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Spring 2021

Tracking and Experiences of Black Students Following the Inception of No Child Left Behind

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College of Education

Tracking and Experiences of Black Students Following

the Inception of No Child Left Behind

A Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Curriculum Studies

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

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of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized,

including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited.

I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines, as directed.

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ABSTRACT

Academic placement in high school classes is an important decision that can have long-term effects on student success. Research indicates that students most often remain in high or low tracks year after year. However, the precision of placements relative to real achievement disparities in the grouping of students into homogenous groups remains a petulant area of debate. Many scholars consider placement judgments to be dubious, marginal, or incorrect in terms of performance gaps, notwithstanding the assumption that these placements are deemed accurate in representing a student's academic ability.

Researchers argue that the process of comparing, sorting, and classifying students has not ceased to exist in the United States but moved to the sidelines. Nonetheless, a recent revival of scholarly discussion indicates that tracking continues to flourish. Following the inception of No Child Left Behind, I analyzed interviews from eight (8) college students involved in high and low-track courses while in high school. The study aimed to look at their perspectives in tracked classes in the context of scholarly and historical studies. Qualitative analysis was selected as the methodology to provide a deeper understanding of the human experience.

The theoretical framework utilized for this research inquiry is critical race theory (CRT) and included for two primary reasons; the current and past role that race has played in the schooling of Black students and its ability to assess the effect of racism in schools. The findings suggest that the participants unanimously concluded that tracking created a negative experience under the auspices of No Child Left Behind, which failed to meet its commitment to provide equal access to a rigorous curriculum for college readiness.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Committee, Dr. Jeffrey Kuzmic, PhD, Dr. Horace Hall, PhD and Dr. Stephen Haymes

PhD for whom I am eternally grateful for your time, commitment, and expertise toward the

completion of this dissertation.

DEDICATION

To my heavenly family: Parents, Henry and Hallie Walters, Grandparents Richard and Corlena

Thompson, Squire and Victoria Walters, Uncle Horace Walters, Siblings, Debra Walters Daniels,

Bernice Walters Anderson, Ray Edward Walters, Bobby Joe Lewis, and my beloved James for

their memories of encouragement throughout this journey.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Supreme Court ruled in 1954 in Brown v. The Board of Education[1] that racial segregation in schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. However, six decades later, segregation in public schools still occurs in subversive forms through ability grouping or tracking of students by academic ability. Although these two terms share slight differences in meaning, for the purpose of this study, I will be using the term "tracking" in relation to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001).

I believe that as a high school student I was tracked into low level math classes based on my perceived ability to perform in higher level math classes. As early as elementary school, Black students are placed in groups that have nothing to do with their intellectual capacities. Often, these categorizations are made based on behavior rather than intellect. Favoritism by teachers also plays a role, as well as advanced placements for students whose parents are in upper socioeconomic levels.

Yet, many of these students remain in lower-level tracks throughout high school as there is little opportunity for them to move into classes which provide advancement and preparation for college. This method of separating Black and White students in classrooms was primarily used as a way to continue segregating students from each other along racial, social, and economic lines. This practice has led to re-segregation in the 20th century.

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[1]Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) *Explanation*: this was a landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional.

The primary focus of this study is Black students and their experiences with tracking. Tracking continued to perpetuate itself into the 19th century as part of a reactionary education reform and was seen as "an efficient and scientific way to school students according to their academic capacity, social class, and future life stations, yet "previous literature continues to document tracking as "racially and economically stratified (Burris, 2014, p. 112).

This research will also provide information for educational leaders to examine the methods addressing the achievement gap and NCLB.

In the U.K. researchers use the word streaming opposed to tracking or ability grouping, in the same way they use setting to describe different classes, whereas students with similar ability levels are pulled out and placed in classes together for specific lessons during the day (setting or regrouping) or by creating whole classes (streaming or tracking) of students into high, intermediate or low tracks (Gillard, 2009). Regardless of word choice, tracking and streaming relate to school performance which is relative to social inequality in communities and perpetuate the division of students who come from different social ethnic and racial backgrounds.

In other countries, such as Germany (where the practice is widespread and not particularly controversial), tracking starts young and separates students onto different paths varying from general education to vocational. The system has been shown to increase the achievement gap, according to Stanford researcher Hanushek & Wößmann (2005).

Hanushek (2005) also researched educational systems that do and don't track and found that eight out of the nine countries in his study that track students before age sixteen see that the difference between highest and lowest test scores is significantly larger than the range in countries that don't track; he did not examine the U.S. because it doesn't have a nationwide policy and tracking is most common in high school.

Numerous studies show that education for students from minority groups and low socio-economic classes tend to emphasize vocational training, which is reinforced more than basic skills such as math and English (Noddings, 2007; McClymer, 1982; US Department of Education, 2004; Whitman, 2008). This is used as social control by funneling minority students into blue-collar jobs instead of preparing them for high-paying work environments. Students from more privileged racial and socioeconomic backgrounds tend to focus on a broader meaning of education, by developing skills such as leadership, personal development, morality and ethics, creative thinking, and employment preparation (Reese, 2000).

The debate on tracking is ongoing and receives its fair share of arguments, both for and against it by academics, researchers, and policymakers alike. According to Neihart (2007), the literature on tracking is used like the Bible, both proponents and opponents pick out the phrases and research that supports their own position. Over the last two decades, more focus has shifted on obtaining sound statistical results to address questions from students, parents, teachers, school administrators and politicians. Research from the United Kingdom shows dividing students based on their perceived ability and grouping them based on strengths in different subject's engendered alienation from school and developed anti-school attitudes among Black and Latino students (Ireson & Hallam, 2001).

At the same time, recent educational reform in the United States public educational system was highly focused towards providing equitable education to all students. In effect, those reforms aimed to minimize the achievement gap between students by ensuring that every student, regardless of racial and cultural differences, had access to high quality teaching and education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Obama, 2009). The most notable attempt to provide equal opportunity was the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which largely targeted

disadvantaged students. According to the Act, the government planned to "distribute and target resources sufficiently to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where the needs were greatest." (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 3). Additionally, the Act wanted to add new and more innovative programs for prevention and intervention of youth neglected by the educational system already in place. The Act set high achievement standards and measurable goals with the intent of creating higher academic achievement among students (United States Department of Education, 2004).

> As quoted by President George Bush during his speech and the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act:
>
> We've got large challenges here in America. There's no greater challenge than to make sure that every child -- and all of us on this stage mean every child, not just a few children -- every single child, regardless of where they live, how they're raised, the income level of their family, every child receives a first-class education in America (Eldenmuller, 2008).

 President Bush's speech communicated the Act's primary goal which included enhancing teacher quality, student testing, and education coupled with technology to ensure that every child received the best education, regardless of his or her background. More than a decade has passed since the adoption of the Act, and there are still arguments for and against NCLB. These arguments challenge the effectiveness in closing the achievement gap between students from different racial groups. Finkel (2010), observed that the Act did not contributed towards minimizing the gap, but rather it gave U.S. states powerful incentive to remove low performing students from the general school population as a way to show better test and educational

results. Tracking is a core feature of the current curriculum model as it has merged through practice such as, high stakes testing, teaching to the test, narrowing of the curriculum and the policy initiatives of NCLB (Taubman, 2009).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the background and context of the study and continues clarifying the problem to allow for further research. Following, the chapter delineates the objectives of the research and provides research questions; additional rationale for the study; its scope and limitations; definition of important terms; and concludes with a description of the dissertation's layout.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is important that we do not exclude discussion regarding the linkage between contemporary issues relative to tracking including academic, cultural racial and economic perspectives and the historical context from which they developed. In lieu of the inclusion of this issue, a historical context is important to the analysis of No Child Left Behind, if we are to expose other issues relative to Black students and the inequities that they have endured. Tracking is an extension of Black history which includes desegregation (Hurst, 2007). Furthermore,

"Classroom segregation like school segregation is a simple concept to understand, if all the Whites learn in one set of classrooms and all the Blacks learn in another, the classrooms are segregated. But if the segregation is not complete, and there is an educational justification for the resulting racial imbalance--for example, that it is more efficient to teach children in classrooms that are homogenous in ability and therefore they will learn more in such an environment--the issue becomes an educational one. This educational issue is called tracking" (Rossell, 1993, p.189).

Studies such as Coleman (1961), McClelland et al., (1953), Rosen (1959) and Levesque et al. (2000), demonstrate the historical background in research that sought to understand and explain differences between educational performance based on racial and ethnic differences. The links between academic achievement, educational attainment, and labor market outcomes have been extensively studied and documented (Coleman, 1961; Iresam & Hallam, 2001; Levesque et al., 2000). The differences in labor market outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities have been traced back to their relatively low educational performance (Jencks, 1972). Yet, Tyson argues that this issue is not exclusive regarding Black students and their ability to perform academically but directly aligned with the structural organization of schools. Following a decade of research observing Black students and their experiences with schooling, Tyson further highlights the existence of curriculum tracking based on race and the daily experiences and effect that this phenomenon creates for Black students regarding achievement outcomes, (Tyson, 2011).

Historically, one argument made regarding these racial and ethnic differences focuses on two theories: cultural orientation and individual differences in achievement motivation. In effect, these differences have been found to be a strong predictor of economic performance, as well as educational performance (McLelland et al., 1953). To study the differences in achievement orientation, due to ethnic differences, Rosen (1959) conducted a study with different ethnic and religious groups. The study revealed that Jews, Protestants, and Greeks had a higher achievement orientation, thus achieving higher mobility within socioeconomic classes. On the contrary, Blacks, French Canadians and South Italians showed a lower achievement orientation (Rosen, 1959). However, more importantly these differences were found purely on the basis of ethnic background, rather than minority status. There have been continuous debates

regarding the educational system in the United States and its practice of placing ethnic minorities in a compromising position. Contrary to Rosen, many studies showed that students from ethnic minorities are disproportionately assigned to low-ability groups from the very beginning of their educational careers (Joseph, 1998; Braddock and Slavin, 1993). At the same time, research also reveals that ethnic minorities and low-income groups participate in higher numbers in vocational classes, (Levesque et al., 2000).

More recently, tracking students according to their past academic performance into different classrooms gained much controversy from both policy makers and research scholars (Lefgren, 2004). Supporters argue that the tracking of students into groups facilitates education, by allowing teachers to tailor their education as a way to enhance the test scores of all students (Slavin, 1988). Critics claim that separating low-achieving students from high-achieving students actually increases educational inequality; and that both groups would benefit from learning together, in the same classroom (Ansalone & George, 2009; Duflo et al., 2010).

According to the North Central Educational Laboratory (2011), tracking is ineffective and reduces equity among children. Since the children tested come from a broad variety of backgrounds and abilities, many researchers claim that tracking negatively impacts the academic achievement of children placed in low ability classroom settings. Findings by Oakes (1985) and Sorinson and Hallinan (1986) reveal that generally, there is a negative impact on the academic achievement of lower track pupils, a minor impact on middle track pupils, and a low to modest positive impact on students in high tracks. Hallinan (1988) observed that low track students developed negative attitudes toward learning. Rosenbaum (1976); Alexander et al., (1978); Hauser & Featherman, (1976); Alexander & Cook, (1982) maintain that aside from the direct

effects of tracking student's academic success, this approach has shown significant implications for prospective course selection, accomplishments and future educational goals.

In the United States, tracking is deeply rooted in the public education system. Ansalone (2003), describes how tracking is embedded within the American education system as 60 percent of all primary schools and 80 percent of all secondary schools in the United States implement a form of tracking. The article "Choosing Tracks: Freedom of Choice in Detracking Schools," explores how the debate over tracking or de-tracking reached its peak in the last decade of the 20th century (Yonezawa et al., 2002). Putka (1990) criticized the practice of ability grouping and tracking by arguing that the most relevant studies focused on long-term benefits attained by students placed in the higher track, instead of mentioning the negative effects on students in lower tracks. This is noteworthy, because the research shows that these students suffer academically and professionally as a result of the tracking practice. As concluded by Gamoran (1992), "grouping and tracking do not increase overall achievements in schools, but they do promote inequity, research suggests" (p. 11).

