FARMS. Students in multiple categories were deemed notable as their scores impacted the school performance rating multiple times. For example, a low-income Latino student in our ESOL program takes the end of year state assessment once; however, that single score is recorded for each of the three subgroups. Adapting pedagogical practices based on the example student’s needs will not only prove beneficial to that student, but it will also improve the overall school’s ranking.

Our focus students comprise about half of the school’s population whereas Black males constitute only fourteen percent of the entire school. Yet, on a daily basis, Black boys at Martin Hope are sent to the office for discipline. It is our Black males who are the focus of the Life Zone club. It is our Black males who are the frequent topic of staff lounge frustrations. One of our grade level teams hosts a yearly challenge to encourage homework completion and exemplary behavior during December; students who earn enough points play basketball against the teachers. Last year, the team decided to cancel the challenge in fear of one Black boy.
According to the 1990 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992), when Martin Hope Elementary opened its doors for the first time, the surrounding census-designated place (CDP) was home to 41,145 residents with 27.6 percent under the age of eighteen; just over twelve percent of the city identified as Black or African American, and single mothers led five and a half percent of households with children. Twenty years later, the population more than doubled to 86,395 with 27.2 percent of residents under the age of eighteen; 22.5 percent of residents identified as Black or African American, and 20.6 percent of households with children were led by single mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). During the 2010-2011 school year, 87.3 percent of the Martin Hope professional staff identified as White and 90.9 percent identified as female. In sum, the population was changing, but the teachers were not.

Over the past few years, the entire staff engaged in professional learning centered on equity and culture, acknowledging that cultures and identities impact relationships (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Although progress is slow, I believe it is this previous learning that pushed members of the instructional leadership team to request support after analyzing the student voice data. Having a basic foundation that includes the differences between equality and equity, levels of culture (Hammond & Jackson, 2015), and implicit bias, my teachers were ready for more. All of our students deserve teachers who build positive relationships with students, but our Black males need it the most; they are the ones we are failing. Borrowing the famous slogan often attributed to President John F. Kennedy, “a rising tide lifts all boats” and becoming better educators for our Black males will make us better educators for all students.

Participants

Although my role includes designing and delivering professional learning on relationship building to the entire instructional leadership team, I believe that participation in the first cogens at Martin Hope Elementary was most valuable in the upper-grade levels. Ladson Billings (2011)
described a love-hate fascination with Black males where the general public begins to perceive them as adults as early as the second or third grade. The same attitude exists at Martin Hope Elementary; conversations between staff members during meetings, planning blocks, and casual lunch banter include language that rips the childhood from these early adolescent boys.

As previously mentioned, Black boys are seven times more likely to receive an office disciplinary referral at Martin Hope Elementary and fourth and fifth-grade boys hold most of those referrals. In response, the one Black male teacher at Martin Hope Elementary started a club for fourth and fifth-grade Black boys where they learn life lessons, problem-solve, and learn from a positive Black male role model. Many of the other teachers at Martin Hope Elementary have expressed praise and positive affirmations about the Life Zone club. Knowing that conversations around race range from challenging to impossible for many North Americans (Singleton, 2015), I believe that the positivity around the Life Zone club served as an entry point to encourage participation in the research.

For the 2019-2020 school year, the fourth and fifth-grade level teams consisted of two male teachers and nine female teachers. Two teachers identified as Black and the remaining identified as white. All were tenured teachers with at least ten years of experience in elementary classroom settings. Using purposeful sampling, I invited all fourth and fifth-grade teachers to participate in the study to culminate in one group in fourth grade and one in fifth. Cogens are built from a foundation of shared experiences; participants include any individual associated within that shared context (Tobin & Shady, 2014). According to Tobin and Shady (2014), outsiders who are willing to join the class and fully participate, offer an advantage of an additional perspective. As a stakeholder, I also participated in both cogens. Consistent with social design, I acknowledged the necessary balance between researcher and participant, “not
wanting to flatten power issues or reify the differences between insiders and outsiders” (Fine, 2018, p.7). Throughout the study, I reflected on my commitment to a social design framework and asked the teacher and student participants to check my stance.

Four teachers, three from fourth-grade and one from fifth-grade, volunteered for the study. “From a social design experiment perspective, working to transform social institutions and their relations is a primary target of design because only such changes can achieve the equity goals of the research” (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016, p. 566). Following the social design approach, I selected two teachers whom I believed to have the most potential for sustainable change. I eliminated one teacher as she worked in the building part-time, which limited our flexibility within the study. From the remaining three, I selected the sole fifth-grade volunteer for a variety of reasons. First, including her increased the number of possible students in the study. Additionally, this teacher taught fourth-grade in the year prior and looped up with the majority of her students. Teaching elementary students for consecutive years creates a unique opportunity where teachers, students, and families have an established foundational relationship on the first day of school (Little & Little, 2001). This teacher also volunteers as the SERT (School Energy and Recycling Team) facilitator. In this role, she meets with students across grade-levels before, during, and after school to develop eco-friendly practices for the building. Over the past eleven years, she formed relationships with over one hundred students outside of her classroom. Lastly, this teacher taught both sections of the accelerated reading and writing courses during the 2019-2020 school year. Congruent with social design methodology, the purposeful inclusion of gifted Black males was meant to ameliorate deficit-based norms and stereotypes.
The remaining volunteers included one Black male and one white female. Selecting the one Black male teacher in our school was an obvious choice for many reasons. Gutiérrez (2011) argued,

Learning to “see” historically across multiple time scales is fundamental to understanding how ecologies come to be, how people come to see who they are and what they might become as part of those ecologies as well as what mediates their trajectories (p. 190).

Including him in the study aligned with social design by adding a unique perspective from someone who has direct insight as to what it means to be both a Black male student and teacher. This teacher is also the creator of our school’s Life Zone club. Over the past three years, he mentored almost 100 Black boys in our school. For many of these students, he is the primary or only adult in the building they trust.

Once the teachers were selected, we invited all Black boys from their classrooms. Tobin and Shady (2014) recommended beginning with challenging students so that cogenerated outcomes improve the classroom environment for them and, in turn, all students; they also emphasized the need for a variety of individuals as their discrepant perspectives often offer an entry point for discussion. However, Baldwin County Public Schools prohibits internal researchers, such as myself, from excluding any possible participants. For the purposes of this study, students met the selection criteria by meeting one of two possible descriptions. Students on the invitation list included all male students identified by their families as Black/African American on school registration documents. Many students in the school self identify as Black, however, their demographic data is officially listed as Multi-Racial. To allow for the inclusion of these students, the student invitation list also included all male students identified by their families as Multi-Racial on school registration documents and are who were members of the school-sponsored club, Life Zone.
Four out of five fourth-graders and five out of six invited fifth-graders agreed to join the study. Within the fourth-grade group, three students were in the grade-level math course and the fourth was in the advanced math course. Of the fifth-graders, one was enrolled in the morning class where the other four were in the afternoon class. To allow for more student voices, I selected the grade-level fourth-grade math group and the afternoon advanced reading and writing group. The lone fifth-grader in the morning class requested that we also include him as the teacher essentially taught the same content in both morning and afternoon sections. We honored his self-advocacy bringing the fifth-grade group up to five student participants. Consistent with social design methodology, this study positioned participants to reflect upon their historical contexts in ways that provided autonomy in creating their futures (Gutiérrez, & Jurow, 2016).

Following social design, the teachers and students in the study acted as co-researchers and participated in decision-making processes throughout the research. I encouraged each participant to develop their pseudonyms and share any insights into those choices. The fourth-grade boys asked for support in identifying possible, inspiring leaders of different races and genders. I created a document with pictures and short bios of political leaders, activists, and athletes to help inform their decisions. Table 3-1 displays the selected pseudonyms for all participant researchers. As a member in both cogens, I used the first column to connect the two groups with my name and position. The fourth-grade cogen also included Mr. Chisolm, Steph, Lebron, and Malcolm; the fifth-grade cogen also included Ms. Washington, Gekyume, Duckworth, Usain, Mike, and Sean.
Table 3-1. Table of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher-Participant: Rachel Orgel</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade: Desmond Chisholm</td>
<td>Steph Curry</td>
<td>Lebron James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade: Rosa Washington</td>
<td>Gekyume King</td>
<td>Duckworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Usain Barack Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jordan Douglas Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mike Kaepernick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sean Common</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Desmond Chisolm” is the sole Black male teacher at Martin Hope Elementary. He identifies as an African American Christian. His name is inspired from Nobel Peace Prize winner, Desmond Tutu, and the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress, Shirley Chisholm. As Desmond Tutu was the voice for many Black South Africans, Mr. Chisholm consistently speaks up for the Black students (and all students) at Martin Hope. Like Shirley Chisholm, he has expertise and passions for education and child welfare. Mr. Chisholm, like so many inspiring leaders, is committed to service and equity.

“Steph Curry” is a quiet boy with many friends. He identifies as African American and British and mimics a decent accent when offering his mates some water. As a member of the Life Zone club, Steph’s father participated as a guest speaker/mentor sharing his journey to include how sports kept him away from a life of drugs and crime. Steph also loves sports and was inspired by Curry’s dedication to life beyond basketball. In addition to being a two time NBA champion, five-time NBA all-star, and recipient of the Most Valuable Player Award, Curry donates mosquito nets to the Nothing But Nets campaign in fighting malaria.

“Lebron James” is the adopted son of two white moms, and self-identifies as Black and Jamaican. Although he is one of the shortest boys in his class, Lebron seldom goes unnoticed with his affinity for talking to his friends, playful smile, and braids pulled back. Lebron chose
this pseudonym because he is also an athlete and appreciates the commitment to service for the community. Often noted as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, James donated 2.5 million dollars to the National Museum of African American History and created the I Promise School for youth in Akron, Ohio.

“Malcolm X” transferred to Martin Hope after the start of his fourth-grade year. Malcolm is one of the biggest boys in the grade yet speaks so quietly that he is often inaudible. He identifies as African and Filipino and frequently shares stories about his mother and grandmother. He chose the name because after being orphaned at a young age and going through many struggles, Malcolm X overcame a lot to become a published author, the inspiration for the Black Panther Party, and one of the most sought after public speakers in the United States.

“Rosa Washington” identifies as a Catholic white woman. With her fair skin, auburn hair, and blue eyes, she is also proud of her Irish heritage. Ms. Washington has 18 years of teaching experience with 11 at Martin Hope Elementary. She selected her name by combining Rosa Parks and Denzel Washington. She was inspired by the leadership and perseverance of Rosa Parks and named Denzel Washington as one of her favorite (and handsome) actors. Ms. Washington offers Martin Hope Elementary a balance of dedication to the service of others and an ability to take time to have fun.

“Gekyume King” is the kid in school who is always looking to help his teachers. He is easily recognizable with his short locks, big smile, and younger brother always in tow. When selecting his pseudonym, he shared,

The name I am choosing is Gekyume King. The first name is a very meaningful name. After the famous rapper “xxxtentacion” or Jahseh Onfroy created this word. This word pretty much means the ability to change in a positive way. Or to change universe/environment of mindset. Jahseh created this word right before he died in Deerfield Beach, Florida. Then, shortly after [Jahseh's] death, his wife decided to name the baby Gekyume. King, is after Martin Luther King Jr. After
all the actions he did, to fight for my race’s freedom. (G. King, personal communication, June 4, 2019)

Gekyume loves sports, and his class appropriately voted him as an Amazing Athlete for the fifth-grade superlatives. He identifies as a human being.