PORTRAIT OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BEFORE AND AFTER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The article "Research Spotlight on Academic Ability Grouping" posits that the achievement gap has remained fairly consistent, in spite of educational and political leaders' efforts that support NCLB. The gap suggests that our current school systems still face great challenges when addressing racial and ethnic disparities in education. Additionally, tracking is discriminatory (NEA Resolutions B-16, 1998/2005). Student achievement gaps among Black

students continue to be consistent, despite increased efforts to level the playing field. Therefore, federal and state governments need to view decreasing the achievement gap between Whites and racial minorities as an important and necessary concern. Over the last two decades, individual state governments and school districts have made numerous changes regarding tracking and the use of this practice reached an all-time low in the mid 1990's yet underwent resurgence in the 2000's (Brown Center Report on American Education, 2013).

In the U.S. ESL, (English second language) students are generally in lower-level classes because of the English language barrier. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress, tracking in English Language Arts dropped sharply from 1990 to 1998. Yet there was a rebound in 2003 because of teacher and administrator perceptions of student achievement. No survey data exists from the National Assessment of Education Progress (2003) on tracking in English Language Arts since 2003. Tracking has continued since the turn of the 21st century (NAEP, 2003). Since the inception of No Child Left and the subsequent reforms, educational institutions have been held more accountable for student achievement. The framework for these educational reforms provides a great premise to understand how tracking has evolved. These reforms lead the question to be asked: Does this indeed lead American schools to a new path of reforms and a new path of results; which was claimed by President Bush as he signed The No Child left Behind Act (Kim & Sunderman, 2004)?

The Washington-based organization Advancement Project released a report titled, "Test, Punish and Push Out." This report made a stark accusation: "The practice of pushing struggling students out of school to boost test scores has become quite common" (2010, p.30). The report focused on the years immediately before and after the passing of the 2001

No Child Left Behind Act. It reassessed the focus on graduation rates in the nation's twenty-five largest school districts, with at least 80 percent Black and Latino students enrolled.

From 1996 to 2002, 19 of these 25 districts saw graduation rates increase, 11 of them by more than 10 percent; however, the data does not support the claims. According to the report, between 2002 and 2006, 76 percent of graduation rates actually decreased, with some schools seeing graduation rates drop by more than 10 percentage points. These figures support the theory that the pressure to boost test scores after No Child Left Behind led students to be pushed out. Although Jim Freeman, project director with Advancement Project's Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track projects, acknowledged that the numbers do not provide hard proof:

> "It's correlation evidence, but not causation evidence," he claimed, "We're trying to get behind those numbers and figure out what's going on. Policies like exclusionary discipline, and high-stakes testing and tracking, have created a hostile and alienating environment, particularly for students of color" (Finkel, 2010, pp. 26-28).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The central purpose of enacting NCLB was to ensure that states actively reduced the performance disparity among high-achieving students and low-achieving students who may have been at a disadvantage because of language barriers (such as being the only English speaker in their home), economic disadvantages, or learning disabilities (Rosenberg et al., (2007). However, while trying to reduce the achievement gap, NCLB legitimized tracking in schools in its efforts to aid disadvantaged, low-achieving students. The mere existence of tracking as a curriculum model creates an achievement gap (Burris, 2005). NCLB assumed that one standardized set of tests could produce results that measured all students equally,

regardless of learning ability. Hence, standardization in order to maintain a claim to objectivity has to assume that local individual conditions, make no difference in either student performance or test-based measurement; the tests are considered objective because they supposedly measure all individuals equally and outside of any potential extenuating circumstances (Au, 2009). The legacy of NCLB is clearly summarized in the following federal testimony given by Neal McCluskey to the House Committee on Education and Workforce:

> The No Child Left Behind Act was a well-intentioned law, but like federal education law generally, the reality of what it has likely accomplished has not lived up to its promise. I'd like first to look at the evidence of the law's academic achievement effects, especially on underserved populations. I do this with a few important provisos. First, standardized test scores generally only provide limited information about how children are performing, and NCLB focused on reading and mathematics. Yet, not only does this mean that NCLB ignored art, social studies, physical education, and other academic subject areas, it also ignored character development, preparation to become active citizens, and other, broader educational goals. Second, test scores often tell us how well students are prepared to take certain kinds of tests, which does not always translate into useable skills or other desired educational outcomes. Finally, sundry variables influence academic outcomes --- students' health, home lives, motivation levels, district policies, state policies, etc. --- and controlling for all of them in order to isolate the effect of a federal law is extremely difficult, if not impossible; Has No Child Left Behind Worked (114th Congress, 2015)?

Standardized is the measure of success reinforced by NCLB 2001. Garrison argued that NCLB did not provide equal resources prior to testing. He further posited that, "by applying the same standard to all students, ranked categories of performance can be established, that is, vertical classification on a natural basis (Garrison, 2009 p. 20). If tracking continues as currently structured, the curriculum may be working against the goals of a standardized education. As cited by Burris at the onset of NCLB, grouping students together in low track classes with poor curriculum will not prepare students for the rigorous standardized testing performance required to meet the demands of NCLB but perhaps maybe the two are interconnected, working to achieve the same goal (Burris, 2005). A curriculum gap is often the cause of an achievement gap and can often lead to an ultimate failure of laws such as No Child Left Behind (2001).

Furthermore, research indicates that because NCLB promised that schools would benefit by following strict testing protocols and relied solely on test scores, schools which served mostly the lower income population, do not benefit (Meier & Wood, 2004). Additionally, schools, which serve mostly poor families, are at a disadvantage because the students served receive limited instruction and curriculum making the school experience unfavorable for these students. Meier and Wood's research showed that schools which served more affluent students found ways to fine tune their testing to increase their scores, even going so far as to push out students who were identified as not expected to test well (Meier & Wood, 2004).

A recent study conducted by NAEP and cited in the testimony of Neal McCluskey (2015) to the House Committee on Education and Workforce also highlights the end result of standardized testing during the era of NCLB:

Perhaps the most negative evidence we have for NCLB is test scores, for roughly high school seniors, the school system's "final products, "the trends report uses age, and the main NAEP uses grade, so the scores are for 17-year-olds and 12th graders, respectively. Here we see first, overall stagnation since the 1970s; an indicator that despite roughly a doubling of both real federal spending and overall, per-pupil outlays we have not made much progress, at least as measured by federal tests. What did the scores show for NCLB, especially on the groups most likely to struggle? On the long-term trends test, they showed little if any, improvement. Between 1999 and 2012, scores for Blacks rose from 283 to only 288 in math, and scores for Hispanics increased just one point. In reading, Blacks scores rose only five points and Hispanic scores went up only three points.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES: BEYOND QUANTITATIVE DATA

Public school tracking policies and educational inequity are very closely intertwined. Along with document analysis, another way to gain insight into the effects of curriculum design and tracking on the high school experience is to explore the perceptions of those most directly impacted by these policies and practices. For the purpose of this study, as the researcher this   phenomenon will be explored by interviewing graduates in the Midwest currently enrolled in college, regarding their perceptions and experiences in tracked classes. A student-centered approach when discussing educational issues can be extremely beneficial. The inclusion of young people in changing their worlds, addresses the need for decisions supported by data driven decisions in school districts restricted by a barrage of mandates and accountability (Datnow et al.,2008; Murnane et al., (2008).

Other stakeholders in this arena such as teachers, parents, politicians and administrators are clearly represented. Yet, students bring a distinctive perspective to the forefront, which if disregarded can lead to a large gap in our knowledge base (Cook-Sather, 2002; Rubin & Silva, 2003; Schultz & Cook-Sather, 2002; Silva, 2003). This group of post-NCLB graduates is also significant as a result of studies, reform initiatives and redesign of post-secondary education which may have occurred as a consequence for students who are placed on probationary status during their enrollment in college resulting from their placement in tracked classes in high school (Balfanz, 2009). In spite of college remedial classes for incoming freshman, students still experience the effects of tracking during their college terms (Moltz, 2008).

This research aims to interview students attending college to reduce biased responses from participants that might result from the selection of interviewee's while enrolled in high school, which may also provide a broader perspective, reinforce validity and ensure that the students would not otherwise be influenced by their parents or teachers regarding their responses.

Furthermore, the impact of their experiences being tracked in high school might be more noticeable as they move into college. Perspectives from this group of students on tracking and the mandates of No Child Left Behind were the primary focus of this study. The research objectives can be described as: to analyze high school experiences of tracked students since the inception of No Child Left Behind and college readiness, to explore and discuss the impact of NCLB on students, their college performance; and to provide suggestions from the student's point of view for possible changes to future reforms resulting from No Child Left Behind.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. As beginning Black college students look back on their experiences in high school, what influence, if any, do they think being tracked had on their attitudes, experiences, and academic identities?

2. As beginning Black college students look back on their experiences in high school, what perceptions, if any, do they have on the fairness of the practice of tracking and being tracked?

3. Do the Black students of the NCLB era in this study feel that tracking supported the goals of NCLB in its role to prepare them for college level education?

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research aimed to record, analyze, and describe the experiences of Black students in tracked classes since the inception of No Child Left Behind (2001). The overall rationale was to conduct a study to record and analyze their experiences because they are essentially the primary stakeholders in the whole debate over ability grouping and tracking.

As Rubin and Silva suggest, the student perspective is an important aspect of the policy debate. "It is not our intent to celebrate student voice and agency as the key to any school reform or the remedy for any school's problems. Rather, we aim to better understand popular, equity-based school reforms from a perspective that is too often assumed, undermined or altogether ignored in the implementation and assessment of school change practices" (Rubin & Silva, 2003, pg. 211).

At the same time, most of the studies on tracking are outdated because they were conducted before NCLB, and thus do not include post-NCLB experiences. The research on the experiences of students who experienced tracking through their voices in the era of NCLB is very limited, (Carbonaro, 2005). By exploring tracking post No Child Left Behind, the research is intended to contribute significantly towards the existing literature on tracking. Rationale for conducting this research lies in the very fact that tracking still remains contested terrain within the U.S. public education system (Paul, 2005).

It has been over 15 years since NCLB was instituted in schools across the United States. NCLB has greatly impacted public policy through standardization and accountability initiatives, and as a result, the way schools are organized, the curriculum, teachers, students and teaching and learning have drastically changed (Ravitch, 2010; see also DeAngelis et al., 2010; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Fuller et al., 2007; Paul, 2005).

Studying the impact of tracking, post No Child Left Behind is significant in the field of education because it can provide important insights into student experiences, specifically regarding Black students who are among the groups for which NCLB was enacted. The findings of the study can provide considerable value to different stakeholders who are participants in the public educational system of this country including parents, teachers, educational administrators, policy makers, and researchers. Also, the issue of whether or not the Act was actually meant to reduce the achievement gap or educational debt provides further dialogue for debate (Lee & Reeves, 2012).

According to Ladson-Billings, the attention that has been given to the achievement gap is parallel to the focus on the budget deficit, yet its effect is more detrimental to Black and Latino

students as it is more widespread from a national perspective. She then goes on to conclude that, we do not have an achievement gap; we have an education debt that continues to cripple minority students across the country (Ladson-Billings, 2006). She further argues, "in the report entitled The Funding Gap (2005), the Education Trust tells us that in 27 of the 49 states studied, the highest poverty school districts receive fewer resources than the lowest poverty districts. Even more states shortchange their highest minority districts. In 30 states, high minority districts receive less money for each child than low minority districts'' (p. 2-5).

Ideally, the conclusions and recommendations drawn from this study could help minimize the shortcomings of the educational system and improve education policy in a substantial way, especially for disadvantaged students who would also benefit from these first-person accounts of the impact of No Child Left Behind (2001) and its relationship to tracking.