“Duckworth” shared a safety patrol duty with Gekyume and could be found each morning and afternoon, regardless of the weather, helping students cross the street at our school bus loop. He is the son of a significant Ghanaian government official and was named Future President for the fifth-grade class superlatives. Duckworth identifies as a Ghanaian male. He shared, “I take pride in being from that country, from its history. And I really think skin, race, is really just a pigment on your skin.” When asked about the pseudonym selection, he responded, “It is Kendrick Lamar’s real last name. Lamar is his middle name. He doesn’t use it because he is ashamed of it. It reminds me to stay confident and stay proud of my heritage.”

“Usain Barack Muhammad Jordan Douglas Jackson Marley” has a quirky personality with an unconventional sense of humor. His fifth-grade class voted him as the Superb Storyteller, and he was featured in the school’s talent show telling jokes. Usain identifies as a Muslim and was one of the few students in our school to fast during Ramadan. Consistent with his storytelling, Usain’s pseudonym was not limited to a singular idea. Inspired by many Black male leaders, Usain created his names in homage to Usain Bolt, Barack Obama, Mohammed Ali, Michael Jordan, Frederick Douglas, Michael Jackson, and Bob Marley.

“Mike Kaepernick” transferred to Martin Hope from Kenya at the start of his fourth-grade year. His friends lovingly refer to him as the Brit Boy because of his distinct accent and fervent patriotism. They voted him to be the Adventure Seeker for his fifth-grade class superlatives. He identifies as a Kenyan male currently questioning his religion. Mike’s name is a blend of the rapper Michael Render (Killer Mike) and professional football player Colin
Kaepernick. Both Render and Kaepernick are known for their activism against social inequality, police brutality, and systemic racism. Like his namesakes, Mike feels passionate about injustice around the world.

“Sean Common” is a sociable jokester often spotted playing hoops with his high-top fade, basketball shorts, and athletic leggings. His fifth-grade class voted him, along with Gekyume, as the Amazing Athlete for their grade level superlatives. Sean loves to dance and showcased his hip hop talents in the school talent show. When asked how he identifies, he shared, “I feel like everyone’s the same, that we’re all even.” He added that his mother is from Jamaica, and his father often talks to him about what it means to be a Black male in this country. Sean’s name is a hybrid of two American rappers, philanthropists, and activists: Sean Michael Leonard Anderson (Big Sean) and Lonnie Corant Jaman Shuka Rashid Lynn (Common).

**Data Collection**

Like many schools across the country, a disconnect exists between a mostly white staff and our increasing numbers of students of color. I believe that given the appropriate venue and supporting structures, teachers at our school will work to remedy this division. As the Staff Development Teacher at Martin Hope Elementary, I am positioned to enact the necessary changes at the school level. By contributing to teacher capacity building and simultaneously providing opportunities for student leadership, my research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do cogenerative dialogues support relationship building between early adolescent Black males and their teachers?

2. How do early adolescent Black males respond to teachers who are engaged in ongoing job-embedded professional development on relationship building?
Using a social design methodology, I selected data collection methods based on their collective effectiveness to answer the stated research questions and also to provide opportunities for collaboration with the participants. Data collection included a researcher's journal using both structured and open formatting. In addition to standard field notes documented in an electronic note taking application on an iPad, journaling allowed for documentation beyond the events of the day and allowed for reflection and thinking (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). In this journal, I documented reflections on the following questions:

1. What evidence of positive or negative relationships between Black males and their teachers did I witness today?

2. In what ways was ongoing JEPD on relationship building evident today? How does it relate to Black males?

I also recorded any notes taken on sticky notes throughout the day into the iPad journal. With the teachers and students a part of the research team, I had hoped to include them in the journaling process. However, Baldwin County Public Schools prohibits the use of any student artifacts, including journals, in internal research studies. I conducted four interviews before beginning the cogens; this included one with each teacher and group of students. After the final cogens, I conducted another round of interviews with each teacher and group of students resulting in a total of eight interviews. I used a combination of semi-structured and informal interviews with the students. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) expanded the traditional definition of interviews to include any opportunities that ask questions related to the inquiry. Additionally, I encouraged students and teachers to interview me. “Researchers have argued that research/interview relationships should be non-hierarchical, non-exploitative, reciprocal and work on a ‘participatory model’ in which the researcher shares their own biography with the researched” (Bhopal, 2010, p.188). The students nor teachers wished to act as a formal interviewer, however, they did ask questions during the interview process and throughout the
study. Following each cogen, I used structured observations to observe classrooms. Utilizing a structured observation protocol, I entered the room in a non-evaluative role and looked specifically for action items discussed in the previous cogen meeting. In each subsequent cogen, I reported my observations as a starting point for reflective discussion. Table 3-2 displays the data collection instruments, necessary materials, and timing for each method. By including multiple methods of data collection, I was able to triangulate the data ensuring a more accurate account of the shared experience.

Table 3-2. Data Collection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>Sticky Notes, iPad</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>iPad</td>
<td>daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured Group</td>
<td>iPad for audio recording</td>
<td>before first cogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>after final cogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured Individual</td>
<td>iPad for audio recording</td>
<td>before first cogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>after final cogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured Observations</td>
<td>iPad</td>
<td>after each cogen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collaboration with participants is an essential component of social design research. Methodological procedures may begin with an outlined plan; however, the plan must remain flexible so that it can change as the group deems necessary. This variable nature of social design eliminated the possibility of a static blueprint. My initial plan for the cogens was merely the beginning of the research design adapted to the needs of all participants.

The study occurred during the third marking period of the 2018-2019 school year at Martin Hope Elementary School. Table 3-3 displays the timeline of critical events related to the research. Beginning cogens later in the year allowed for students and teachers to have an established relationship and some level of common ground. Cogens occurred weekly during the
scheduled lunch block during the months of March and April. Teachers selected the day they wished to hold the cogen and participation from the students was voluntary and fluid meaning they were encouraged, but not required to attend each cogen. To encourage participation and ensure that all parties benefited from the research, students received a free homework pass for each cogen attended, and teachers received a thirty-minute break with class coverage provided to make up for the missed lunch block. Additionally, lunch was provided to all teachers as well as snacks for the students.

Table 3-3. Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissertation Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain permission from district</td>
<td>March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit participants</td>
<td>March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect consent forms</td>
<td>March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly cogens and observations</td>
<td>March-April 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final semi-structured interview</td>
<td>April 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>April-August 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Write-up</td>
<td>August-September 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the postponed approval date from the district, each group met four times between March 19, 2019 and April 17, 2019.

Cogens followed a five-step protocol which allowed for flexibility within each step. As a fluid process unique to each group of children, the look and feel of a cogen can and should vary. Both cogen groups at Martin Hope began with typical elementary school banter. The fifth graders often tossed a small football across the room until all members arrived with their lunch where the fourth graders typically whispered and laughed to each other about events in their day. For both groups, one person called the cogen to start and all participants sat around a table. Each cogen began with a review of the overall purpose and objective. The overarching goal for each cogen was for students and teachers to collaborate and co-construct solutions for classroom concerns. Additionally, a goal in this research study was to improve relationships between students and teachers. During the initial step, groups assigned a timekeeper and note taker. Both
groups requested that I take notes so that the teachers and students could focus more on the conversation. Participants rotated the role of timekeeper by informally offering to take on the responsibility. Groups had the opportunity, but chose not to add additional roles they deemed necessary to achieve their overarching goals. Step two included a review of ground rules for the group. Following the model of rap and hip-hop cyphers, participants in a cogen sat in a circle, shared with all voices carrying an equal amount of weight, and created an action plan based on shared experiences (Emdin, 2011). In the first cogen, I presented the ground rules; in subsequent meetings, I prompted the participants to remind the group of our rules. After a review of the objectives and ground rules, participants reflected on the lessons over the previous week and offered suggestions on what the class should continue and what needed consideration to change.

As with the entire cogen, this process flowed organically. In the first cogens, I asked the group a prompting questions such as, “How was this last week? What worked well and what needs to change?” In the later cogens, students began the discussion without any prompts. Suggestions focused on the roles of the participants, classroom rules, and access to materials (Tobin & Shady, 2014). During the discussion, all members had a responsibility to engage in active listening and prompt those who were more reluctant to speak. Initially the fourth-graders appeared hesitant to speak up and required prompts and probing questions. To encourage participation, Mr. Chisolm and I challenged the students that if they spoke more than the adults, Mr. Chisolm would do push-ups. In step four, participants came to a consensus on an action plan to address concerns.

In order to create a sense of ownership, each participant had a part in the action plan to ensure shared responsibility. Students typically offered ideas without prompting on how each member could take an active role. At times, I asked a general question such as, “How are we going to monitor this plan?” The notetaker documented salient points and agreements for the group
(Tobin & Shady, 2014). Each cogen closed by asking a final reflective question: “What did we cogenerate today?” The teachers and students summarized our action plan adding on to each other without prompting. Before leaving the room, the students returned to their typical elementary school banter.

Figure 3-3. Cogen Five-Step Protocol. Cogens maintained the five-step protocol, however, over the course of the study, the fluidity between the steps became organic.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) listed the essential elements of qualitative data analysis as coding the data, synthesizing codes to create broader categories, and creating visual representations to show comparisons. Formative data analysis occurs throughout the data collection process where summative data analysis occurs at the end of the data collection period (Dana, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). To prepare the final data for analysis, I first collected the journals and notes and transcribed all audio-recorded interviews. Agar (1980, as cited in Creswell, 2013), suggested engaging in multiple readings of the entire dataset to develop a comprehensive understanding before engaging in the coding process. Over the course of the readings, I recorded relevant ideas in my electronic researcher journal.

During the coding phase of data analysis, “researchers build detailed descriptions, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Saldaña (2015) described qualitative data analysis as a process that moves from real and particular towards abstract and general. Data are chunked to reveal codes which are then merged to form categories. These are then developed into themes and eventually, theories. In reality, this process is much more complicated as
“qualitative researchers are not algorithmic automatons” (Saldaña, 2015 p. 16). As humans, we naturally notice themes, patterns, and trends before and while coding the data.

Disaggregating the data through an inductive coding process, I followed Dana and Yendol-Hoppey's (2014) four-step process beginning with describing the data and making sense of the complete dataset, moving to the interpretation of the data, and finally drawing implications. As I moved through the multiple iterations of data analysis, I documented the process in my electronic research journal. Using a multiple column method, I created a clear visual to see the raw data in the first column, the preliminary codes in the second column, and the final codes in the third column. Table 3-4 displays an excerpt from the fifth-grade initial interview when Mike described a positive experience with a teacher at Martin Hope.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Initial Code</th>
<th>Final Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What did she do that was so helpful?</td>
<td>Check in and</td>
<td>Genuine Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well she didn't really treat it like &quot;Oh do you need help, do you need someone to come for you, do you need something, you can tell me anything?&quot; And sometimes it just pressures you to be like &quot;Should I tell her, should I not?&quot; So she just asked me once then laid off of it then checked on me again then said I could take a break from the work. Then a few minutes later she asked me if I was doing better then I nodded and she just gave me a lollypop which topped it all off.</td>
<td>give space Candy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After each round of coding, I reread my literature review to compare my codes to documented themes in previous studies. Additionally, I returned to my research questions to ensure that I documented the data due to its relevance to this study rather than its level of intrigue. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) emphasized the ongoing nature of teacher inquiry and suggested a final period of reflection at the end of the data analysis with questions to address researcher learning, action steps for the context, and new inquiry wonderings. In conjunction with the social design framework, Stacy (1988 as cited in Bhopal, 2010) added that self-reflection also diminishes the
natural imbalance of power between the researcher and the participants. After my data analysis, I reflected on the following questions:

1. What did I learn as a practitioner-researcher?
2. How will I go forward with what I’ve learned from this study?
3. How can I help to empower the student and teacher participants outside the bounds of this study?