THE NEW NCLB: EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

The new educational reform designed to enhance and replace the failure of NCLB, entitled, 'Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was reauthorized and signed into law in December of 2015 by President Barack Obama. Under Every Student Succeeds, states gained significant control in a wide range of areas as compared to No Child Left Behind of 2001. Primary differences and similarities from NCLB which is an abbreviated version of the Bill included the following:

(a) the highly qualified teacher requirement was eliminated; (b) teacher evaluations were no longer tied to student outcomes; (c) school choice decisions no longer relied on states or parents but directly aligned with district officials; (d) grants were provided to districts that wanted to try out performance pay and other teacher-quality improvement

measures such as Stem training; (e) block grants were used to consolidate dozens of programs, including some involving physical education, advanced placement, school counseling, and educational technology; (f) changes to Title II funding, yet Title I funding remained intact; (g) only one percent, (10% of entire population) of special education students

received alternative testing; (h) English language learner test scores were included in all district/state test scores after one year shifting full accountability for testing to ELL learners along with the general student population; (i) testing was still required for students in grades 3-8 and high school yet, states were expected to develop their own testing opt-out laws, and local districts and states got to decide what should happen in schools that miss benchmarks which were included in accountability plans; (j) funding for after-school programs, as well as Promise Neighborhoods, and full-service community schools with funding guidelines; (k) changes to parent engagement, possibly arts education, gifted and talented education, and Ready to Learn television; (l) states were given the option to choose to adopt core standards at their own will and the U.S. Secretary of Education was forbidden from interfering in what standards they chose, yet those standards had to be challenging; (m) preschool programs remained but under the management of the Department of Health and Human Services, jointly administered by the Education Department; (n) waivers for NCLB no longer existed but states were required to continue to support low performing schools; (o) school Districts receiving more than $30,000 were required to spend at least 20 percent of these funds at a minimum toward one activity that helped

students become well-rounded, and an additional 20 percent on at least one

activity that reinforced student safety and health; with some of this funding

designated for technology; (p) after four (4) years, states could take over failing

schools who did not meet new accountability standards or turn them into charter

schools (Every Child Succeeds Act, 2015).

Charter schools are publicly funded but run under a charter by parents, educators,

community groups, universities, or private organizations to encourage school autonomy and

innovation (Berends, 2015, p.160). As the fastest-growing area of school choice, charter schools

number more than 6,000 and serve more than 2.5 million children across the United States

(National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2014). According to Ravitch (2013) Charter

Schools and the "developments of the past two decades have brought about massive changes in

the governance of public education, especially in urban districts; some children have gained, yet

most have not. And the public schools, an essential element in our democracy for many

generations, have suffered damage that may be irreparable" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 179).

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research is being conducted to evaluate student experiences with regards to the

impact of tracking in the time of No Child Left Behind. My study focuses on a combination of

data analysis, and interviews from graduates within tracked groups from public schools enrolled

in their first year of college in Chicago Illinois. The sample size will consist of eight (8)

participants. Additional data such as the students and their success in college may also be

analyzed. Although tracking in the age of NCLB is experienced at different levels which include

primary, middle, and high school education, high school graduates are chosen because they can

provide valuable insight into their tracking experiences after the fact. Recent high school graduates have been in school throughout the NCLB era, making them tracked participants as early as second or third grade. Conducting interviews with this selected group of students will allow the researcher to gain more insight and a better understanding regarding the effect of NCLB, as opposed to conducting research with students only tracked for two or three years.

To keep the study focused, limitations have been set. In order to develop a meaningful and in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of these students, a research method is called for that adequately fulfills this need. I believe that qualitative research is a proven approach with regards to the research objectives. Accordingly, to facilitate a connected, in-depth understanding of how students view tracking, qualitative research has been widely used along with the student's personal voice (Kawabata & Gastaldo, 2015; Lub, 2015). Empirical data may also be useful in analyzing any possible limitations in this research, such as whether or not grouping by race, economic status, or gender are truly biased in favor of one group over another. Researcher bias may result in analyzing the data; however, it will be ensured that scholarly objectivity is maintained by supporting the analysis with sound justifications, and available literature (Lewis, 2015).

DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS

In order to help the reader, understand and comprehend the important words and their relationships used during the study, a list of important terms and their operational definitions are presented below:

Ability grouping. Often referred to as "tracking," ability grouping is the "practice of grouping children together according to their talents in the classroom" (National Education

Association [NEA], 2010, p. 1). In 1980, there were two specific types of ability grouping defined by Bryson and Bentley as achievement grouping reported by Vacca (2005) to the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute. First, tracking was defined as grouping students "based on scores students make on achievement tests and on their past performance" (NEA, 2010, p.2). Second, tracking is commonly known as assigning students "based on intelligence tests, achievement tests, past performance, teacher judgments, or a combination of these" (NEA, 2010 p.2).

Tracking. Tracking is a form of ability grouping whereby students are grouped into classes on the basis of their prior academic achievement and ability, organizing curriculum accordingly to match the students' academic capabilities. The core difference between tracking and ability grouping is that tracking group's students within classes based on their abilities, with differential curricula. The practice of tracking is more common in middle and high school where students are grouped together with differences in curricula, which may influence destinations after graduation (Karen, 2005).

Achievement Gap. In education, achievement gap refers to the difference in academic output between different groups of students which includes race and socio- economic status, (SES). Achievement gap can be gauged through a number of measures like grades, standardized test scores, dropout rate and course selection. The achievement gap refers to the output, rather than the input (Berlak, 2001).

Self-Concept. Self-Concept refers to the global understanding a person has of him or herself.

Self-Esteem. A term used in psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth.

Setting. Setting is a system in England and other countries; a method of grouping pupils based on their attainment in different curriculum subjects, rather than on a measure of general ability.

Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a form of oppositional scholarship that challenges the experiences of Whites as normative, where Whites are on top, and others are worthy of suppression; in contrast CRT scholars ground themselves in the experiences of people of color (Taylor, 1998). They seek to understand the creation and maintenance of this unequal power structure, seeking ultimately to change it (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Ethnic Minorities. Ethnic Minorities are a group of people living within a community who share different cultural, religious, racial, or economic backgrounds. Although ethnic minorities are not always the disadvantaged groups within communities, in this research they are referred to as the U.S. population that is less privileged because of racial and socio-economic differences (Romanucci-Ross & et al., 2006, p 5).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB is an Act of Congress, enacted in 2001, a federal initiative directed at improving school performance by requiring schools to set high achievement standards and establish measurable goals to enhance individual academic outcome. The Act was primarily focused towards reducing the achievement gap between privileged and less-privileged students. The legislation included five integral components/principles including greater emphasis on teacher qualification; higher accountability for results; greater options for parents whose children attended schools that were low performing; increased emphasis on teaching based on scientific research; and enhanced flexibility and local control of schools (Linn et al., 2002).

Organization And Structure Of The Study

The remaining chapters of the dissertation are organized in the following manner:

CHAPTER. II: OVERVIEW

This chapter is one of the most important sections of the dissertation as it reviews, discusses, describes, evaluates, and analyzes existing literature on the topic of tracking. The researcher also sought to delineate certain principles and other aspects of how tracking practices have affected Black students, such as damage to student self -esteem.

Tracking, as described earlier, is a system that focuses on placing students on specific paths in the high school curriculum. The practice has been done in high schools to prepare students for fields they have the best potential in, especially in terms of careers and other paths they may take. Therefore, it was important to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of tracking on public education. Specific discussion points included the curriculum, teaching quality, and psychological effects on the students including academic self-assessment, racial achievement gap, and racial segregation.

Tracking was also viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) and student voice highlighting research on student experiences in tracked classes. Further discussion of this theory will continue in the methodology section.

Advantages and disadvantages of tracking were highlighted throughout the study, so that clear and distinct concepts would be drawn and presented in analyzing the impact of such on the students. After understanding tracking, it was important to draw comparison between tracking and de-tracking. Therefore, student performance and other parameters were discussed to give more insight on the matter.

Ultimately, the No Child Left Behind Act was explored along with tracking and grouping following the enactment of the law. The rationale for understanding the act was to provide insight on the actual impact on students based on the process implemented to narrow the gap between people of different academic aptitudes. The act sought to help all people acquire high quality education, but it is worthy to take note of the intent and the actual product of the act.

CHAPTER III: OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on explaining the research design and methods used to carry out the research. A qualitative research design focus guided the data collection methods utilized. In this section, several important theoretical viewpoints were outlined, including a general discussion of critical race theory (CRT), its foundation and components, as well as a discussion of critical voice and student-centered approaches to education which occurred throughout the study. A complete discussion of these theories, as well as their application to the issue of tracking explored in this project, make it clear that this was an appropriate lens for a holistic and comprehensive view of the issue for school tracking.

Since this researcher's primary query stems from qualitative research, a thorough analysis of qualitative techniques of research, data collection, and analysis were presented. The chapter will also discuss the research sample, data collection tools, ethical considerations, and analysis techniques.

CHAPTER IV: OVERVIEW

Based on the collected data through interviews, and questionnaires; this chapter provided findings of the study which relied heavily on the input of students. Their status as legitimate policy analysts were supported by the qualitative methods and critical race theory previously discussed.

As Rubin and Silva suggest, the student perspective is an essential component of the policy debate:

Our goal is not to extol the virtues of student voice and agency as the panacea for school problems but to increase awareness of widespread school reforms from a view too frequently assumed, undermined, or disregarded in monitoring and evaluating these practices in schools. (Rubin & Silva, 2003). The findings derived from this data will be analyzed with qualitative research techniques to come up with objective results. The focus of this chapter was to present collected data clearly, and analyze it using available tools and techniques.

CHAPTER V: OVERVIEW

This chapter draws from the previous chapter by discussing the findings of this research and analyzing them in the light of scholarly reviews. This section also marked the end of the dissertation by putting forward conclusions drawn from the study. The conclusions were then presented as recommendations to policy makers, government, educational administrators, and teachers to further improve the public education system. Lastly, the chapter discusses the theoretical, practical and research implications of the current study, and highlighted the areas where future research should focus.

CHAPTER VI: OVERVIEW

This is the final chapter which highlights suggestions for improvement and future research implications.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted in Chapter 1 (pp. 10-12 in particular) tracking is a set of educational practices that are deeply connected to educational inequality that manifests itself most notably in what has been termed the achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups in the United States. This gap has to be recognized as being both complex and historically structured and situated. While the focus of this study is the way in which tracking has impacted racial minorities under the accountability, testing and standardization policies emerging from NCLB, it is important to situate and understand how this has emerged historically as well. This chapter also seeks to highlight the practice of tracking as a major cause of segregation among Black students who were identified as low achievers with limited intellectual prospects.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The dilemma regarding equity in public schools extends much farther than a general discussion of tracking in itself. Opening with an historical interpretation is fundamental to a clear and inclusive understanding of the link that exists between desegregation and the practice of tracking; because tracking, even in the twentieth century, is closely aligned with the onset of these historical events. Another focus of this section will be the history of education pre- and post-19th century. It should be recognized that legislation regarding the education of Blacks began as early as the 1600s (Irons, 2002), and by 1830, instruction for slaves was against the law in most of the south (Maltz, 2007).

In the North, the notion of enrolling Black students in schools created violence and strong resistance. State laws against the education of Blacks, specifically reading and writing were greatly fueled by fear (Kluger, 1975). Punishments included loss of limbs, beatings and

death (Anderson, 1988; Irons, 2002; Litwack, 1999). Many Blacks rebelled against state laws

in their thirst for education even though the threat of death loomed over them.

BLACKS EDUCATION DURING SLAVERY, POST-CIVIL WAR AND
RECONSTRUCTION

During this time, Black communities became even more zealous in their fight for

education for themselves and their children. Aside from the absence of slavery, becoming

literate offered other opportunities for Blacks to become more independent.