**Enhancing Trustworthiness**

To increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research, Creswell (2013) recommended that researchers employ at least two validation strategies within a given study. While critics of qualitative research often discount its validity, Creswell (2013) posited the reverse is claiming validation as a strength. This study utilized prolonged engagement, clarifying researcher positionality member checking, and triangulation of data.

As a practitioner-researcher, I benefit from the inherent prolonged engagement in the field. In my third year at Martin Hope Elementary, I had begun to build trust with the participants long before the onset of the study. I also understood the unique culture of the school which is especially important when navigating conversations around race and trust. Additionally, I clarified my own bias as a researcher to address, in advance, how my positionality may impact the study. I continued to monitor researcher bias through journal reflections. Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Creswell, 2013) claimed member checking as the integral component to establish credibility. Audio recordings of all interviews reduced misunderstandings; however, I also reviewed the data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions with all relevant participants. I triangulated the information to identify corroborating evidence across the multiple sources of data when identifying themes or drawing conclusions. In this

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process, the researcher seeks both recurring behaviors as well as disconfirming evidence to continually adjust and reevaluate the interpretations of the data.

Executing a study within a social design framework requires additional measures to ensure authenticity. Ethical validation (Angen, 2000) requires researchers to self-reflect and question any moral assumptions to ensure an honorable treatment of marginalized voices. Angen (2000) added that research must result in transformative action. Substantive validation (Angen, 2000) requires the researcher to act as a “sociohistorical interpreter” (p. 390) who cogenerates interpretations by committing to self-reflexivity and reflection. Additionally, Angen (2000) obligated researchers to demonstrate their respect for complex topics by addressing current and historical understandings from multiple perspectives. While the literature review for this study is by no means exhaustive, it does provide background and context well beyond a surface level.

Limitations

Gutiérrez et al. (2016) posited that there is no definitive end in social design research. If we are genuinely working to transform the possibilities for traditionally marginalized and vulnerable people, we must make a considerable commitment that goes beyond the conclusion of each study. Gutiérrez (2016) recommended developing short and long-term goals to address the perpetual structure of design research to address the need to share results with a variety of audiences.

A second limitation of my research involved the level of trust among participants. Although I have strong relationships with many students and attempted to build rapport in interviews through questioning techniques, many of our students started from a position of distrust. One way to combat the inherent power hierarchy was to put me in a place of vulnerability. Vakil, Mckinney de Royston, Suad Nasir, and Kirshner, (2016, as cited in Gutiérrez et al., 2016) asked students to interview the researchers to allow the students first to
determine if there would be a good working relationship. To encourage the aura of collaborative research, I invited the students to interview me as well. While none agreed to a complete interview, the students and teachers asked questions throughout the study. I documented these questions and answers as part of the data set.

Conducting research outside of a laboratory means that external factors of the environment can also serve as limitations. Within my district, data collection with students is limited to a short window during the school year to prevent any overlaps with state assessments. While the cogens may continue beyond the data collection period, I needed to close the study even when the work was incomplete. It is my hope, however, that cogens may emerge as a new norm at Martin Hope Elementary. Additionally, my district took longer than expected to approve the study shortening the data collection window to allow for only four cogens. They also included mandates which altered my original plan for participant selection and data collection procedures.

Finally, because the nature of design research requires adaptability and adherence to the unique identities of the participants, my research will be difficult to replicate. I hope to gain understandings that might be borrowed by other staff development teachers and building leaders; however, I do not want my research to evolve into a script for how white female teachers teach Black males.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to build stronger relationships between early adolescent Black males and their teachers. Utilizing the first “C” of Emdin’s (2011) reality pedagogy, cogenerative dialogues, we sought to create opportunities where students and teachers could move away from the normed hierarchical structure in schools and towards a more equitable environment that improves the learning experiences for Black males, and eventually all students.

The cogenerative dialogue practice is a method where all stakeholders, including students, have an equal voice when reflecting on and deconstructing classroom lessons (Emdin, 2011). This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do cogenerative dialogues support relationship building between early adolescent Black males and their teachers?

2. How do early adolescent Black males respond to teachers who are engaged in ongoing job-embedded professional development on relationship building?

Between March 19, 2019, and April 17, 2019, I enlisted the support of my fellow researchers to collect relevant data. Employing a social design methodology, the teacher and student researchers needed to have a voice in how, when, and where we conducted the study.

The fourth-grade group included me, a grade-level math teacher, Mr. Chisolm, his intern, and three students: Steph, Lebron, and Malcolm. The fifth-grade group included me, an above-grade-level literacy teacher, Ms. Washington, and five students: Gekyume, Duckworth, Usain, Mike, and Sean. Each group conducted four cogenerative dialogues during their respective lunch blocks. The fourth-grade group met in Mr. Chisolm’s classroom, and the fifth-grade group met in my office. Both groups asked that I serve as a notetaker so they could be free to have more organic discussions. Following each cogen, I conducted structured observations in Mr. Chisolm and Ms. Washington’s classrooms, explicitly looking for action items discussed in the previous
cogen. The notes from the cogens and structured observations, along with pre and post-study interview data, and my researcher journal served as the basis for data collection.

The eleven most frequently occurring codes appear in the figure above. All codes were represented within the interview data, cogen notes, and researcher journal.

The final round of coding resulted in forty-four different codes ranging in frequency. Figure 4-1 displays the top eleven codes for the complete dataset. Many of the data entries included more than one code. Additionally, there was a natural overlap in many of the codes. For example, Genuine Care was frequently combined with either Cultivating Community or Relationships. Furthermore, some codes represent both the presence and absence of meaning. For example, voice, included as a top three most frequent codes, depicts opportunities where students were given a voice as well as when they expressed frustration by being silenced.

Expanding and collapsing codes improved the data analysis process by highlighting connections across a large dataset. When triangulating the data, I quickly noticed the links within and across interviews, observational data, and my researcher journal. In describing the findings, I specify, in further detail, the relationship between codes. Three categories emerged as codes related to, driven by, or primarily associated Teachers, Students, and the Community; five codes fell into a merged category entitled Teacher-Student. In this study, I define Community to include the

![Figure 4-1. Most Frequent Codes. The eleven most frequently occurring codes appear in the figure above. All codes were represented within the interview data, cogen notes, and researcher journal.](image)
school, neighborhood, and the larger society. Analysis of the data revealed three findings consistent with current research: Societal constructs of race impact relationships at Martin Hope. Martin Hope students appreciate teachers who care. Martin Hope teachers feel constricted by the academic curriculum.

“It’s Hard Growing Up In This Country As A Black Person”: Identity, Discipline, and Bias

Emdin (2012) necessitated the representation of Black students’ voices to inform teacher practice and implement culturally relevant changes. The cogens created such a space to elevate our Black male voices. In turn, the data revealed how societal constructs of race impact relationships at Martin Hope. Subthemes of identity, discipline, and bias resonated throughout the data. Although portions of the data revealed a positive connection to race, the majority of the race-specific data corresponded with deficit thinking, stereotypes, and discriminatory behavior.

Identity

In the initial and student interviews, I asked each participant how they identify and offered examples of how I might respond. Following the social design methodology, Ms. Washington brought me into the research asking why I included such a question. I replied,

One of the things, since I am isolating by race and by gender. So I’m going to ask the students very similar questions. I want to know, obviously somebody checked on a paper that they’re Black or African American or multiracial, but I want to know, how do they see themselves? So if I’m asking the students how they see themselves, I want to know how you see yourself too.

“Most young people challenge the very identity categories that social movements have historically relied upon; most tell very complex and layered stories about their identities and commitments” (Fine, 2018, p.106). When asked the identity question, not all students included race; however, for each of them, at some point during the study, race became a topic of conversation. For example, Sean responded that he identified as human, but later commented on race when discussing how teachers gain trust, “I feel like they’d have to show enough respect for
me as who I am. Being a Black male in my country, my dad always tells me, ‘You’re a Black man. It’s hard growing up in this country as a Black person.’” Also identifying as human, Gekyume added, “racism is starting to come back” and then responded to how a teacher gains trust, “A teacher that would help me, or accept me no matter who I am. If I’m white, Black, if I’m illiterate or disabled or something, they would still push me like all the other students.”

Similarly, Duckworth self-identified by ethnicity and gender but later brought up racial dating stereotypes and assumptions. “I’m put into groups with my same race sometimes. One time I said, ‘I have a crush,’ and then somebody’s been like, everybody thought I had a crush on the only Black girl in the class.” Gekyume connected this assumption to literature commenting on how the lead Black female character in Angie Thomas’ (2018) novel, The Hate U Give, experienced the same treatment,

It’s an ongoing joke before she dates Chris that she’s going to date, well, it’s not even a joke, it’s a belief that she’s going to date the only Black guy in her class. So even after she stops seeing Chris, it’s still an ongoing joke. They refer to each other as, “Oh hey there, Black girlfriend. Oh hey there, Black boyfriend.”

Gekyume later continued with how the social construct of race is used to divide and further marginalize Black people,

To add on to [Duckworth], the racist people, they don't really believe that they're putting us into categories that really just the sun changed. I mean, and the lighting and stuff changed the way we look and our skin color. And then they think that it's how we were created. We were supposed to not be like the other races. And I'm not saying that as a word in a good way, but I mean they're thinking that we should do different things, think different things.

Usain also found literature connections with discrimination describing Harry Potter’s relationship with his aunt’s family, the Dursleys in J. K. Rowling’s (1998) Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, “Well, you know how the Dursleys don't like Harry because he's a wizard? Who wants to be a Dursley now? That's like if you discriminate against people, or separate people because race or religion, then you're being a Dursley.”

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In addition to the students’ affirmation of their Black identity, the data revealed similar cases from Mr. Chisolm, the only Black male teacher. When asked what it’s like to teach at Martin Hope, Mr. Chisolm positively spoke about the racial make-up of the school,

I find it rewarding to work and get to know kids from different backgrounds, their cultures, their race, some of the traditions that they celebrate. I think that helps me become a better teacher because it gives me the awareness of why they may do some of the things that they do. And it wasn't always like that here at [Martin Hope], it used to be mostly kids who were predominantly white, and there was like 20 percent African American, Hispanic, and so on and so forth. But I find that over the past five, seven years, it's become very diverse.

During my first year as the Staff Development Teacher at Martin Hope, I worked with the administration to connect faces to the names of students discussed during our data chats. We presented a slideshow to the entire staff with pictures of each student who had yet to meet academic success according to district guidelines. Connecting his own identity with that of our students, Mr. Chisolm remembered this experience as a pivotal moment remarking,

And as those pictures were coming across the screen, most of them African-American boys, I felt like as an African-American teacher, where have I been? Then that started the ball rolling, like, I need to do something, as an African-American teacher, this is my race, and I need to do something to help these kids. I know that there is a place for them in this world.

Not enough teachers, however, share the same passion and commitment to serve Black boys at Martin Hope. A broad literature base connects a racial chasm between teacher and student identities to culturally discrepant education and a discipline gap (Butler et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2010; Howard et al., 2016; Pane et al., 2013). The students at Martin Hope are no exception to this unjust rule.

**Discipline**

Situating discipline as a school-driven problem rather than a student-driven problem, Fine (2018) reported, “where schools rely heavily on policing to manage discipline, racial suspension disparities spike, and yet in schools that refuse to administer high-stakes testing, these disparities
shrink” (p. 95). Similarly, teachers at Martin Hope who view behavior as a product of the larger system, rather than solely blaming the child, deliver more equity-oriented disciplinary responses. When analyzing the data from this study, two opposing themes emerged: evidence of normative and discriminatory disciplinary practices and those of alternative and culturally congruent responses to behavior. Respectively, the data contained thirteen and seven examples.