> The value of 'book-larnin' was at no time more dramatically impressed on blacks than at
>
> 'settling up' time and when it came to signing a labor contract. To know how to read,
>
> write and cipher, to calculate rates of interest, to command knowledge of prices, to be
>
> familiar with the most fundamental methods of accounting—these skills were to cast off
>
> the remaining vestiges of slavery that made them economically dependent on whites
>
> (Litwack, 1999, p. 54).

Blacks began to utilize their newfound literacy and finances to rally and crusade for a

public education for their children (Anderson, 1988). Since the onset of slavery, there were

no schools or supplies for the education of Black students. In the South, 25% of Black

students attended public schools and by the end of 1870, state constitutions included

constitutional clauses that supported state supported education for Black students (Anderson,

1988). Yet, in spite of state constitutional provisions regarding the education of Black children,

their parents were the primary contributors for Black schools. Organizations such as, the

Freedman's Bureau, some southern Whites and northern missionaries also contributed to Black

schools. The push for education was largely successful, and by 1865, "fourteen southern states

had established 575 schools, and these schools were employing 1,171 teachers for the 71,779

Negro and White children in regular attendance" (Anderson, 1988 p.19). Education for African

Americans post-war flourished. Anderson also noted, "throughout the entire South, an effort is

being made by the colored people to educate themselves. In the absence of other teaching, they

are determined to be self-taught; and everywhere some elementary textbook, or the fragment of

one, may be seen in the hands of Negroes" (Anderson, 1988 p.6).

> "Black Americans arrived in northern cities in large numbers at a time when
>
> centralization had undermined ward school politics, when educators were increasingly
>
> empowered to make classifications of pupils according to their notion of what was best
>
> for the client, when the results of biased tests were commonly accepted as proof of native
>
> ability, when those in control of schooling generally agreed that the function of schools
>
> was to sort and train students to fit into the existing order, and when much writing in
>
> education and social science tended to portray black citizens as a 'social problem, 'linked
>
> in research and library classification schemes with delinquency, prostitution, and
>
> disease—when they were considered at all." (Tyack, 1974, p. 217).

There are also cases in northern states like Connecticut and New Hampshire in which the

enrollment of even one Black student into school was challenged with hostility and violence

(Irons, 2002). The fear of Blacks learning to read and write reinforced many states to pass laws

declaring it illegal to educate free or enslaved Blacks, (Kluger, 1975).

Outside funding sources were scarce for Black families, therefore the majority of support

for their school relied heavily on them and much of the monies contributed were passed on to

White schools along with the reasoning that Whites paid more taxes and should therefore receive more of the funding which was not always factual. "Black citizens were expected to depend heavily on their private resources to build a system of public schools for black children, while the school tax, which was paid by all the citizens of the state, black and white was used disproportionately to build schools for white children" (Anderson, 1988, p. 156). Transportation was also a problem for Black students as many had to walk very long routes alone to get to school (Anderson, 1988; Litwack, 1999).

This practice continued into the twentieth century (Anderson, 1988). Race and the implementation of educational policies held a significant impact on the education of Black students. Yet, education after Emancipation and the civil war thrived in spite of these obstacles and African Americans were very much attuned to the benefits of learning to read and write. In fact, many of them made this a prerequisite to employment (Anderson, 1988; Litwack, 1999).

Following the election of Rutherford B. Hayes as President, Reconstruction primarily ceased and federal troops were removed from the South, which halted Reconstruction. White landowners were against the notion of education for Blacks and poor Whites as it threatened their level of control over the lower classes regarding access to monies. For the rest of the century, access to education for Blacks continued to decline (Anderson, 1988). Although the spirit and determination toward the acquisition of an education did not end.

> The ex-slaves' initiative in establishing and supporting a system of secular and
> Sabbath schools and in demanding universal public education for all children
> presented a new challenge for the dominant-class whites---the possibility of an
> emerging literate black working class in the midst of a largely illiterate poor white

class. This continued a frontal assault on the racist myth of black inferiority, which was

critical to the maintenance of the South's racial caste system (Anderson 1988, p. 27).

Other education movements initiated during the 19th century such as the Populist

movement also owed some credit to the progress previously made by Blacks

(Anderson, 1988).

Racial segregation was prominent during the 19th century, yet it was not systemized and

voted into law until the case of Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896 (Kluger, 1975; Irons, 2002;

Thomas, 1997). Plessy vs. Ferguson[2] was directly related to the segregation of African

Americans when riding on trains, which involved a 7/8 White man named Homer Plessy. Plessy

while sitting in the White section was asked to move to the Colored section. In June of 1896,

which was years after the incident occurred in 1892 the Supreme Court ruled that it did not

violate the 14th Amendment (equal protection clause), and also stated that any feelings of

subordination were of their own choosing and not a product of the segregation law, (Kluger,

1975; Thomas, 1977). Kluger (1975) denounced the court's decision as one of the weakest

cases in the history of the Supreme Court along with the fact that the decision did not mention

any previous cases relative to the constitution of this decision:

Justice Brown and seven of his eight brethren had tortured truth to make the shoe fit;

racially separate facilities, so long as they were equal, could legally be ordained by the

state; segregation was not discrimination. To reach that conclusion, the Court had to

---

[2]Plessy v. Ferguson, <u>163 U.S. 537, 544 </u>, 545 S., 16 S. Ct. 1138, 1140 (1896). Explanation: this was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court issued in 1896. It upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation laws for public facilities as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality – a doctrine that came to be known as "separate but equal".

indulge in a willful reading of human nature and to abuse case law, common law, and

common sense. In dismissing the wound men suffer when forcefully separated from

their fellow citizens when for no reason beyond the color of their skin, the Supreme

Court was reduced to pretending that the resulting pain was self-inflicted, the result of

an overly fragile psychological make-up (Kluger, 1975, p.81). A separate but equal

segregated public facility was the law.

Following this decision, the Supreme Court had several opportunities in such cases as

Gong Lum v. Rice[3] (1927), Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education [4](1899) and

Berea College v. Kentucky[5] (1908), to revert its decision in the Plessy Case yet they did not

(Irons 2002; Kluger 1975; Patterson 2001).

---

[3]Gong Lum v. Rice, 275 U.S. 78, 83 (1927) Explanation: case in which the U.S. Supreme Court on November 21, *1927*, ruled (9–0) that a Mississippi school board had not violated the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause when it classified a student of Chinese descent as "colored" and barred her from attending a white high school.

[4] Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education, 175 U.S. 528 (*1899*). Explanation: this was a class action suit decided by the Supreme Court of the United States. It is a landmark case in that it sanctioned de jure segregation of races in American *schools*. The decision was overruled by Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

[5] Berea College v. Kentucky, 211 U.S. 45, 46 (1908). Explanation: case argued before the United States Supreme Court that upheld the rights of states to prohibit private educational institutions chartered as corporations from admitting both black and white students.

Many Blacks felt that they were being forced to accept inferiority. As E. Franklin Frazier noted in 1935:

> The separation of the races in the South today, both legal and customary, can be understood only if one realizes that it is a means of forcing the Negro to accept an inferior status. A negro may be found in any place in any degree of physical closeness with the whites if he is known to have any inferior status. In most cases he must wear the badge of his inferior status such as the chauffeur's uniform or the maid's cap and apron. (Frazier, 1935, p. 300).

Frazier further posits, "where such a basic pattern of relations between whites and blacks exist it will become clear why democratic justice in the courts is impossible in spite of the abstract legal formulations" (Frazier, 1935, p. 301). Legally segregation appeared to be infallible. Segregation was seen as a widely accepted social custom. Inequalities between Black and White schools became even more intense during the first half of the 20th century. The laws of the Jim Crow era and its effects were extremely palpable and concrete. Following the Plessy ruling it was very evident that where Blacks resided, particularly in large numbers, there were greater differences in school funding (Kluger, 1975). For example, in Mississippi Blacks represented 60% of the school's population, yet were only given 19% of the state's funding; in Alabama White students received $22.96 cents, yet Blacks only received $.98 of this funding (Kluger, 1975). There were also notable disparities in school attendance as Black students were only exposed to 15-20 weeks of education in 1930 (Kluger, 1975). "No matter how it was measured—by the quality of the facilities, the length of the school term, financial appropriations, student teacher ratio, curriculum, teachers' preparation and salaries—the

education available to black children in the New South was vastly inferior to that available to white children" (Litwack, 1999, p. 107). Yet, as a result of one of the most outstanding court battles of our time, Brown vs. Board of Education, 1954-1964; the thirst for equal access and opportunity in education by determined Blacks was not stifled as they continued to fight for this freedom.

Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka,[6] 1954 resulted from years of hard work by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), lawyers such as Charles Hamilton Houston, and the commitment of many commonplace citizens as the Supreme Court was still seen as very unlikely to support such a decision. Cases such as Dred Scott v. Sanford[7] (1857) Plessy v. Ferguson (1857). Wilkinson (1979) further confirmed the Supreme Courts non-support. Houston was also noted for his creation of Howard Law School and the careers of civil rights attorneys such as Thurgood Marshall, Bill Hastie, Jack Greenberg, Leon Ransom, James Nabrit, Edward Lovett, and Oliver Hill who were graduates of Howard University (Kluger, 1975). Kluger cites the determination of Houston in the following excerpt:

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[6] Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) *Explanation*: this was a landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional.

[7] Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S.393 (1857) *Explanation*: The Supreme Court ruled that Americans of African descent, whether free or slave, were not American citizens and could not sue in federal court. The Court also ruled that Congress lacked power to ban slavery in the U.S. territories.

A law school for negroes was different from a medical school for Negroes or, say, an engineering school for negroes. Hearts and lungs and glands worked the same way inside the negroes as in whites. And the principals of thermodynamics or the properties of the hypotenuse did not vary with the color of the man contemplating them. But the laws of the United States did not operate to provide equal justice for whites and blacks, so it would not do just to learn about them in general and in principle. Charles Houston set out to teach young negroes the difference between what the laws said and how they were applied to black Americans. His avowed aim was to eliminate that difference (Kluger, 1975, p. 126).

Charles Hamilton Houston worked to assemble a team of dedicated attorneys and citing notable cases such as the Plessy case to attack segregation (Irons, 2002; Kluger, 1975; Patterson, 2001). A number of various cases led to the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) case such as Briggs v. Elliott [8](1952) in South Carolina, Davis v. Prince Edward County[9]

[7.] Briggs v. Elliott, 342 U.S. 350 (1952) Explanation: this was the first case in the twentieth century to challenge the constitutionality of racially segregated schools. The case carries the names of the lead plaintiff, Harry Briggs, who had five children in the school district, and Roderick W. Elliott, chairman of School District 22.

[9] *Davis v. County* School Board of *Prince Edward County,* 103 F. Supp. 337 (1952) Explanation: this was one of the five cases combined into Brown *v*. Board of Education, the famous case

(1952) in Virginia, Bolling v. Sharpe[10] (1954) out of Washington DC, Beulah v. Gebhart [11](1952).

Following, many months of delay regarding the Brown case and the death of Chief Justice Vinson; one of the strongest opponents against desegregation, the appointment of Earl Warren and his unanimous opinion presented on May 17, 1954, was pivotal in the final decision rendered in Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka and read accordingly:

Today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today, it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms. We come then to the question presented: Does segregation in public schools solely on the

---

[10] *Bolling v. Sharpe,* 347 U.S. 497 (1952). Explanation: In view of this Court's decision in Brown v. *Board of Education.* Explanation: stated that the Constitution prohibits the States from maintaining racially segregated public schools, it would be unthinkable that the same Constitution would impose a lesser duty on the Federal Government.

[11] Beulah v. Gebhart, 33 Del. Ch. 144, 87 (1952) Explanation: case ruled that the "separate but equal" doctrine had been violated and that the plaintiffs were entitled to immediate admission to the white school in their communities. Although a victory for the named plaintiffs, his decision had not dealt the sweeping blow to segregation they had hoped for.

basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" actors may be

equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal education opportunities? We

believe that it does (Kluger, 1975, p. 781.)

This decision was met with much celebration, which was later halted in May of when the

Supreme Court handed down Brown II,[12] the second decision regarding the case. This decision

merely compelled schools to desegregate, "with all deliberate speed", lacking any plan or

timeline regarding its actual implementation or enforcement. Unfortunately, "for the first time,

the Supreme Court had vindicated a constitutional right and then deferred its exercise" (Sitkoff,

1993, p. 23). This action forced the Black community to again be left in limbo and further

delayed their right to equal educational opportunity. Thurgood Marshall along with other

Attorneys tried to understand what the Court meant by "deliberate speed" in their written

opinion. It was further noted that the phrase meant to slow down and as a result, the victory was

endangered because segregationist would respond in their time (Ogletree, 2004). The federal

government was needed to force integration in public schools.

President Dwight Eisenhower had regrets for his appointment of Justice Earl Warren and

many other branches of government did not support desegregation. Furthermore, the House

and Senate were under the control of the Republicans and Southern Democrats who explicitly

demanded that their states not comply with the Brown decision (Sitkoff, 1993). The NAACP

proceeded by initiating individual cases across the country. Segregationist used delay tactics to

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[12] Brown II, 349 *U.S.* 294, (1955). Explanation: Brown II implied that local resistance to desegregation could indeed delay desegregation.

avoid the Brown decision, along with statements such as, "As long as we legislate, we can segregate,' and during this time more than 450 laws and resolutions to thwart desegregation efforts were undertaken in Southern states (Sitkoff, 1993, p. 26-27). This represents the kind of opposition that those in favor of desegregation were forced to confront.

CIVIL RIGHTS: 1964-1968

As discussed previously, the Brown decision was insufficient in its enforcement of the desegregation of public schools. In reality, it was almost a decade before the Supreme Court's decision was implemented. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and their legislative branches supported desegregation. As a result of this support, other educational reforms were passed such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which awarded financial assistance to schools that, complied with the Act and sanctions to those schools that resisted the Order. The 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 1964 Civil Rights Act were also passed during this period. (Irons, 2002; Kluger, 1975; Patterson, 2001; Sitkoff, 1993). Presidents of the 19th century such as, "the two Roosevelts, Wilson, Eisenhower and Nixon among them—saw each wave of zeal for racial justice compromised against the need for day-to-day southern political support" (Wilkinson, 1979, p. 7-8).

President Ford was also opposed to busing and the notion of integration. President Carter appointed many Blacks to cabinet positions but the failing economy during his tenure and its effect on the Black community made him less popular and led to failing support (D'Angelo, 2001). Yet, the Bush and Reagan administrations were extremely harsh towards the desegregation efforts. Patterson observed that this type of opposition against desegregation efforts continued to hinder the implementation of the Brown decision that

was further reinforced by the retirement and replacement of several Supreme Court justices (Patterson, 2001).

     In fact, the election of Ronald Reagan represented a major blow to desegregation efforts as he unsuccessfully worked to dismantle the Department of Education and create block grants. This type of educational funding served to seriously stifle desegregation efforts particularly in urban cities (Lugg, 1996). On May 22, 1981, mandatory busing in support of school desegregation ended brusquely (Lugg, 1996). To make matters even worst, the Justice Department redefined the enforcement of civil rights to include, the intent of discrimination along with the effects of discrimination (Lugg, 1996). Whites moved to all White suburbs, placing their kids in private schools strongly resisting desegregation by supporting pupil placement laws and the notion of freedom of choice:

> After a tumultuous decade of social and cultural change, a nation that had been
> torn by war, stunned by urban riots and shaken by assassinations was not prepared to
> recognize or cope with metropolitan apartheid. People denied that the problem existed,
> claimed that it was or most often, attacked the proposed solutions. (Orfield, 1978, p. 3).
> School desegregation efforts during the 19th century were plagued with intense protests
> and opposition from White supremacists and anti-desegregation politicians
> throughout the country.

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN NORTHERN STATES

The Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and even the Fourteenth Amendment failed to secure the rights of Black children in many northern cities. It was left to state and local politics to decide "the Negro question" (Tyack 1974, p. 114). Other minority groups, such as the Germans were given special language classes in support of their assimilation, yet education for Black students was not regarded as entitlement yet more as an act of altruism (D'Angelo, 2001; Tyack, 1974). In the North, parental choice to send students to segregated or desegregated schools depended on reasons such as, "the density of the black population, the nature of black leadership, and the degree of white prejudice" (Tyack, 1974, p. 110). Many Black parents felt that desegregated schools exposed their children to poor treatment by White students and teachers, yet others felt that segregated schools would provide a better education and future for their children (Mohraz, 1979; Tyack, 1974). As long as the black population remained small, there was an uncertain peace in northern cities, but as numbers increased especially in the closing decades of the 19th century, hostility and tension grew (Mohraz, 1979, p.4). Before the 1930's Black populations were small and most lived in the South (D'Angelo, 2001; Mohraz, 1979; Tyack, 1974). Although this began to change as a result of industrialization, which prompted many southerners to move to the North. This industrial movement created more jobs that were not aligned with domestic service (Mohraz, 1979).

At a meeting in Delaware, Blacks were offered better schools if they would return to the south, but after acknowledging that they would not be allowed to vote in the south, the meeting was dismissed (D'Angelo, 2001). Prior to the 1930's, the majority of Black people resided in the South (D'Angelo, 2001; Mohraz, 1979; Tyack, 1974). Newspapers such as the Chicago Defender were very instrumental in encouraging the migration of Blacks to the

North by not only publicizing industry job opportunities that existed, but also the actual printing of train schedules (D'Angelo, 2001; Grossman, 1989; Mohraz, 1979). Employment for Blacks in the South was primarily domestic (Mohraz, 1979).

Mohraz (1979) further observed Chicago, Philadelphia and Indiana regarding segregation laws between 1900 and 1930. Indiana segregation in schools was the law. Philadelphia laws forbade segregation, but it was ignored as Black students were still expected to attend separate schools. Yet in Chicago the laws against this practice existed, but they were not even recognized as school districts changed district lines and White parents transferred their students away from integrated schools (Mohraz, 1979). Even though Brown v. Board of Education of 1954 prohibited de jure or legally sanctioned segregation in the North, segregation most often occurred as a result of neighborhood or de facto (by fact or circumstance) segregation. But in most northern cities the legal situation was cloudy, for there, the segregation in schools resulted mostly from residential patterns rather than from legal policy--de facto rather than de jure--, although to the child in the all-black school the lawyers' technicalities probably made little difference" (Tyack, 1974, p. 280). This reversal in desegregation continues into the 20th century in urban areas, and even worst in some suburbs (Frankenberg et al., 2003; Orfield, 1993; Orfield, 2001; Orfield, 2004). This shift has been supported by a number of Supreme Court cases from the 19th century including, Missouri v. Jenkins [13](1995), Freeman v. Pitts [14](1992), Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell, [15](1991) and Milliken v. Bradley[16] (1974).

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[13] Missouri v. Jenkins, 515 U.S. 70 (1995). Explanation: the district court's school desegregation orders, which required the State of Missouri to fund across-the-board salary increases and to continue to fund remedial education programs, went beyond the court's remedial authority.

Educational reforms were channeled as citizens viewed the public education system and its need for further improvement. According to Loveless (1999), the educational reforms focused on career-specific means, such as college-bound, vocational, and general labor. Moreover, Horace Mann an educational reformer of the nineteenth century stated that education should be geared toward a more specific career-based approach which had been the white-collar approach, factory, or vocational (Oakes & Wells, 2004). It was not until the middle of the twentieth century, that education had taken a more sophisticated design which involved the tracking system (McDonald, 2004). The tracking system had emerged as the change from profession-based tracking to ability level tracking. It was perceived as a solution to society's need for children to reach their maximum potentials, particularly in allowing them to further expand their abilities through this intensive training. For many years, the tracking system has been utilized in the United States, systematically structured in 60% of elementary schools and 80% of secondary schools (Ansalone 2003).

Oakes (1985) concluded; historically speaking, racial injustice had continually existed within the tracking system. Blacks were very much outnumbered in the educational system

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[14] Freeman vs. Pitts, 503 U.S. 467 (1992). Explanation: federal Courts have the authority to relinquish control of a school district in incremental stages, before compliance has been achieved in every area of school operations.

[15] Board of Education of Oklahoma City. Pub. Sch. *v*. *Dowell*, 111 S. Ct. 630, 635-36 (1991). Explanation: the significance of Dowell is that the Supreme Court upheld the authority and discretion of lower courts to address issues relating to school desegregation.

[16]Milliken v. Bradley, 418 U.S. 717 (1974). Explanation: A particular urban school district in Detroit was found to have de jure segregation. There were other school districts in the suburban areas. The lower court found that the appropriate remedy

between 1930 and 1970. This resulted in fewer Black students receiving the higher tracking treatment as this trend had become prevalent through future generations. Hallinan (1994) supported this data by studying 25 middle and high schools with tracked curricula. It was revealed that low ability groups held a majority presence among ethnic minorities verses the number of Whites and their enrollment in high priority groups. Tracking, as a result, has the historical significance of being innately prejudiced.

As we review the history of these United States, it is clear that specific groups of students (and their families) have been methodically and frequently barred from access to quality schooling. Researchers in the history of education such as David Tyack (2004), James Anderson (1989), and Michael Fultz (1995), have outlined the heritage of educational injustice in the United States. Those inequities originally were fashioned around class, race, and gender. Progressively, some of those inequities began to retreat, but clearly continue to persist in the areas of race and tracking.

TRACKING AND THE MYTH OF THE RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The racial achievement gap, generally defined as the difference in educational performance between groups that include Latino and African American, Asian and White students (Noguera, & Wing, 2006), is an issue that has received overwhelming attention in recent years (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orr, 2003; Rothstein, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Thompson, 2007). NCLB, (2001) has been instrumental in fueling an increase in this wave of inquiry due to its focus on accountability and standardized test scores (Gooden, 2005).

Slavin (1990) emphasized that the trend in tracking systems toward widening the racial and achievement gap has been a growing concern for many people, especially parents and

teachers. This has created much controversy with how the tracking system is being applied to enhance the educational system at hand. For instance, Chen (2006) asserted that "placement in lower ability groups was criticized to be racially and socioeconomically imbalanced" (p. 6). This meant that there existed racial disparity in the tracking system. This racial disparity has been cited as an indicator for the problems that arise in careers where minority groups assigned to lower ability groups receive low-paying jobs and Whites, who are likely in higher ability groups, receive higher paying jobs. Cullen et al., (2013) concluded:

> Of students whose 5th grade math scores placed them in the top half, 26 percent of Blacks took Algebra I or another advanced math course in the 8th grade, while 60 percent of their White peers were enrolled in these courses (Cullen et.al., 2013, p. 135).

This alone proved that academic proficiency was more biased toward the Whites. Cullen et al., (2013) also argued that "Low-income and minority students are exposed to teachers with less experience and fewer qualifications than higher socioeconomic students" (p. 135). This problem is still prevalent along with other social problems, which have developed their roots as a result of tracking and the resulting gap between students in our educational system. Kalogrides and Loeb (2013) stated:

> A more critical, social reproduction theory of tracking decisions is that students are matched to courses in ways that maintain racial and socioeconomic stratification. Rather than being based solely on merit, tracking decisions are argued to be designed to reproduce the existing social order by limiting minority and poor students' access to rigorous curriculum and consequently, access to college and higher status careers. (p.9-10).

Hence, the racial gap is still prevalent in the educational system, and it is important to understand the impact of tracking in effecting change.