In the initial student interview, Usain described three types of teachers. The first two teachers react to students based on his/her expectations. He explained,

The teachers who if you're bad, then they'll start to get used to it and then they'll care less when you do something wrong. And if you're really good then when you do something wrong, they're really surprised, and they don't take it very nicely. And then there's the teachers that when you're a really good student, and you do something wrong, they don't care as much. And if you're really bad student, they progressively get angrier and angrier as you do things wrong.

He included a third type whom he described as a principled teacher who reacts appropriately to behaviors rather than preconceived expectations. “If you drop a pencil, they’ll tell you to pick it up. If you do something really wrong like bully someone, then they’ll get really mad at you and send you to the office.” Sean added, “I’m not saying this because she’s my teacher, but Ms. [Washington], she’s category three.”

Most concerning, however not surprising, some students connected their identities to behavior. Howard (2013) described this dehumanizing association reporting, “Frequently labeled as problems, prone to violence, invoking fear in many, and deemed as undesirable in certain circles, the view of Black males is diverse and extreme on many levels” (p. 55). Sean commented that overall fairness at Martin Hope needed improvement; in this statement he self-denigrated saying, “Some kids, they get special things and then other kids they’re just treated normal. I’m like wicked. But it’s like, I mean we’re all human, so I feel like we should all get
that same experience.” Sean connected his own identity to his behavior again when asked how he identified initially responding,

I mean, people, they get me mad, and they don't see that you shouldn't be annoying me like that. Because some people, they're scared of me because I get mad and they can see a look in my eye, which means move right now. So it's like, any time I get mad, they're like, they just go. So I mean, I'm not. I'm not a bad person.

Malcolm, also commenting on the unfair treatment of certain students, said, “Because sometimes I do bad, but we don't do bad every single time.” He and Lebron shared multiple examples of being blamed because they had a reputation as troublemakers. Malcolm shared the most egregious response to behavior at his previous school,

At my old school, this kid, he was running, and then a kid tripped him, and then he scraped his arm really bad, he started bleeding, and had black marks on his forehead, and then a teacher thought it was me who tripped him, but I was the one who was sitting at the bench. Then they all ran, and she thought it was me and then I was with the principal and got suspended for two weeks.

Lebron told a similar story about receiving out of school suspension after a teacher also misidentified him during a playground fight. Steph described yet another misunderstanding when a white female teacher sent him to the office for playing with a white student. “Me and [student] were just joking, we were playing this game, and I was mad, but I wasn’t really mad, and she took me to the office for no reason and thought I was going to hurt him, but I was just acting.” The fifth-grade boys shared a common negative opinion of [Paraprofessional A], primarily in regards to unfair disciplinary practices. Mike explained,

I just feel like, it’s unpleasant being near her or anywhere around her because it’s just, she for the most menial things, she inflicts the most serious punishment on the most menial things. For example, let’s say you’re opening a bag of chips, you accidentally pop them. She’ll be like, “All right, you’re going to the office.”

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1 Two paraprofessionals are frequently mentioned throughout the dataset. Paraprofessional A and Paraprofessional B are both Black females and frequently mentioned during the study in positive and negative regards.
Duckworth added another example detailing an experience between him and Mike at lunch.

So I had a salad, and he was just touching the top of my lid. And [Paraprofessional A] came in yelling at them for playing with my food, even though I put it to the side literally expressing that I wasn't going to eat it. And then she started yelling at him. And then when he went to the office, and that was really unfair.

In contrast, both the teachers and students reported examples of unbiased practices. The fourth-graders praised [Paraprofessional B]’s supportive, rather than reactionary responses explaining, “She helps some kids. She tells kids to stop. She gives kids a warning.” Mr. Chisolm echoed these practices as a result of mutual respect explaining,

It’s just that whole respect on both ends, which is very important to me as a teacher. It just helps me understand that we all come from different walks of life, and if we can truly understand that and if the kids can truly understand that their teachers understand that, they are more likely to respect you, even if you’re disciplining them in any way.

Following this example of understanding student needs, a white female teacher proactively reached out to me rather than send a Black boy to the office during a difficult transition. “We are switching classes, and he is starting to heighten talking about hating school and substitutes. [His next teacher] has a sub right now.” I was able to provide the student a mental break and bring him to next class in a more calm state.

Carter et al. (2016) argued, “To remedy disparities, educators must design specific strategies for improving student-teacher relationships, and preventing and handling conflict” (p. 16). As a way to take ownership of student behavior, the administration at Martin Hope encourages all staff to enroll in Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) courses. CPI coursework focuses on de-escalation strategies and teaches, as a last resort, nonviolent physical restraints in line with federal and state guidelines. The entire administrative and special education teams along with many other staff members, including Mr. Chisolm, are CPI certified. As a team, we meet monthly to discuss strategies and practice safe physical restraints. During the March 2018
meeting, teachers talked about success in building relationships by establishing trust. One member emphasized the importance of understanding the whole context when deciding on the appropriate de-escalation strategy. We acknowledged that most of our students appear to escalate because of a need for control and that providing reasonable control in the form of choices was the most effective strategy. The team discussed allowing students to take breaks rather than punishing them for work avoidance. The school psychologist summed up the meeting saying, “We are the adults and need to let things go because it is in our control. We want the kids back in class when they can be productive, so our strategy should be centered around whatever will get them there.”

The opposing responses to behaviors at Martin Hope exemplify an authentic representation of the Will and Skill Matrix (Howard et al., 2016). Some teachers, such as members of the CPI team, exhibit both the desire and capacity (will and skill). Many teachers, including members of the CRT book club, demonstrate care but are unsure of how to engage (will and lack of skill). Still others, as mentioned in Mr. Chisolm’s interview, show little interest even with the resources available at Martin Hope (no will and unused skill). Carter et al., (2016) argued, “Racial discipline disparities are a consequence of U.S. history, of the biases and stereotypes created by that history, and of the still strong divisions in lived experience between groups that we call ‘races’” (p.2). All teachers, including those with both the will and skill, are fallible and prone to such bias.

**Racial Bias**

Bias is a broadly used term referring to unfair and prejudicial actions. At times, all participants erroneously applied to this term to mean positionality, racist ideas, or racial privilege. However, with equity-oriented research, it is especially critical to use precise language. After analyzing the data, many of the initial descriptive codes merged to reveal two
themes: negativity bias and researcher bias. “Teachers and others in a school aspiring to support Black males should refrain from internalizing and passing on negative stories or depictions of young men of color based on their past mistakes” (Howard et al., 2016, p. 4). Understanding the personal content divulged during interviews, I assured all participants that I would keep names confidential, allowing them to speak freely. Ms. Washington remarked that it was a “force of habit” to conceal student names. “We do talk about kids and stuff, I think it’s just a force of habit.” Then in a lower volume added, “Unless we’re in the teacher’s lounge.” Researchers have long studied the pervasiveness of negativity bias in adults finding that we are hard-wired to assign more weight to the negative elements of an event or stimulus rather than the positive (Vaish, Grossman, & Woodward, 2008). Vaish et al., (2008) revealed, “negative reinforcement, as opposed to comparable positive reinforcement, leads to faster learning that is more resistant to extinction in both human adults and in animals” (p. 383) and emerges in infants as early as six months old. Especially concerning for Black males, Goff et al. (2014) found commensurate evidence that the general public holds Black males more accountable due only to their gender and race.

When asked about previous students with whom they could not build relationships, both Mr. Chisolm and Ms. Washington spoke of Black males. In Ms. Washington’s response, she shared an experience about a white male qualified with a mention of race. Almost immediately, she realized the racism in her statement saying,

My third year here at [Martin Hope], I had a child who was very defiant. Ironically, Caucasian. I don't mean to say that our African Americans are the ones that cause the trouble. Because that sounds very stereotypical, but it's just ironic that it would've been a Caucasian male that I would've had [pause] especially since that year I had a little bit more African American males that year. I just couldn't reach him. I just could not reach him. No matter what I tried to do, I just could not reach him.
Mr. Chisolm, in contrast, added a reflection about how his new learning and growth might make the difference,

So, it was probably somewhere between eighth and tenth year; there was an African American boy that we just butted heads all year long. I think that if I had him now, it would be a totally different because I felt like I learned, and I've learned and grown as a teacher.

The fourth-grade students recounted prejudice without categorically mentioning race. However, in their descriptions, they only mentioned other Black boys. Again, bringing up

[Paraprofessional A] they explained,

Malcolm: At lunch, once somebody made a nasty noise and she always comes to me and thinks I did it.

Lebron: Yeah, she always does that to [Malcolm] and me. She always comes at me, [Malcolm], [Black male], and sometimes [Steph] but not all of the time.

In the fifth-graders initial interview, Gekyume and Mike mentioned biased teachers attempting to limit their future. Howard et al. (2016) directly call out this type of racist action demanding,

“High expectations for Black boys must never be compromised based on mere perceptions of their supposed lack of engagement or resilience in school” (p. 3)

Gekyume: And it's kind of like, we're set out just supposed to do something. Something that, it's almost clear that we're not going to do it, but there's sometimes things that teachers want us. If they think it's our destiny to do, they set a [pause]. They think we're supposed to settle to do this or do that, even though that may not be as [pause]. And I'm not only talking about we might be bad, I'm not talking about that. But I'm talking about if we were to [pause]. Well, I don't how to explain it though.

Lead Researcher: What do you mean by “they?” They think about what your destiny is?

Mike: They try and hold you.

Gekyume: What they want you to be.

Mike: Yeah.

Gekyume: And then what they say you should be instead of what you want to be.

Duckworth continued the conversation explicitly calling out bias,
So yeah, so with some of the teachers, when some kids are bad, and then I see improvement, the teachers kind of knock them down like they don't really let them get better. For some things a normal kid does that really doesn't have any bias to the teacher. It's like, "Good job," for that. But then when the bad kid that's getting better at being a better person and having a better behavior, when they do that same things. But the teacher kind of finds a way to put a twist on that. Some kids in our [advanced] math class, they're doing normal things, but our teacher still yells at them for doing it.

Bias, however, is not merely a Black and white issue. Examining criminal sentencing disparities in Georgia, Burch (2015) found courts to sentence Black people with medium and dark skin to serve 4.8 percent more time than their white counterparts; however, the same courts sentenced Black people with light skin to similar lengths as whites. Sean reiterated this effect telling a story of racist ideas involving a Black girl with light skin.

There’s this teacher from third grade. This incident happened. It was my home teacher. So there was this sand project we were doing. And then we made them and we were just playing in the sand. And then [female student], she messes up the ice and throws the project down. And everyone saw that it was [female student] that did it. And yet we were like, “It was [female student].” And Ms. [Teacher] was like, “No, it was you guys.” So it was like it was what she was blaming us because we’re Black. And I feel like she was taking [female student’s] side because [female student] looks more white than Black.

As both the lead researcher and a participant in the study with intimate knowledge of the context, bias is inevitable. Fine (2018) described her struggle to balance both roles revealing, “Neither wanting to flatten power issues nor reify the differences between insiders and outsiders, we struggled to craft the section on who is the ‘we’ of the research collective” (p. 7). In an effort to acknowledge the duality of my role, I present four examples of researcher bias accepting there are most likely more that have gone undetected. All four occurred in conjunction with the fourth-grade cogens.

Twice during the initial interview, I demonstrated assumptions that the students lacked the understanding of my questions rather than taking their responses at face value.
Lead Researcher: Okay, so tell me about a time when you felt misunderstood by an adult in the building.

Malcolm: My teacher was doing Algebra for the kids.

Lead Researcher: So, that was a time when you didn’t understand what you were learning?

Malcolm: She was doing Algebra, and I didn’t understand it.

Lead Researcher: I’m thinking about, have there ever been a time where you did something and an adult in the building kind of took it the wrong way? And you were like, “That’s not what I did” or you got upset, or you felt like they didn’t understand where you were coming from or what you were doing?