Tracking has been aligned as a primary contributor to the achievement gap in numerous Research studies, focusing on the relationship between the mere structure of tracking, student achievement (Gamoran, 1992; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Slavin & Oickle, 1981) and the eradication of the achievement gap through de-tracking (Burris & Welner, 2005). Other studies document the tracking of students as early as third grade (Barta & Allen, 1995; George, 1993; Nieto, 2000; Oakes, 1995; Pool & Page, 1995) and further discuss how the decision to place Black students in tracked classes established itself as a prevailing force in the organization of schools throughout the country.

Additional evidence is drawn from a qualitative project by Oakes (1995) entitled "Matchmaking: The Dynamics of High School Tracking" using a case study design with seven Black high school students in tracked mathematics and English classes. Results indicated differential treatment by school personnel as early as elementary school that influenced students' later school performance. "What made these recommendations and initial judgments so powerful was the widespread belief that a student's educational prospects are virtually set by the time he or she gets to high school" (Oakes, 1995, p. 10). As an example, Oakes further supports this notion by stating that the principal at one of the schools claimed, "that he could tell by the end of kindergarten which children would be successful in high school" (p.10).

According to Cooper (1996), true equity in education can only occur if heterogeneity existed instead of racially segregated homogeneity. As a result, the tracking system itself is disruptive and has created stigma in the educational system. It is also important to note that, as

stated by Werblow et al. (2013), tracking has actually promoted complications in the educational system that has increased high school dropouts. This has been attributed to the pressure and social disparity that students face in an environment that may seem to promote equity in learning but only focused on isolating students based on ability groups. One of the most important aspects of tracking is the racial achievement gap. According to Lleras and Rangel (2009), "Recent empirical research suggests that while controlling for family, socioeconomic status completely eliminates black-white reading achievement gaps at school entry, the gaps reemerge during the first few years of school and are quite substantial by the end of third grade" (p. 279). Researchers, such as Kunjufu, (2005) have attributed this disparity to various structural factors, which may be systematic in nature. Hence, tracking has affected the Black student population negatively by widening the achievement gap (Lee, 2006; Kunjufu 2005; Ladson-Billings, (2009).

Tracking has been cited as a contribution to segregation and an obstruction to student achievement when Black students are placed in low performing ability groups. This practice assigns labels to students based on class rank such as high achievers along with students of mid-level intellectual capacities as medium achievers, compared to those with low intellectual abilities as low achievers. This form of classification reinforces homogeneity in the classroom. It is also useful in analyzing standardized test results that support teacher expectations and allow schools and administrators to adapt learning curves as needed (Ishitani, 2006). According to Chen (2006) homogeneity in the classroom encourages classroom development, which can result in easier identification for teachers with possible target goals, and objectives that exist in classrooms. Yet, tracking as a curriculum differentiation model may assist educators, but it hinders student progress.

Data from Braddock and Slavin (1992) posits "In high schools, Black and Hispanic students are greatly overrepresented in the vocational track and underrepresented in academic programs. These groups are also overrepresented among the low tracks in junior high and middle schools, and in low reading groups in elementary school" (p. 7). Also important is that the most recent national statistics, as well as statistics from some states, suggest that students of color and lower income students are overrepresented in Career to Education (CTE), a fact that was first unearthed by Oakes in 1983 (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; NCES, 2013).

It is clear that the achievement gap has continued to grow and has impacted the educational system with Blacks being more concentrated in low ability groups due to little opportunities. The main reason of this occurrence may be linked to socioeconomic status, which indicated that because the majority of Blacks are impoverished, they could not afford similar upbringing to Whites, hence they receive low test scores and are assigned to low ability groups. Findings from a National Educational Longitudinal Study indicated that parents' abilities to invest economic, social, and human capital in their children's education led to higher academic achievement (Altschul, 2012).

As a result of the evidence presented, Black students have been at the center of the tracking controversy since they are usually found in low ability groups. The connection between race, tracking, educational growth and socioeconomic factors provides much insight on the conditions that African American students face in the educational system. The U.S. Government passed the No Child Left Behind Act to address these issues whose purpose was to "meet high academic standards and participate fully in American society. It is imperative that education operate as an integral part of a system that expects high achievement of all children, rather than as a means of avoiding accountability for children who are more

challenging to educate or who have fallen behind (Bush, 2001; Sharpe & Hawes 2003). This meant that schools must focus on the holistic development of students and ensure that everyone receives the proper treatment in educational opportunity, especially since tracking promoted achievement gaps and only limited the potential of students.

Another primary issue with tracking is that it creates division among students when achievement levels are identified and defined, which generally occurs when they begin to mingle with other students from different ability and achievement groups. Brunello and Checchi (2007) further expound that the differences in achievement levels create social gaps within classrooms and public schools. Ability grouping thus supports tracking and as a result encourages school inequity, which can affect the interaction needed to continue and sustain equal opportunities among students.

Previous research also supports the belief that one way to alleviate the minority achievement gap was to integrate Black students into predominately White public schools. The practice of integrating low-income Black students into schools where more affluent students are enrolled can help to delineate the Black-White achievement gap. Results of long-term studies have shown positive results regarding outcomes for this type of placement, primarily for those Black adults and adolescents who have been enrolled in integrated schools (Guryan, 2001; Johnson, 2011). But the conventional wisdom of contemporary education policy notwithstanding, there is no evidence that segregated schools with poorly performing students can be "turned around" while remaining racially isolated.

Claims that some schools, Charter Schools in particular, "beat the odds" were not founded upon closer examination. Such schools are structurally selective on non-observables, at least, and frequently have high attrition rates (Rothstein, 2004). In smaller suburban and

urban or larger school districts where poor and middle - class neighborhoods are closely aligned, the practice of integrating schools has been supported with some success by the control of attendance zones, schools controlled by lotteries, and the development of magnet schools. Yet, for those Black students who reside in large urban areas such as Chicago and New York away from middle class suburbs, the target for removing racial isolation must occur in their neighborhoods.

In the United States, race determines your level of access to various resources. Bonilla-Silva (2001) summarized the sacrifice of being Black relative to racial and bigoted issues regarding income and earnings, occupational mobility, labor market participation, home loan approvals, various interactions with the legal system (including increasing rates of incarceration), and everyday forms of race and discrimination. He further labels the U.S. as a prejudiced social system and argues that in the United States:

> The placement of actors in racial categories involves some form of hierarchy. The race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic re-numeration and access to better occupations and prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation (e. g., is viewed as "smarter" and "better looking"), and often has license to draw physical (segregation) as well as social (racial etiquette) boundaries between itself and other races, (Bonilla-Silva 2001, p. 37).

As a result of life in a biased society; Black and White students, even in the same schools and demographic areas must steer through racial educational environments. This paradigm extends Bonilla-Silva's (2001) work by implicitly linking the idea of a racialized social system at the organizational level to its impact on the institutional school and

Ideological levels within the education sect (Diamond, 2006).

IMPACT OF THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

To narrow the education gap, policymakers and school administrators must understand the underlying intent behind the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Details of this act provided insight into why the changes were needed to improve public schooling, especially in combating issues regarding equal access. NCLB, as outlined by McGuinn (2006), was a response to the Federal educational policy in alleviating various problems that were projected over unequal treatment of students and the segregation that existed in schools. The Act aimed to transform the educational system through many points: (1) accountability, (2) freedom to choose schools, (3) more concrete standardization tests based on refined scientific methods, and (4) increased quality and distribution of teachers (NCLB, 2002). These provisions aimed to eliminate the gaps that had been present in the educational system, especially in terms of child development. NCLB's core requirements included the following:

- All students must be proficient in reading and math by 2014, as defined and measured by state standards and assessments.

- States must assess students in math and reading once annually in grades 3–8 and at least once during their high school years.

- Every public school is evaluated to see if it has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), based largely on the percentage of students scoring "proficient" or above on state assessments, overall and for each of the following subgroups of students: economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

- Schools that do not make AYP for two years in a row are identified as "needing improvement." School and district AYP information is communicated to parents and to the public through annual school report cards.

- Those schools that received federal Title I am funding and identified as "needing improvement" must develop a school improvement plan and for each additional year that they don't make AYP, must undertake specific actions. These schools are required to spend federal funding to implement federally mandated strategies— public school choice, supplemental education services (SES), corrective action, and restructuring". (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007, p.3).

According to Lee and Orfield (2006), NCLB opted in narrowing the class and achievement gap by equalizing tests that would meet this need and requiring schools to focus their attention on under-served groups, students with disabilities, and low-income students. These actions purported to allow schools to give due justice to students who did not have the financial capacity to enhance their education in comparison to their more affluent peers. Tracking systems were renewed, and emphasis was placed on its overall development. This action was intended to promote positive change in terms of the provisions mentioned, and efforts in attempting to equalize the educational system.

It is important to note, however, that Mickelson et al. (2013) argued that NCLB actually failed to close the achievement gap and based on a long-term study in North Carolina, it was concluded as such because of the inability of the Act to implement the necessary reforms proposed. They specifically noted that, "A general critique of NCLB notes that the legislation fails to take into account how the social, political, and economic sources of unequal educational achievement that lie beyond school walls affect what goes on within them" (Mickelson, et.al.,

2013, p. 4). David Blumenthal, (2006) in a lawsuit filed by the state of Connecticut argued that NCLB was detrimental to the achievement gaps of education in Connecticut by not providing appropriate funds to finance the law. The main reason for this litigation was to force the federal government to provide the necessary funding to meet the sanctions and goals of NCLB. He further concurred along with many other states that the Act reinforced the association between rich school districts and improved educational quality by providing unfunded, unrealistic mandates, and assigning harsh penalties for AYP failures (Blumenthal, 2006; Duncombe et al., (2008).

Additionally, the emphasis on accountability had undermined teacher quality for students who were most in need. Although the premise for NCLB was positive its effects were contrary to what was proposed. This is further supported by the notion that those who felt that No Child Left Behind led to school improvement often cite the primary idea behind the law — that no child would be left behind, or that struggling disadvantaged students would be brought up to the level of their peers. Problems in assessing socioeconomic dynamics still existed, and thus tracking systems were re-implemented in schools. Fletcher (2012) assessed how the dynamics of tracking after NCLB affected employment status in adulthood, particularly by taking note of school-to-work transitions and the basic trends in achievement gains which remained modest, at most. This showed that NCLB could not completely solve the problem of the achievement gap.

Sunderman (2008), however, presented arguments that the presence of NCLB has great potential. According to Sunderman (2008), "When NCLB has a significant positive effect, the state performance trajectory will shift upward with a marked increase in the growth rate" (p. 78). By this measure, Sunderman (2008) further assessed school performance and compared

the results of pre-NCLB with that of post-NCLB. The results revealed that, as similar to what

Fletcher (2012) proclaimed, "NCLB did not have significant impact on improving reading and

math achievement across the states so far" (p. 87). This showed that there was more work to be

done to enforce NCLB and garner results that would narrow the achievement gap. It is

important to note that NCLB was a good start in educational reform; however, it needed

improvement. The Act, "provided a framework for standards and accountability with the goal

of equalizing educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, yet implementation

strategies are still leaving children behind" (Brooks, 2005), specifically regarding funding.

Also, to ensure the initial passage and ongoing support for No Child Left Behind its

rationale was to a great extent based on the likelihood of positive outcomes from the law's initial

onset. This rhetoric was also supported by the notion that NCLB offered improved academics for

disadvantaged students in inadequately structured public schools (NCLB, 2002).

The primary goal of providing education to all and narrowing the racial and class achievement

gap needs more work so that students may have ongoing educational gains. As such, tracking

could still function in this system if changes were made to accommodate the impact of NCLB

and the tracking system itself (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Lee and Orfield (2006) stated that while "NCLB has not helped the nation and states

significantly narrow the achievement gap" (p.13), the tracking system must continue to

implement equity and accountability measures to accommodate the changing environment at

hand; it is worthy to note that the gap has considerably narrowed since the 1970s, but in recent

trends, the reduction of the gap is not as significant as it was in the past. In a study conducted by

Jaekyung Lee, the achievement gap between Black and White students actually, "narrowed

substantially in the 1970s and 1980s, (2002, p. 3). Yet, according to recent trends documented by the National Assessment for Educational Progress report, (2013) Black, White and Hispanic–White achievement gaps in reading and math showed no significant change from 2011 to 2013.

Sunderman (2008) shared the same conclusion as Lee and Orfield (2006) in that ability grouping must be channeled toward enhancing student progress and not merely focus on tests that would segregate students. Sunderman (2008) emphasized that "Sustained growth under NCLB was good news, but it is not a testament to a positive effect of NCLB because the post-NCLB growth simply extends the past trend" (p. 88). NCLB could not provide significant evidence that the increased accountability and other provisions   increased student performance in educational systems across schools.

Mickelson, et al. (2013) projected that NCLB needed considerable work as they emphasized that:

> NCLB did not introduce any new pedagogical techniques to education; rather than adding resources, it threatened to take them away in low performing schools along with sanctions on administrators and district authorities. Its fundamental premise was that low achievers were capable of performing at the same level as their peers, but they lacked sufficient incentive to do so, or at least their teachers lacked sufficient motivation to teach them well (p. 18).

Thus, it is important to redirect the approach of tracking and ability grouping toward promoting the desired equity in the educational system at hand. Only then will the U.S. see equality in education and the removal of the racial achievement gap.

With the inception of No Child Left Behind (2001), it was assumed that achievement disparity would be reduced and that every child would have equal access to a quality education.

NCLB provided a statutory justification to educational institutions to track and group low-achievement students (Brown Center Report on Education Policy, 2013). According to Cusick (2014); the impact of NCLB is part of a larger scheme by politicians, educators, and researchers to "exert more control over public schools" and the $850 billion annual budget for K-12. Not only did the Act provide financial assistance to states to help ensure that educational standards and achievement was met and enhanced, but it also put forward stringent measures for schools that fail to comply with the set standards (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

Another aspect of NCLB's efforts was the supplemental services provision, which provided funds to private tutoring businesses with no reliable data to substantiate its effect on students:

> NCLB's Supplemental Educational Services: Is This What Our Students Need, reported that NCLB's supplemental education services were reaching just 233,000 or 11% of the two million students eligible nationwide, frequently offering low-quality services that merely extended NCLB's "narrowed educational agenda into students' out-of-school hours (Ascher, 2011 p. 136).

The ongoing debate on the effectiveness of NCLB largely focuses on the underlying intent of the Act, which was the notion that teachers are both the solution and the problem in the education segment. In a study by Dee and Jacob (2010) to determine the effect of NCLB on 4th grade student scores it was noted that the policy may have resulted in a small increase in the student's math scores. Yet, other researchers argue that when states modify their evaluation tools and teachers began teaching to the test, results of such can be incorrect and misleading, (Fuller et.al. 2007, as cited in Dee & Jacobs, 2010).

IMPACT OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ON TEACHING QUALITY

No Child Left Behind (2001), required all teachers to be highly qualified in their areas of instruction by 2006, which meant that all educators must be college graduates, certified in the State of their employment and be experts in their area of instruction. The primary rule that all teachers must have at a minimum a four-year college degree was basic and widely accepted. The next certification rule was loosely written and has resulted in many states setting certification requirements as they chose. As a result of, a number of state departments of education have created alternative education routes to teacher certification such as, The American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence's Passport to Teaching which has been a disappointment to those who value pedagogy as an integral part of the field of teaching because No Child Left Behind did not require such to acquire a teacher's certificate. Yet, in most state's certification is a requirement to teach (Porter, 2004).

The most debatable rule of NCLB (2001) was that all teachers be able to prove mastery in their specific areas of certification. This demand along with NCLB's initial rule of thumb, which included some student teaching and pedagogy courses, created much confusion regarding one's view of the definition of a qualified teacher. This shift is supported by a number of research studies that focus on the relationship between content knowledge and student achievement as opposed to pedagogy. This is highly supported for required courses such as math and science. Research by Goldhaber & Brewer (1996), suggest that "A teacher with a BA in mathematics or an MA in mathematics has a statistically significant positive impact on students' achievement compared to teachers with no advanced degrees or degrees in non-mathematics subjects" (p. 206). Darling- Hammond (2000) also supported the findings of Goldhaber and Brewer quoting:

The most consistent highly significant predictor of student achievement in

reading and mathematics in each year tested is the proportion of well-qualified

teachers in a state: those with full certification and a major in the field they

teach (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. v).

Additionally, states were required to inform parents of the number or percentage of

teachers in their schools who were not highly qualified, which was very unpopular. NCLB

and its highly qualified requirements required teachers to have demonstrated subject matter

competency in their specific teaching content area, yet many teachers hired in low-income

urban schools were not highly qualified making it difficult for schools to provide them. In

lieu of, several states continued looking for gaps in the system to avoid the rules of NCLB

yet continued to collect the federal subsidies that were rewarded for compliance. These

monies were primarily targeted for poor and minority school districts and students (Porter,

2004). One major provision regarding certification called, the High Objective Uniform State

Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) provision, gave states the option to outline the

requirements for subject area mastery. As a result, states created standards that delivered the

greatest number of highly qualified teachers. According to the National Council on Teacher

Quality (NCTQ), many states left so many loopholes and options in their HOUSSE standards

that "there was little likelihood that weak teachers would be identified and helped—and in

fact, the weakest teachers were the most likely to take advantage of these loopholes" (Tracy

& Walsh, 2004).

There are very few who will argue the value of good teaching, yet there is ongoing debate

regarding the effects of poor teaching. According to research conducted by Rivers and

Sanders (2002), the effect of the teacher far overshadows classroom variables, such as previous achievement level of students, and class size as it is currently operationalized, heterogeneity of students, and the ethnic and socioeconomic makeup of the classroom (p.17). NCLB also required states to label those schools who demonstrated an environment which was persistently violent in terms of school climate and give students the option to leave those schools, yet loopholes allowed them to avoid this provision, which left students in violent schools (Porter, 2004).

TRACKING AND ITS IMPACT ON CURRICULUM

The disadvantage of tracking within the curriculum is that it provides students with paths that may not prepare them for their chosen careers when they graduate. The nature of curricula based on tracking is that the focus is on a specific career orientation, and the lessons and skill levels are augmented to support this specific path in education (Reigeluth, 2013). On the contrary, this may be too limiting in terms of standardization and effective management of quality education. The nature of curricula under tracking cannot provide educational managers a clear and definitive standard in assessing the quality of education attained by the students, which is based on the quality of the curriculum such as inclusiveness, relevant internally aligned and coherent curriculum, and consistency with broader societal goals (Arends, 2012).

Another problem with this is that tracking is too specific to be judged from a general point of view, factors are all circumstantial and based on the kind of path for which the student has potential (Moore, 2014). Tiesco (2003) argues, "Ability grouping will not lead to significant improvement in student's achievement unless it is combined with curricula that have been created based on students' learning styles, interests, and abilities" (p. 29). Thus,

tracking and the curriculum need to be examined closely to provide clearer merit as to how the former impacts the latter in a positive manner.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF TRACKING ON STUDENTS

Tracking has distinct effects on the development of students which may be psychological or academic, (Lipps et al., 2010). The impact of tracking can be two-fold; some students benefit while others are at a disadvantage due to the fact that students are tracked into classes that do not support the prerequisites needed to perform at their best when entering college or to prepare for their first year of college. The disparity of this feedback goes to show how tracking is still very controversial in public education. One advantage of the tracking system, however, is that it promotes students with a sure career path as early as possible in terms of giving them some direction regarding what they want to pursue in high school whether it be college bound or school to work programs. Brunello and Checchi (2007), also state that students who have undergone tracking systems have been known to be more affirmative in their decision-making when they seek to establish their careers. From my experience with vocational programs, students are reinforced to declare college track or school to work paths as early as junior high school. The tracking system is a definitive system that focuses on training students with the skills they need to function effectively in their respective paths. This kind of mindset allows students to be more focused and more driven toward their goal; a goal that has been predetermined for them based on their perceived abilities.

Students in higher tracks are part of a system that is focused on their growth as valuable or more able to contribute intellectually as a part of society. This is also supported by Slavin (1990) in that the focus of tracks provides students with the potential to understand themselves

even more. They gain a new perspective on matters, and they are more oriented toward the system that they will later be integrated into. However, another problem with tracking is that the discrepancy of learning has affected other students, especially those in low ability groups or tracks. Braddock and Slavin (1992) stated that various policies in the educational system have been counterproductive in maintaining academic integrity. Students of low ability groups have been known to develop self-esteem problems because they feel they are inadequate. Chiu et.al., (2008) define self-esteem as "an individual's overall assessment of his or her value or worth based in part on self-judgments about his or her competence in different areas" (p. 126). The impact of the tracking system, if not positive, is very negative. It can hurt the growth potential of people who have been assigned to low ability groups, and thus they do not have the chance to grow. They cannot choose to be who they want to be as the system has decided for them based on standardized testing and circumstantial evidence.

As long as students are assigned to low achieving groups, the more damage to their self- concept (Hallam & Deathe, 2002). This theory was further evidenced by a study conducted by Martha Wong and David Watkins in Hong Kong (2001) to determine how ability grouping affects self-esteem. The principle entitled, "Big Fish Little Pond effect was used to conduct their research. The indications presented were revealing and characteristic of the finding's comparative of students in the United States.

According to their research, "Psychologists believe that school experiences such as academic successes and failures, social rejection or acceptance from classmates, and rewards and punishments from teachers have a major impact on the way a student perceives himself or herself" (Wong & Watkins, 2001, p. 80). The Big Fish Little Pond theory directly correlates with previous research discussed in this sub-section regarding the analogies students make

between them and their peers in relation to their self-concept and self-esteem. The way in which students feel about themselves is dependent on their group assignments in classrooms. Wong and Watkins, (2001) further suggested of this theory, "Two factors are crucial in determining an individual's self-esteem, namely, perceived state of one's competence and the frame of reference in which these perceptions are processed" (p. 82).

When dissecting Wong and Watkins's (2001) Big Fish Little Pond theory, it is important to view the pond as the overall environment that creates the culture of the school. Students view themselves as the "big fish" when their self-esteem is higher. Motivated by a report conducted by the American Association of University Women (1991), Peggy Orenstein's research with middle school girls ask them to describe their lives if they were born as boys in her quest to dissect the differences in confidence levels among the two groups of students. The study confirmed significant differences in self- esteem and performance in science and math between both groups (2013).

An increase in self-concept takes place when a student compares him or herself to a less demanding standard, or lower achieving student, and uses this as a basis for evaluating his/her self-worth. When students compare themselves to more advanced students who are placed in higher ability groups, negative self-concept occurs. Marsh (1984) makes the distinction that "academic self-concept is negatively affected by school ability and positively affected by individual ability, even though these two ability measures are positively correlated with each other" (p. 803). Student ability levels are generally determined by counselors, teachers and administrators; therefore, these entities are important to student self-esteem and self-concept.

Another important facet of tracking and its effects on student psyche includes student academic self-assessment. Self-assessments are how students view their actual progress and how effective they learn the material presented to them (Oakes, 1985). The tracking system was implemented to ensure that students might have a clear and defined understanding of the progress of learning they are going through, especially after being assigned to their specific ability groups. The advantage of tracking on self-assessment is that in high ability groups, students understand their current skill level and they are aware of the conditions involved in the knowledge they have attained (Oakes, 1985).