In the example above, I ignored Malcolm’s response about his need for academic support and presumed he was confused by my question. The same type of conversation arose with Steph after asking, “What does an adult need to do here to gain your trust?”

Steph: I think what teachers need to do to have our trust is say we do good in school, our attitude, because if we be bad in school they might not really look at you or do anything because your attitude is just bad, and they’ll give the same attitude you give them back to you.

Lead Researcher: So, that kind of sounds like some things kids can do to help, but what do you think that teachers need to do?

In retrospect, Steph answered the question describing a desire for affirmation. I only recognized this bias after re-reading through the fifth-grade interview transcripts where Duckworth described the same teacher behaviors saying, “With a lot of my teachers they kind of, when I’m trying to answer a question they kind of take my question out of context and reword it, so that’s kind of annoying.”

The third example again represented my racial privilege toward the fourth-graders blaming them rather than society. In a conversation with my dissertation chair, he reminded me to refocus on the system.

Lead Researcher: My fifth grade cogen is amazing. They’re in a gifted ELA program so their language skills are great. They are also loving the experience so it’s so cool to see it unfold. My fourth graders are also very excited but I’m not getting as much
original thought. Two out of the three are pretty low academically so their language skills are far below my fifth graders. I’m not too surprised by that and I’m trying to not compare too much. Most of their answers in the interview and things that come up in the cogen are things they think the teacher wants to hear.

Chair: Remember that not all students are accustomed to being empowered in school settings, so do not misinterpret this as a lack of original thought, but rather a byproduct of exposure to an educational system that does not always listen.

In the fourth example, I attempted to reconcile my role as both a researcher and a stakeholder at Martin Hope. Mr. Chisolm spoke about his racial and religious identities that drove his motivation to create change. He then asked me about my goals for the research. I responded by sharing my feelings that we’re failing our “students of color, especially our Black males,” and my frustrations with staff who were unwilling or unable to “get uncomfortable” to talk about race and equity. I added that I hoped the cogens evolved into “something that maybe works well for us and we could keep going. But also, it gives these Black boys in our school a chance to just have a voice.” I ended by acknowledging my position as a white woman to gain career advancement from research focused on Black boys adding, “Obviously, I have professional goals. I want to be a doctor, and that’s a thing. But I’ve been trying to make sure I find ways to make it about the kids and keep it about them. That’s my big hope.” The parallel role of both researcher and participant coupled with the normative hierarchical nature in schools and my own bias created an imperfect situation. Following the social design methodology, however, I believe that through honest reflection and transparency, this study accomplished the goal of telling a story of Black male resilience and leadership.

“I Don’t Think She Knows My Name”: Genuine Care and Respect

Martin Hope students appreciate teachers who care. For the purposes of this study, I used the code Genuine Care to represent behaviors described by Quaylan Allen (2014) and Joseph Derrick Nelson (2016). Allen (2014) used the term “genuine interest and care for teaching” (p.
24) to describe good teaching in action. In his study, Black males identified teacher behaviors that contributed to their academic success, including asset-based thinking, opportunities for growth, high expectations, and a desire to be a better teacher. Nelson’s (2016) study showed that Black boys described “relationally effective teachers” (p. 13) went above and beyond, connected to students’ talents and passions, established common ground through shared interests, backgrounds, and experiences, and at times, overlooked inappropriate behavior and low academic achievement for the sake of recognizing the personhood and humanity over the action.

**Genuine Care**

The thirty-nine occurrences of Genuine Care within the data represent how the teachers see themselves, how the students describe Mr. Chisolm and Ms. Washington at various points in the process, and how the students want all teachers at Martin Hope to act. Often, the first step in building a relationship is learning and using students’ names where, in contrast, teachers who do not put forth the effort appear uncommitted and inaccessible (Glenz, 2014). Duckworth shared how two paraprofessionals who have known him all year by either being assigned his lunch block or his patrol spot do not know his name. “Ms. [Paraprofessional A] was our lunch aid for a whole year. She has not even tried to know my name at all. And Ms. [Paraprofessional B], I’m literally at her post, and she doesn’t. I don’t really think she knows my name.” In contrast, Ms. Washington shared during her initial interview, “I lucked out with where I knew all the students, even though I didn’t have all of them last year. Again, its that rapport of even if I saw you in the hallway, I know your name.” In describing Paraprofessional B, Steph believed she showed care and illustrated Nelson’s (2016) skill of accommodating opposition, “Like when somebody gets

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2 Paraprofessional A and Paraprofessional B are both Black females and frequently mentioned during the study in positive and negative regards.
in trouble she’s not, she’s like one of those chill teachers. She listens. She makes some jokes, and then we start laughing.” Mr. Chisolm established common ground and showed vulnerability when he expressed, “The biggest way that I build relationships is I’ll share my story with them, my ups and downs in life, and I think that really helps them understand that it’s okay if they come to me, if they’re having difficulty.”

Students value teachers who challenge them through high expectations, rigorous curricula, and share a clear objective of academic success (Allen, 2014; Howard et al., 2016; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Reichert & Hawley, 2009; Nelson, 2016). Accordant with the literature, Martin Hope students expressed the same aspirations. During the first cogen, the fourth-graders reflected on ways to improve their classroom by asking for increased academic support. Malcolm specifically asked for more support and homework on fractions, times tables, and repeated addition. During the structured observation, Malcolm sat at a small group table receiving that support. Malcolm spoke of Mr. Chisolm in the initial interview saying, “He helps us. He encourages us. But he helps us, if we get our answer wrong, he’s like ‘It’s okay, try again.’” During the final interview, Lebron expressed similar sentiments, “He pushes us more and it helps a lot. How we get more homework, he keeps on asking me like, ‘Have you been doing that?’ Checking in.” Although the fifth-grade group included only accelerated students, they also communicated the need for academic support. Gekyume described the staff at Martin Hope stating, “Most teachers are good. And then they push you harder than average and stuff.” Usain affirmed that same belief describing Ms. Washington, “She would always motivate you. And she’d see that you’re struggling so she’d always help you. She would provide you a working recess just to help you get better.” The data often included elements revealing parallel positions of genuine care and respect.
Respect

Codes of respect resonated across the data also arising in connection with voice, trust, and leadership. The boys in both cogens found power in the rule that all voices are equal. In the second fifth-grade cogen, when asked what they would like to see change, Ms. Washington quipped that they could not request less work. Mike immediately announced with a big smile, “You can say whatever you want. We have an equal voice!” The entire group laughed, and Usain followed up with the comment, “Just because teachers get paid doesn’t mean you have a more important voice.” Ms. Washington smiled and nodded in agreement. In the second fourth-grade cogen, Steph also spoke up, “Most of the times it’s the teacher’s power, but here we have all the power.” Howard et al. (2016) insisted that this elevation of student voices was essential for a more accurate understanding of Black male student needs. In Ms. Washington’s initial interview, she shared her goal of encouraging students’ voices, I want them to be able to say what they feel. I don’t want them holding it back, but also teaching them, though, in a polite manner. That’s the one piece of advice that I keep giving my students. If something is going on in your other classes, you need to speak up about it, but you need to do it in a respectful manner.

It is not always clear, however, to discern differing definitions of respect. This is especially true for Black boys as indicated by Martin Hope’s disciplinary data showing that Black boys were seven times more likely to receive office disciplinary referrals and often for subjective reasons such as disrespect. In his initial interview, Mike spoke of a lunch bunch with Paraprofessional B saying, “She tells us to stand up for yourself and then we would stand up for ourselves to her, she acts disrespectful. So I don’t get it. What she means, stand up for yourself. And then when you do, she puts you down.” Howard et al. (2016) asserted the need for systems where the adults are adept at hearing Black male perspectives and experiences. The fifth-graders also conveyed other
communication disconnects between teachers and students. Duckworth spoke of the time his
dog passed sharing,

    Sometimes when something bad happens, the rare times that a teacher has earned
enough trust in me that I’ll tell them, sometimes my trust with them floats down
because sometimes they don’t understand that the child brain is networked
differently and some experiences just won’t pass as quickly as it will for others.
Pity and stuff like that doesn’t really help at all.

Mike added, “Sometimes your best option is to just be quiet and just help them through it
without speaking.” Howard et al. (2016) demanded,

    Students must be viewed as whole people, in need of social, emotional,
physiological, and intellectual support. This support cannot be born out of pity for
their circumstances. Nor can this support usurp or supersede the agency, cultural
practices, language, and resourcefulness young men bring to school with them. (p.
4)

In the same interview, Mike contended teachers gain trust when we respect the differences
between adults and children. Stating that he wanted to be treated as an adult with the
contingency that we remember he is still a child and bound to make mistakes. These views are
consistent with the antiblack school practices and the findings of Goff et al, (2014) where Black
children and adults are perceived as less innocent, and that after age nine, the difference was
drastically disparate.

    The second cogen marked a shift for the fourth-grade group. In the first cogen, students
mainly spoke of academic needs, including wanting more homework, an increase in math games,
and opportunities for reteaching. During the second cogen, the students requested small group
math rotations and an assigned student leader for any group without an adult. The boys
volunteered to serve as those leaders but were hesitant in how to carry out the role. Between the
second and third cogen, I brought Malcolm, Steph, and Lebron to observe Ms. Washington’s
afternoon class to see how Duckworth, Usain, Sean, and Mike demonstrated leadership during
group discussions. Ms. Washington had her class divided into five groups, and the fifth-grade
cogen boys were in two. Malcolm, Steph, and Lebron sat with the fifth-graders at their tables to watch and listen. Sean and Mike broke the proverbial fourth wall and included the fourth-graders in the discussion and even offered advice.

“Schools and practitioners must carve out a defined space where young men of color can self-affirm, provide one another multiple forms of support, and receive mentorship and access to men of color who provide multiple images of success” (Howard et al., 2016, p. 4). The fourth-graders’ third cogen primarily included discussions around respect, voice, and leadership. Mr. Chisolm asked the group, “How will it help you having a voice that’s heard and respected in life?” Steph responded, “People might care about what you say.” Lebron answered, “When you have a voice, some listen, and some don’t.” Mr. Chisolm followed up the question with, “What leadership qualities do you have to show, so they respect you? Malcolm replied, “You have to respect them, treat them how you want to be treated.” The conversation evolved into a more personal discussion where each member of the cogen shared about a leader in their own life. Lebron spoke of his grandmother who is old and wise; Malcolm described his dad as a Navy leader who is respectful and gives people a voice; Steph recalled his father’s teachings to follow your own path and to walk away from friends who get in trouble; Mr. Chisolm described his mother as the one who taught him what it means to love all people with actions; and I spoke of my father modeling the importance of treating all humans with respect regardless of their position in life. Malcolm, Steph, and Lebron agreed that they wanted more opportunities for leadership and taking a break from academics to talk about life. While I did not witness it during the structured observation, the fourth graders reported that Mr. Chisolm broke from his typical math lessons the following week to teach the entire class about leadership. In the fourth, and final cogen, the boys appeared more comfortable and confident by speaking more often without
being prompted and talking freely without first raising their hands. They were in total agreement that the leadership opportunities impacted the class positively. Steph added that he wanted to serve as a mentor for younger students who needed help, and Lebron shared that he wanted to return to Martin Hope as a middle schooler volunteering his time after school. When asked which aspects of the cogen we should continue with other groups, Steph commented, “I like to talk about our life and the leader thing.” Malcolm also shared his relationship changed with Mr. Chisolm throughout the cogens because of his responses to student needs citing the increase in homework and the opportunities for leadership. The boys organically commented on their teachers’ roles as learners within the cogen; however, I also explicitly questioned how they viewed their teachers’ participation as part of a larger structure involving other forms of job-embedded professional development.

“Not Every Teacher Knows Everything”: Barriers and Curricular Demands

Baldwin County Public Schools defines the role of the Staff Development Teacher as one who builds teacher capacity to increase student achievement. Howard et al. (2016) expanded that definition specifying the need to dismantle racist and deficit ideologies to augment Black male success. Students in this study spoke positively of teachers engaging in PD, and also asserted a need for more. Aligned with the Will and Skill Matrix (Howard et al., 2016), the boys described teachers at Martin Hope ranging in degree of interest and skill. In their initial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will and Skill</th>
<th>No Will and Unused Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers exhibit care, urgency, capacity, and clarity on how to engage individually and institutionally.</td>
<td>Teachers demonstrate a lack of interest related to Black male achievement but there are attendant resources that are going unused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will and Lack of Skill</td>
<td>No Will and Lack of Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers exhibit care, but are unsure of how or where to act.</td>
<td>Teachers demonstrate a lack of interest and also lack the skills to engage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 4-2. The above chart is adapted from Howard et al. (2016) and represents the continuum of stakeholders situated to promote success for Black male students.
interviews, both Mr. Chisolm and Ms. Washington expressed a general appreciation for professional learning around relationships but struggled to recall most of the specific JEPD opportunities provided; each mentioned whole staff meetings and community builders. When asked about the types of professional learning that have supported her capacity with relationship building, Ms. Washington responded,

> When we talk about things about developing relationships with kids or what we can do to reach the kid, or whatever, I sit there, and I will say to myself, I'm already doing that. But it's kind of nice to know that it is totally validating what it is that I'm already doing. I can't give a specific professional development that I've done over the years. Whenever maybe we do a staff meeting or your own trainings.

Mr. Chisolm vaguely commented on the equity learning at Martin Hope and the range of teacher capacity that exists within our building. However, salient to this study, Mr. Chisolm’s response also illuminated Tatum’s (1997) notion that the absence of white teachers’ conversations about race is due to a fear of misinterpretation and animosity from colleagues of color.

> I think a big part of it is the whole equity piece. I'm fine with it, but sometime I'll look around, and there are staff members who, you can just tell by the look on their face, that they're uncomfortable with it. And that's why sometimes you have problems, because we don't talk about the past and what's going on now and so on and so forth. So a lot of it was equity and then community builders. I think, overall, it's just the way that you present the material.

In the final interviews, I asked the student groups how they felt about their teachers volunteering for the study and engaging in professional learning on relationships. Malcolm shared that it has helped Mr. Chisolm because he is learning more, adding that, “Not every teacher knows everything.” Mike noted similar improvements with Ms. Washington affirming, “Now I’ve noticed certain things like she’s learning as well. She’s progressing as we are as well.” Sean piggybacked by suggesting we use cogens with more teachers; he explained,

> It might help us out with them, especially if it's your homeroom teacher. That really helped because she would be one of the main people who understood how
we felt about all that happened. Especially me being with her for two years, she knows how I cooperate and how I think about things.

In their final interviews, both Mr. Chisolm and Ms. Washington remarked on the positive learning experience from being a part of the cogens. Mr. Chisolm repeated his sentiments about whole staff meetings, added his learning as part of the ILT, and expressed a desire to expand the cogens. “As far as other things, definitely like what we did with the kids in the cogens. I think we need to have more of that in the school, especially for African American males.” Ms. Washington commented about how her learning from the cogens helped to reshape her class dynamics stating,

I feel like the kids are very competitive with each other at the beginning of the year because of this [accelerated program]. They do try to outshine the other. It was nice to see that for the first time when I did something like this; they were working together. They weren’t debating; they were having a blast!

In addition to the abovementioned staff meetings, leadership meetings, and cogen learning, various members of the staff also engaged in JEPD through voluntary book clubs, peer observations, coaching and co-teaching, sharing of professional journal articles, and collaborative planning/curriculum study meetings. Mr. Chisolm participated in one of two voluntary book clubs during the 2018-2019 school year where, in collaboration with a district equity leader, we read, unpacked, and applied the learning from Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Members of the club identified teacher practices, such as implementing “trust generators” (Hammond & Jackson, 2015, p. 79), to build relationships with SIP focus students. At our final meeting of the year, teachers expressed a need for the information to be shared with the entire staff and potentially develop a committee to discuss how to best present the information. Within the club, we discussed multiple barriers to building relationships which were congruent with the research data.
Barriers to Building Relationships

During the second fifth-grade cogen, Mike coined the term “blockades” when referencing any disruption to the standard or expected schedule. Blockades meant breaks in familiar routines, an increase in stress, and less of a focus on teacher-student relationships. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) drawing on earlier works of Pierce (1988) found that regardless of location or social status, Black males suffer from additional stressors from perceived or actual racism in schools. While all students are at a disadvantage when teachers are less patient and focused on relationships, it is our Black males who endure the most. In fact, the stress is at such a high level, Smith (2004) developed the term, “racial battle fatigue” to encompass the cumulative result of daily racism which ranges from unintentional microaggressions to antagonistic classrooms to life-threatening conditions. “Racial battle fatigue develops in African Americans and other people of color much like combat fatigue in military personnel, even when they are not under direct (racial) attack” (Smith, 2004, p. 180). The data revealed two types of break in routine: Mike’s blockade resulting in a decrease in relationship building, and purposeful divergence from the academic curriculum to increase positive relationships.

Blockades adversely impacting relationships primarily arose within the fifth-grade data. The boys described negative changes in teacher behavior as a result of these interruptions. The majority of the disruptions to their routine occurred during the third and fourth marking periods. It is unclear whether the overrepresentation during the second half of the year is due to the timing of the study, the increase of blockades in the spring, or a combination of both. Specific examples included the Health and Human Development curriculum, mandatory state testing, school assemblies and events, and teachers requiring substitutes for sick leave.

One week a year, fifth-graders learn about puberty, reproduction, and healthy relationships. Over the last three years, Martin Hope Elementary included either five or six
homeroom classes with a maximum of twenty-nine students per class. During the 2018-2019 school year, the teachers divided the 162 students into two groups based on their assigned sex at birth as the Health and Human Development curriculum includes different content for each group. Ms. Washington, in alignment with her fifth-grade teammates, expressed concern about teaching the content without an additional adult in the room; for this reason, the team opted to create two large groups rather than six smaller groups. One teammate shared, “I don’t feel comfortable being alone with them, especially the boys. I’m not trying to have a kid say something and get fired over this.” Teachers and students shared the stress. My mentee, a fifth-grade Black girl, explained, “I hate Family Life. Everyone is on edge. We aren’t supposed to talk about it during recess, but what do you think everyone does? Then the teachers just get more worked up.”

Figure 4-3. 2018-2019 Fifth-Grade Class Sizes. At the start of the fourth quarter during the 2018-2019 school year, each fifth-grade class included between twenty-six and twenty-

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3 A small number of families opt out of the learning. This third group participates in alternate health lessons.
eight students in their homeroom. The maximum number of students dictated by Baldwin County Public Schools is twenty-nine.

Another barrier to building relationships is high-stakes testing. During the 2018-2019 school year, mandatory state testing⁴ for fifth-graders included four sixty-minute sessions of science testing in March as well as four sixty-minute sessions of math and four ninety-minute sessions of literacy testing between April and June. Adding time to provide materials, directions, and special education accommodations, Martin Hope Elementary schedules for two-hour testing blocks. Duckworth described Ms. Washington’s demeanor noting how testing eliminated the positive changes seen during the cogens. “The stress of [state test] has made some of the things go back the way they were before. She is snapping at the kids.” Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) found similar reactions from teachers and parents regarding high-stakes testing; the teachers noted a decrease in quality instruction and an increase in stress and anxiety. Unlike some states, Baldwin County does not link teacher evaluations to student performance on tests, however, like the teachers in Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas’s (2000) study, teachers at Martin Hope were also worried about job security. One teacher spoke of district leaders saying, “I know they keep saying it’s not connected, but they’re looking at the data. We talk about it in all the meetings. I’m just not so sure.” Consistent with the literature (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; von der Embse, 2017) Martin Hope teachers also noted an increase in student stress. During a coaching conversation with a teacher in a non-testing grade, the teacher offered comfort, “We appreciate you helping us, but we know this time of year is crazy. We see everyone stressed. The kids are all popping off because of it.”

⁴ In addition to mandatory state testing, teachers at each grade level must administer multiple district assessments throughout the year.
Even well-intentioned events can negatively impact relationships. [Paraprofessional B], along with another teacher, organize the school talent show including try-outs, bi-weekly rehearsals, a daytime assembly for the students, and an evening presentation for the families. During the initial interview, Sean noted the negative changes in relationships. “I feel like [Paraprofessional B], it’s like she feels like these other kids, so they’re more important than we are. And it’s like especially when the talent show comes up, she’s not really herself anymore. She’s way different.” Students and teachers did not condemn all disruptions to the typical schedule; some interruptions resulted in positive changes.

**Curricular Demands**

Allen’s (2014) description of caring teachers included those who built relationships before and after school and elevated their pedagogical practices well above the standard curriculum. Teachers at Martin Hope, like many teachers, feel constricted by the academic curriculum. Howard et al. (2016) might say they have the will but lack the skill, not knowing how or where to engage. Ms. Washington expressed this disposition when reflecting on how to incorporate professional learning on relationships into practice. “I think, for me, it’s always nice to hear these things about what we’re supposed to be doing with these kids and we’re supposed to be making the time for it, but, of course, as teachers, we don’t always have that time.” Our students, especially our most marginalized, cannot afford for teachers to not make that time commitment (Brown & Brown, 2012; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Butler et al., 2012; Dickerson & Agosto, 2015; Emdin, 2011; Emdin, 2012; Emdin, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Howard, 2008; Howard, 2013; Howard et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Love, 2013; Rocque, 2010; Singleton, 2015). In describing an activity during her final interview, Ms. Washington recognized the value of teaching beyond the baseline standards. “I wanted to do something different with them, and I wish maybe we weren’t so pigeonholed into doing things
that the county wants us to do. I wish we could branch out a little bit more.” She continued to
describe a culminating activity where students had increased freedom to choose their medium
and their partners. “The engagement piece is huge. Like I said, I’ve never seen that entire class
so engaged and it was the first time that some of your squirrely kids were really focused and
excited to do something.” For this project, Gekyume wrote and performed a play with three
classmates; Duckworth, Sean, and Mike rapped together; and Usain wrote a poem.

Mr. Chisolm has long expressed the need to break away from curricular demands but did
not always know when or how to do so. The students in Allen’s (2014) study praised teachers
who made real-life connections to the curriculum and emphasized why and how the content
would benefit them in college and future careers. Mr. Chisolm acknowledged the sentiment
saying,

> At the end of the day, it's not always about your subject area, your content, it's
> getting to that deeper understanding of kids' interests and developing lessons
> based off some of their answers. As it relates to different jobs and careers to help
> them truly understand why they are learning what they're learning and how it can
> benefit them later in life.

Steph echoed this view in his initial interview,

> I like this school because in fourth grade for math, they really helped me
> understand because we need math like for money and buying stuff, and
> measurement helps us a lot because like say if we bought a house and we need a
> rug, we need to see how big the rug is to put inside your house, and writing helps
> with your punctuation, you write better, and we've been doing typing so we can
> get faster. [I’m] trying to type without looking at the keys because Mrs. [Fourth
> grade teacher’s] been doing this for a long time and she doesn't really have to
> look at the words, because she practices a lot.

Beyond connecting academic content to their lives, students in the study embraced
opportunities to experience the unwritten social-emotional curriculum. After the final fifth-grade

\[^5\] The fourth-grade teacher mentioned is one of three Black female teachers in the school.
cogen, Duckworth commented that he appreciated how the cogen resulted in a change in teacher practice, primarily through grouping structures, but wished they had spent more time on the “social piece” as a way to deepen their relationships. As noted earlier, the fourth-graders commended the breaks from academics to discuss life lessons. In his final interview, Mr. Chisolm proudly demonstrated his will and skill (Howard et al., 2016) to engage reporting,

> Throughout the year, I'll often, if I'm teaching a math assignment or whatever, sometimes I'll just stop teaching, and I'll just talk about life. I let my kids know every year, especially the past three to four years, that I don't want to be their teacher that's recognized as the good math teacher or the good reading teacher. Not that those things aren't good, but just a teacher that truly cared about his students. And I am seeing results where kids are coming back to see me.

Mike’s term, blockades, described unwanted breaks in routines resulting in stressful school environments. Many of the blockades were beyond the control of teachers or students, but how teachers responded to the inevitable made the difference. However, students and teachers viewed some interruptions more like a welcomed caesura, as was the case with Ms. Washington’s choice activity and Mr. Chisolm’s life lessons. Both positive and negative divergences fundamentally impacted all students; however, many experiences at Martin Hope are reserved solely for the Black students.
“While schools cannot clean up the residue of inequality gaps, state violence, relentless racism, and xenophobia, they can be designed to respect children, their families, and educators; preserve relationships; cultivate inquiry; and invite creativity” (Fine, 2018, p. 68). While Fine (2018) acknowledged the broader societal inequities in America, she also positioned educators capable of enacting meaningful change at the local level. Fundamentally, this study set out to mediate student-teacher relationships between Black males and their teachers by dismantling the normative hierarchy in schools. Emphasizing the social component of cogenerative dialogues and the elevation of marginalized voices through a social design framework, we socialized for social justice. To answer the research questions, cogenerative dialogues, at least temporarily, positively impacted student-teacher relationships at Martin Hope Elementary, and early adolescent Black males responded positively to teachers engaged in JEPD on relationship building.

The data revealed three principle findings: societal constructs of race impact relationships at Martin Hope; Martin Hope students appreciate teachers who care; and Martin Hope teachers feel constrict constricted by the academic curriculum. The findings in this study support the broad literature base highlighting the need for well-developed student teacher relationships as well as the need to repudiate myths focusing on Black males as the source of the problem. In alignment with key scholarship on Black males from Quaylan Allen (2014) and Joseph Derrick Nelson (2016), students at Martin Hope expressed a need for genuine care including respect, trust, and opportunities for voice and leadership. They also valued teachers who exhibited a care and commitment to the teaching profession and lifelong learning. Both teachers and students also described structural blockades to building relationships that increased
stress and diminished established relationships. These blockades existed primarily in the form of state mandated curriculum and its kin, high stakes standardized testing. In recognizing these structural constraints, participants also noted positive experiences when teachers broke from the standard curriculum to create culturally congruent classroom experiences. This was evident in Mr. Chisolm’s leadership lessons and Ms. Washington’s choice activity.

Finally, the staff and students at Martin Hope were not immune to the impacts of societal constructs of race on relationships. Although the Black male students in the study focused on their racial identity to varying degrees, each described at least one instance of racial discrimination. Sadly congruent with the broader experience of life for Black males in America, the boys in this study typically experienced racial discrimination through unjust disciplinary practices. The nature of these experiences is what constituted their initial mistrust with adults in the building and the overall rationale for this study.

In light of these findings, I present implications for teachers, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders who continue to grapple with notions of race and racism relative to Black students as they play out in school settings. I present these implications by revisiting the literature on Black male school experiences, reality pedagogy, and finally social design based research. It is imperative to note that while the results of this study were commensurate with the burgeoning canon of research on relationships and Black males (Howard et al., 2016; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Nelson, 2015; Reichert, 2015; Reichert, 2016; Reichert & Hawley, 2009; Reichert & Hawley 2013), educators outside of Martin Hope Elementary and Baldwin County Public Schools should first listen to the voices and specific needs of their students before applying these suggestions as a one-size-fits-all approach.
Implications for Eradicating Antiblack School Environments for Black Boys

When we acknowledge that Black boys have legitimate fears, frustrations, and sadness about their lived experiences in school, we might challenge ourselves to think about our roles in protecting Black boys, in defending them from a host of assaults on their bodies and spirits. (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p.39)

In the quote above, Dumas and Nelson (2016) offered a charge for educators regardless of level to ensure humanizing experiences for Black boys in U.S. public schools. This is warranted because antiblack schooling practices deny Black children their fundamental rights through consistent implementation of inequitable disciplinary practices, obstructing access to culturally relevant coursework, and promoting an overrepresentation of Black students in special education and an underrepresentation in gifted education (Carter et al., 2016; Dumas, 2014; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Love, 2016). Dumas and Nelson (2016) contended that the controlling structures in American schools dehumanize Black males by eliminating personal power and voice, and requiring large group learning and monotonous routines under the oversight of assigned, rather than selected, adults. Findings from this social design research study illustrated how Black males experienced dehumanizing forms in their educational experience. Yet, by listening to the very Black males who were targeted and at times dehumanized, we can gain insight as to how antiblack school structures can be mediated.

First, as evident from this study, students want to see that their teachers care. Moreover, Black male students value teachers who intentionally and visibly work towards the eradication of antiblack schooling practices. It is imperative that teachers of Black males, especially when they identify as neither Black nor male, must examine their current practices to discern opportunities for growth. While Baldwin County Public Schools does not evaluate teachers based on student achievement and outcomes, teachers are evaluated based on performance standards. Teachers
must demonstrate commitment to their students’ overall growth by beginning with a racially equitable approach and belief system. In fact, district documents explicitly state,

The teacher extends his/her mission beyond the academic growth of students. The teacher acts to end the predictability of achievement/performance among racial and ethnic groups by implementing practices, structures, and processes in our schools and worksites that eliminate inequities based on race and ethnicity. (District Document, 2018)

As this policy illustrates, in order to disrupt the denigrating norms evident in schools, educators cannot ignore the social-emotional development of Black boys. It is not enough to acknowledge race; educators must recognize the pervasiveness of how societal perceptions of race act as a structural barrier in schools. Teachers can meet this demand by setting high expectations for all students, offering genuine encouragement and affirmations, cultivating social and emotional development, and accepting responsibility for the outcomes of all students.

Relatedly, by rejecting socially constructed myths about Black boys and shifting our focus towards an asset-based view, we have the opportunity to reimagine schools for Black boys as venues to elicit creativity, agency, and joy (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Evident in both the existing literature and the findings in this study, Black males want teachers to first see them as a human with unique strengths and needs. Nelson’s (2016) study on relational teaching with Black boys emphasized how teachers must utilize multiple approaches to building relationships; explaining his concept of accommodating opposition, Nelson (2016) explained,

Purposely overlooking, for example, boys’ achievement, school behavior, and other actions typically deemed inappropriate for learning environments. Boys’ narratives depicted strategic instances when these exceptions helped with the realization of their own uniqueness, and how the gesture demonstrated teachers’ appreciation of their individuality. The relational process enabled boys to see how their personhood mattered to teachers more than a school rule or discipline policy.

The contrasting descriptions of [Paraprofessional B] in this study demonstrated how some students valued teachers who accommodated opposition (Nelson, 2016) where others
characterized it as racially driven. Teachers who accommodate opposition intentionally overlook some behaviors; this serves as a gesture to build relationships by showing students’ that their humanity supersedes rules and policies. (Nelson, 2016) While this study did not intentionally seek out differences between the two groups, Ms. Washington’s students spoke of [Paraprofessional B] exclusively in the negative whereas Mr. Chisolm’s students regarded her actions favorably. Remaining attuned to differing students’ needs, teachers must establish positive learning environments founded on openness, respect, and collaboration. Teachers must elicit student input in all aspects of the classroom environment and employ a repertoire of approaches to match individual academic and social-emotional needs.

Findings also show that schools do have the responsibility to prioritize the safety of all students, and therefore, teachers should view discipline matters as learning opportunities for school staff, families, and students to collaborate on supportive responses and restorative practices (Dumas and Nelson, 2016). As Bettina Love (2014) noted, “If educators do not take action to problematize, examine, confront, and challenge their own inscribed dispositions to create social change, they determine that their role in schools is to criminalize Black bodies” (p. 304). Cogens are one way to demonstrate a supportive and humanitarian response. The inherent balance of power within the cogen structure encourages productive discourse from an equity-oriented stance whereby teachers are learning from the students.

Students in this study also valued teachers committed to ongoing professional development. Teachers must continue to hone their practice through reflection, connecting information from workshops and conferences to their classrooms, and engaging in the feedback cycle with both colleagues and students. Teachers would also benefit from being transparent with their students about ongoing professional learning. An intentional conversation about
teachers as learners will not only help break down the standard imbalance of power in the classroom, but will also invite students into the conversation as sources of feedback. By no means is this an exhaustive list of recommendations nor should teachers feel burdened to implement changes without support. Coaches, such as myself, have a key role in creating sustainable change.

**Implications for Coaches**

Instructional coaches as well as other non-classroom teachers such as special educators, ESOL teachers, and administrators are all uniquely situated to understand a more complete picture of the antiblack condition of schools. We are not bound to a single classroom allowing us an ability to hear multiple perspectives and view the school in a broader sense. We also have the flexibility to vertically support staff by connecting learning between grade-levels and subject-alike teams. Holding teachers accountable for asset-based thinking requires coaches to model high expectations and the importance of social-emotional development on a daily basis. Coaches must monitor their language choices and create a culture where the discussions around student outcomes and achievement include plural and possessive pronouns, such as we and ours, reflecting shared accountability. Coaches should also model effective teaching strategies requesting feedback from both classroom teachers and students. This will serve as an opportunity for JEPD while also creating a culture that encourages vulnerability and elevates student voices as a valuable source of information. Coaches should guide staff members through continuous rounds of an equity audit whereby teachers identify blind spots and program gaps acknowledging their placement on the Will and Skill Matrix (Howard et al., 2016).

When planning for professional learning, coaches must differentiate learning to meet the specific needs of the staff. In order to develop a sense of ownership, we must solicit input before creating professional development plans beginning first with student voice. In the case of Martin
Hope, the ILT vocalized a need for learning around building relationships. This need emerged from students expressing a lack of trust. It is still vital, however, to acknowledge the increasing demands placed on classroom teachers. Coaches should present professional learning that is concomitant rather than additive by connecting to prior learning. Teachers will not respond if they view new PD as “one more thing.” Especially when including topics of race, coaches must establish dialogic learning environments in which teachers feel safe speaking their truths, taking intellectual risks, and learning from each other. However, in doing so, coaches must recognize that conversations around race without critical dialogue may increase resistance and undermine otherwise well-intended practices. As was the case with the cogens at Martin Hope, the students’ willingness to open up and share their stories inspired the teachers to follow suit and ultimately examine their own practice. Follow up conversations with teachers must include disaggregated racial/ethnic data, the relevant context associated with the data, solutions that specifically address disparities, and follow through to monitor effectiveness of those solutions (Carter et al., 2016).

Specific to the needs of Black males, coaches must also follow the lead of humanizing researchers by emphasizing students’ resilience and perseverance when telling their story (Allen, 2014; Fine, 2016; Gutiérrez, 2016; Howard, 2008; Howard, 2013; Howard et al., 2016; Love, 2013; Love, 2016; Paris & Winn, 2014) We must also rely on student voices if we hope to gain a more reliable account of system barriers for Black males. Cogens served as a valuable tool for both teachers and students at Martin Hope. We were able to begin with minimal time devoted to initial instruction of the format, and the voices of the young, Black males guided our process. Like researchers, coaches must take action to disrupt structural inequities. Fine (2018) demanded that,
Once critical researchers chronicle the scar tissue and desires of those who have been shut out, we carry the responsibility to theorize, historicize, make visible, re-present, and re-circulate their stories in the courts, in policy, textbooks, classrooms, curriculum, organizing, and popular media. And we are obligated to animate the histories, structures, policies, ideologies, and practices that have spawned their social exclusion, and perhaps have fomented their deep commitments to justice. “Voices” alone will not suffice. Critical researchers are neither tape recorders nor ventriloquists. (p.12)

As teachers must commit beyond the academic curriculum and the walls of their classroom, coaches, too must invest in Black male students beyond the walls of the school building.

**Reality Pedagogy Beyond the Pedagogy**

Reality pedagogy consists of five tools: cogenerative dialogues, coteaching, cosmopolitanism, context, and content. Emdin (2012) developed the five Cs to create educational spaces where Black males are positioned to engage in meaningful dialogue based on personal observations and critical thinking. In turn, teachers operating their classrooms with Emdin’s (2012) reality pedagogical practices highlight the emphasis on a need for community; teachers then have the opportunity to elicit constructive feedback from Black males to better appreciate the differing needs of all students. Often, educators view pedagogical practices in terms of the classroom. Reality pedagogy, however, extends beyond the classroom walls. The cogens in the study all occurred during the students’ lunchtime. In addition to the power to influence classroom lessons and structures, the students remarked positively to their teachers giving up a personal lunch block each week. The boys were excited to be a part of something new; the fifth-graders even created their own Google Classroom for the cogens. They used this digital space to not only give reminders about tasks but also to chat informally. Before the cogens, I greeted the boys in the hallway as I would any other student passing by. After the cogens, the boys sought me out to say, “Hello” and tell me about their day. All five of the fifth-graders have come back to visit from middle school. They have all asked about my progress with the dissertation, and
Mike has even asked to read it after completion. Our conversations move beyond surface level banter too. Ms. Washington and Mr. Chisholm both also reported a change where their students more freely discuss deeper matters. In her final interview, Ms. Washington described an encounter after class when Mike felt wronged,

Yesterday [Mike] had something going on with him and he was very upset that I didn't listen to his side of the story when the substitute was here and he was very upset. He finally let it out and he said, "I'm mad because you won't listen to my side of the story. There's always two sides to a story, Ms. [Washington]." I said, "Okay," I said, "How about this, I am now ready to listen to you. Before I wasn't ready to listen to you but now I'm ready to listen to you, go ahead and share." And he shared and he was right, there were two sides of that story.

Mike had been reprimanded for a misunderstanding. Although the substitute did not deliver a serious consequence, such as an office referral, the incident served as one more microaggression in Mike’s life as a Black male. Dumas (2014) contended that educators refrain from discounting microaggressions; he asserted,

insisting that only grande misère counts as suffering prevents us from understanding social suffering as a normalized dimension of our social order – not natural, not inevitable, but perpetrated by the social order itself in ways that have systematic, deleterious effects, every day, on specific social groups. (p.7)

Over time, the culmination of microaggressions may impact both academic achievements as well a student’s self-esteem (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). Reality pedagogy provides teachers and students space to address inequities occurring in school as well as in the larger society (Emdin, 2011). Emdin (2011) described it as a process that moves “teachers to engage in dialogues with Black youth about the ways they have been denied full participation in society” (p. 287). Within these dialogues, teachers begin to unpack both individual and structural barriers present.
Addressing Structural Barriers to Building Relationships

As educators in a public school system, we are bound by certain regulations and policies that undermine the ability to build student-teacher relationships. Mike’s term, blockades, initiated discussions about the stress involved in high-stakes testing. Milner (2015) emphasized, pressures that teachers, school leaders (and other educators), and students are under to show gains on tests can make it difficult for them to concentrate on what should be at the heart of teaching and learning: educational experiences that build on the assets of students, pique their curiosity and interest in learning, and cultivate mind-sets and practices to improve community. (p. 5)

Teachers must advocate for their students to reduce the amount of high-stakes testing in schools.

In my state, reaching out to union leaders, the school board, and elected government officials has helped to create legislation reducing testing in schools. However, the laws do not yet sufficiently address the needs of our students. At the school level, teachers must also purposefully plan for testing times and be especially cognizant of stress levels in the school building. In my role, I also serve as the school testing coordinator for Martin Hope. In the past, I attempted to reduce stress and anxiety through daily treats and words of inspiration while reminding teachers that students can feel our stress. Going into the 2019-2010 testing season, I plan to share some of the specific insights learned in the cogens. In addition to the standard training regarding testing regulations and procedures, I will ask the boys from the cogen to impart their wisdom, explaining from the student perspective, what children need.

My commitment to the participants also includes many day-to-day efforts. During the pre-service schedule, Ms. Washington expressed frustration and anxiety about her class sizes and the needs of her students. Lebron and Steph both have Ms. Washington as a teacher this year and I reminded all three about their special connection. I encouraged Ms. Washington to draw on their experience as classroom leaders to help build community and shape her new classroom, and I reminded the boys to volunteer ways to support Ms. Washington. In my role, I am
responsible for the entire study body; however, I now make a concerted effort to check in more frequently with these boys. Rather than asking about their day, I have adjusted my language to ask how their day could have been better. This small shift naturally invites more genuine responses in addition to providing specific feedback. Fine (2018) advocated, “The youth want nothing more than what most adults ask for today: public accountability. They want someone to assure that the state and the adults will fulfill their legal obligations to educate. They want someone to monitor inequities, intervene, and remedy” (p. 42). Above all, I want them to have a voice, feel respected, and believe that the adults in their school are doing right by them.

Reflection

“Without the ability to think about yourself, to reflect on your life, there’s really no awareness, no consciousness. Consciousness doesn’t come automatically; it comes through being alive, awake, curious, and often furious” (Fine, 2018, p. 113). In closing this cycle of teacher inquiry, I reflected on three questions addressing my learning and next steps: What did I learn as a practitioner-researcher? How will I go forward with what I’ve learned from this study? How can I help to empower the student and teacher participants outside the bounds of this study?

What did I learn as a practitioner-researcher? In this study, I attempted to let go of my Type A personality and aimed for more vulnerability. I naturally feel comforted with more control but knew that if I wanted this research to be truly meaningful, I needed to find ways to intentionally relinquish that power. As a learner, cogenerative dialogues drew me in because of their novelty; I had no choice but to let the literature review drive my process rather than seek out evidence to correspond with what I already knew to be true. Whether during my initial review or any return to the research, it was most helpful to draw on the expertise of Black males. I often turned to the University of Texas’s Black Male Education Research Collection as a
source for peer-reviewed research. This database highlights prominent Black male researchers who contribute to the counter-narrative to stereotypical and rampant beliefs about Black males in America. I was also fortunate to collaborate with Dr. Christopher Busey as my dissertation chair for this project. Not only is he a published scholar on race and education, but Dr. Busey also served as a guide for me and shared his first hand knowledge as I, a white woman, attempted to navigate the Black male experience. It was sometimes difficult, but extremely meaningful to learn with and from my fellow participant-researchers. The more I opened up, the more they let me in. Even with that amount of vulnerability, I learned that one could never go deep enough when addressing equity-oriented research. There is always another story to hear, layer to reveal, and lesson to learn.

Attempting to complete practitioner-research within a social design framework, I learned the importance of balance and transparency. Practitioner-research situates the teacher as an insider who tells a story about her given context and attempts to create change while focusing on personally relevant questions and practices (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). In this study, I examined student-teacher relationships within my workplace, attempting to use professional learning and cogenerative dialogues as a means to improve the educational experience for young, Black boys. Under a social design framework, however, this was not my story alone to tell. I learned that by amplifying the voices of my participants and softening my own, I was not only able to create a high-caliber study but found that it improved the quality of my research. It was not always straightforward with how I would navigate the regulations set forth by my district and university and also maintain a commitment to my participants, but I followed the words of my district’s namesake, James Baldwin (2011), “Not everything that is faced can be changed; but
nothing can be changed until it is faced” (p. 42). I kept an open mind and turned to my participants for guidance more often than not.

Social design research seeks to create sustainable transformation by reorganizing systems where the participants drive the process (Gutiérrez & Jurrow, 2016). A critical aspect of this research relied on what Gutiérrez and Jurrow (2016) call developing a historicized self; this process emphasizes a maturating sense of identity which includes an awareness of “how one came to be a member of a historically marginalized community” (p. 567). In this study, I learned that an effective way to discuss race with elementary students is to simply start talking about race. As a white woman, I initially felt awkward sharing the details of my research with the boys; however, I found that when I was transparent about my intentions, vulnerable when sharing my truth, and provided space for their voices, they mirrored those actions. Unfortunately, the study was restricted to four weeks of cogens which only scratched the surface of revealing a historicized self. That is not to say that these boys do not already have a well-developed sense of identity which includes their membership in a marginalized community; I can only report on what they revealed within the confines of our study.

Completing research within a social design framework forced me to be a more reflective educator than I have ever been. I began this journey with a few ideas on how to move beyond the traditional research design, but throughout the process, I learned to question everything. It has improved my practice in such a way that I now reflect on my daily interactions with teachers and students as if I am still deep in the research. I have learned that teachers can, and should, apply social design research practices outside the confines of a study.

How else will I go forward with what I’ve learned from this study? Cogens created safe spaces that empowered some of our most marginalized students and allowed teachers to use
student voice as their primary source of reflection. Continuing on as the Staff Development Teacher for the 2019-2020 school year, I plan to expand the use of cogens beyond two classrooms. Martin Hope teachers will continue to experience JEPD on relationship building including explicit learning on cogenerative dialogues. As was the case during the 2018-2019 school year, our professional learning plan will include both voluntary and whole school initiatives. The successes of the cogens in our study began with carefully selected teachers who had established a foundational level of relationships with their students. In his final interview, Sean expressed the desire to be heard coupled with the hesitation to speak in front of all teachers. “I like it better when it was just us, because you want the teachers to hear you but you don’t want to say it right in front of their faces to make it seem like disrespectful and stuff.” Moving forward, this aspect is critical if we want to recreate safe spaces for our students. Participation in cogens will remain voluntary. Cogens, however, are only one tool from Emdin’s (2012) reality pedagogy toolbox.

Throughout this study I often felt as if I were driving in a roundabout; I was going around the circle sometimes entering as a researcher, leaving as a participant, and navigating my position while the others circled around me as both. This process taught me that when we let go of our traditional labels, we co-created exceptional dialogue that led to improved teaching, leading, and learning. My goal is that all students at Martin Hope Elementary continue to experience increased agency and opportunities to share their stories, and that we, as educators, reveal our own vulnerability and commit to not only listening to, but seeking out, the voices of our most marginalized students.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel Hope Orgel, born Rachel Hope Katz, is an elementary school Staff Development Teacher. She is a three-time graduate of the University of Florida. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education, a Master of Education in special education, and a Doctor of Education in curriculum and instruction. Rachel has been teaching full-time for fourteen years. Prior to her current position as an instructional coach, Rachel taught in both general education and special education classrooms from Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade. Throughout her career, she expanded her dedication to education and equity outside of the classroom walls. She was awarded the CESJDS Brenner Award for her project, Poverty and a First Grader’s Ability to Impact Change, named as a Maryland Teachers of Promise Mentor, and selected for the STEM Liaison position at the 2011 Educator Effectiveness Academy. Rachel’s passion for technology led her to support her school’s Technology Task Force as a beta-tester for new technology followed up by professional learning for all K-12 teachers on how to best implement that technology, develop school and district-wide tools for monitoring student data, and eventually develop an app to monitor the effectiveness of professional development. Rachel, along with her two co-creators, presented the app at the 2017 Learning Forward Conference in Orlando, Florida.