This theory is further noted in Thurgood Marshalls litigation regarding Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954) where he inserts the notion that the separation of Blacks and Whites in public school reinforces the creation of inferiority in Black students. To support this claim, Marshall used the results of the report by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark which relied on the results of the racial preference of dolls used to confirm the psychological damage to Black children in segregated schools. When the children were asked to choose between the Black vs. White dolls and respond to questions regarding which one, they identified with more and wanted to play with; the children chose the White dolls as being the nice ones with the best color. This action allowed the Brown case to link the negative effects of segregation directly to the self-esteem for Black students and was very instrumental in the success of this landmark case (Bergner, 2009).

According to Zimmer (2003), students thrive best when they are in an environment of like-minded peers. This is a strong point of tracking in the sense that students tend to develop positive self-assessments due to their assigned environment. The problem, however, arises in the homogeneity of the group. Most problems occur in tracking systems due to no peer academic

support. It is certain that students may feel satisfied with the group they are assigned within; however, since the group is homogeneous, self-assessments are only limited to similar experiences and no more room for improvement since students in the same group are of equal intellectual level. In addition to theory, empirical research increasingly supports the necessity to understand and develop effective learning environments that are sensitive to the needs of the participants (Zimmer, 2003).

School environment has been defined by investigators in a number of different ways including "the quality and character of school life," (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 182) the "shared perceptions" of the educational arena (Gregory et al., 2007, p. 251) and the "personality" or "health" of a school (Hoy & Hannum, 1999, p 292). Most of the research has established that the student's observation of their interaction with peers at school to be the most important characteristic of the school's environment. This encompasses their overall satisfaction with other peers in the school (Loukas & Robinson, 2004), and includes the significance or value of teacher relationships (Goodenow, 1993). Previous research also confirms that when students graduate to secondary schools, quite often they find that teachers in these schools are construed as more abrasive, and not as friendly and nurturing as their teachers in elementary schools (Reddy et al., 2003).

TRACKING VERSUS DE-TRACKING

Tracking has been used in the American educational system to ensure that kids get the appropriate level of instruction depending on their abilities and potential. Tracking has caused some issues, specifically that "there is no obvious trade-off between average accomplishment in skills and its dispersion, at least throughout the schooling period, although some negative

association might arise later in life" (Salverda et al. 2014). The second lesson is that delaying the age of tracking may lead to decreased competency dispersion while increasing the degree of uniformity of inputs (i.e., lowering school autonomy) or implementing central tests seems less beneficial in reducing educational disparity; This idea further attempts to support that, while the system is fraught with unfairness, it is not primarily due to discrimination; instead, the minority groups did not do well in terms of the standard testing that is used in the tracking system (Salverda et al. 2014) This idea further indicates that there is a performance gap in the whole tracking system, which should be addressed.

Finally, the vocational orientation of the secondary school system, by retaining in schools the least motivated students (who often coincide with students with poorer cultural backgrounds), reduces the dispersion in competencies in the adult population" (Brunello and Checchi, 2007, pg. 304). Overall, tracking is indeed harmful, and it affects the condition of equality by shaping antagonized interests.

Another advantage of having a tracking system is that teachers do not have to adjust their teaching strategies to a class of varying intellectual capacities. Neihart (2007) & Moltz, (2008) argued that tracking gives teachers the opportunity to focus more on the delivery of the material instead of assessing at what skill level the material would be presented. In a class of high intellectual capacity, teachers can challenge their students with more difficult problems. All of the students are expected to handle the problem and manage to advance their knowledge quite easily. Likewise, in a class of low intellectual capacity, teachers can adjust their teaching strategies to fit the whole class (Oakes, 1985). The focus of tracking and teaching quality is on the effort the teacher has to make to find a balance in the classroom setting.

In the tracking system, teachers do not have to assess individual student performance and they can work with the presumption that students in the classroom are of similar skill level, lessening the need for teachers to prepare problems that would be too easy or too difficult for some students and providing them with the focus they need on delivery. However, according to Noddings (2007), teaching quality at different skill levels may be too unfair for those with lower intellectual capacity. Classes that are categorized as inferior would have teaching quality that is also inferior. Students, therefore, are limited in what they can learn, and students do not have much choice if they are kept within the skill level, they are assigned by the tracking system at hand. It is clear that these students would be left behind since they are treated based on their skill level. In most cases, children with low intellectual capacities end up taking low-paying jobs due to their low qualifications. This is a problem that exists due to the disparity in teaching quality based on tracking. As cited by Oakes in 1985:

> Students learn better in groups of academically similar students, "with those who know about the same things, who learn at the same rate, or who are expected to have similar futures" (Oakes, 1985, p.6). Tracking supporters further claim that:

1. Teachers have an easier time teaching students in homogenous classes and differentiation is easier to dispense in this setting.
2. Students are less intimidated with their own learning groups as opposed to placement in higher groups.
3. Groupings are done with an accurate assessment of the students' past achievements and future intrinsic abilities (Oakes, 1985, p.6).

Education in its most fundamental sense is burdened by both the teacher and the student (Booth, 2011). The teacher is burdened to convey material and values to the student so that the student may attain a higher level of knowledge. The student is burdened by the need to maintain a certain level of knowledge that is measured by testing and other instruments before proceeding with his or her education. In any classroom setting, both student and teacher must therefore cooperate in order to attain the ultimate goal of interaction and the sharing of knowledge (Moore, 2014).

Mehan (2015) further stated, "The curriculum in low-ability groups and low-track classes is reduced in scope, content, and pace relative to high-ability groups and high-track classes" (Mehan, p. 75). This has resulted in bias in the education system where distribution of students is very disproportionately related to ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Mehan, 2015). As a result, it is proposed that de-tracking be implemented in public schools to streamline the focus of the system in a strategy that would focus on promoting equitable education and fair treatment for all students.

For instance, de-tracking focuses on establishing an "educational strategy of providing a single course of rigorous instruction supported by an extensive regimen of academic and social supports (or 'scaffolds') and holds the promise for increasing the possibility of upward social mobility for low-income students of color" (Mehan, 2015) p. 76). Another suggested strategy is to provide students with the supports needed to be successful in challenging classes. Schedule all students in heterogeneous classes that provide primary instruction; schedule any necessary supplemental instruction separately (Burris et al., 2010, pp. 19-21).

Additionally, Mehan (2015) also purports that de-tracking is not focused on structural

or technical change, but in instilling a cultural change that would break the barriers that exist in the educational system. In my capacity as an educator, I have observed that some parents even want to keep their kids away from poor students in tracked classes. This kind of behavior is indeed very detrimental on other individuals as it promotes discrimination and negativity in an environment that should focus on promoting cooperation and development.

De-tracking promotes change in a way that all students get the chance to face the material in a similar manner and not be limited to what their skill level dictates. This is very helpful in low ability groups who wish to learn more and for high ability groups who wish to feel not as pressured as they previously were in the tracking system. As a result, there have been discussions on the implementation of de-tracking measures to narrow this gap. As Mehan (2015) argues, "De-tracked schools have demonstrated success in preparing low-income students of color for college and university enrollment (Mehan, p. 80). Nevertheless, questions remain about the long-term effects of the interventions used. Much of the research on educational inequality emphasizes its entrenched and continuing status.

Black students graduating from de-tracked schools, however express changes in their outlook for the future and credit them partly to the strategic use of extra resources that enabled them to rise above such inequalities" (Mehan, p. 80). Thus, de-tracking has shown promise for the development of students, especially those from poor sectors, (Burris & Garrity, 2008).

Yet, in spite of de-tracking efforts, "It has been demonstrated that one of the first areas where Black youth directly encounter the barriers of a racist society is in education (Wright, 2009). The placement of students in tracked classes and ability groups have been identified as extreme forms of institutionalized racism used to deny educational opportunities and academic achievement for Black and Hispanic students (Hobson v. Hansen, 1967). Olsen and Moore,

(1982, as cited in Kuykendall, 2004) further agree that tracking and ability grouping continue to be seen as two of the most extreme, intense and detrimental curriculum models in the history of U.S. schools.

As such, it is important to understand the target group of this research, which are Black students, because their perspectives can be drawn with respect to the tracking system, which can shed light on how the tracking system has impacted them. Unfortunately, numerous teachers and administrators also react to students who exhibit personality differences by assigning them to low academic tracks. In a study conducted by, The Children's Defense Fund (1985, as cited in Kuykendall, 2004), Black students are three times more likely to be labeled educable mentally retarded as White students, yet only one-third are more likely to be assigned to talented and gifted classrooms. Black students are continuously placed in low tracks as a result of behavioral issues involving faculty or classmates. Many are also placed in special education classes resulting from their failure to master school curriculum models.

More rigorous curriculum and coursework has a positive impact on the achievement of formerly low-achieving students and enhances the success of work-bound students as well. The work ethic and performance discipline students develop as a result of a more rigorous curriculum can help them develop persistence in future endeavors (Kuykendall, 2004). Haycock (2001, as cited in Kuykendall, 2004) also concluded that the quality and intensity of instruction and the high school curriculum are the highest determinants of success in college verses class rank or scores on college placement tests.

Tyson (2009) posits the racial make-up of the school gives limited insight into the story of equal educational opportunity post-Brown era. Blacks and Whites may have access to the

same schools, but as we have observed and heard from students in numerous schools across the country, they often do not have access to the same curriculum (Tyson, 2009). "Black students are disproportionately underrepresented in gifted programs and advanced courses especially in predominantly white and racially diverse schools" which present a myriad of problems for black students, (Tyson, 2009, p. 163). Opportunities and social mobility for Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds have also declined compared to 20 years ago, (Nunn et al, 2007). There is also widespread agreement that there are now increased inequalities for disadvantaged groups in society (Cregan, 2002; Thomas et al, 2003).

Students tracked are generally those who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Tracking was often based on class—vocational paths for those from working-class backgrounds and general education paths for wealthier students. After the Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954, which mandated the desegregation of America's public schools, the tracking system basically translated into a new form of segregation. Those with money and resources could negotiate the system to ensure that their students tested into the higher-level classes, and less fortunate students, many of them Black, were left behind in the lower-level classes (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012).

RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND TRACKING

A number of studies have revealed that teachers and teaching can be the most dominant inside of school predictors of success for students (Barton, 2003; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). To illustrate, Barton (2003) concluded that curriculum rigor, which is directly connected to teacher expectation, was the strongest classroom predictor of student achievement. One of the most affected minority groups in the tracking system are Black students.

In fact, it is important to understand the experiences they have with the tracking system to have a better overall view of the effect on them. Hence, it is vital to take evidence from literature in determining whether tracking and ability grouping have impacted these students in a positive or negative manner.

Student attitudes towards ability group are possibly the most important factor in making such a program work. The majority of the studies measured academic success, with little regard about how students felt about tracking. While there are plenty of studies involving student achievement, there are very few that deal with student attitudes (Shields, 2002). Without surveying students, some incorrect assumptions may be made. In reality, it can be argued that many students may not care about being placed in a lower group as much as they care about learning as much as possible.

Ability grouping has become embedded in many educational institutions across the nation. In the early 1980's, John Goodlad used research to effectively describe the daily operations of schools in, "A Place Called School". Approximately twenty-nine years ago, Goodlad and his research teams were engaged in what Theodore Sizer described in the most recent edition of the work as "one of the largest and most sophisticated studies of American schooling ever undertaken" (Goodlad, 2004, p. xxiii). More than twenty-seven thousand persons provided data for Goodlad's research (Goodlad, 2004). During this same period, in 1981, the federal government had embarked upon a similar study regarding education (Goodlad, 2004). The government's objective was to gather national statistics surrounding education and to report those to former President Ronald Reagan and to the American people (Goodlad, 2004). Former Secretary of Education Terrell Bell appointed the National Commission on Excellence in Education and charged them with this task (Goodlad, 2004).

Shimahara (1998) found that there was no significant change in learning opportunities between the ability classes. Wright-Castroet al., (2003) confirmed that students in the low ability groups displayed more negative attitudes with their peers, the school and teachers. They also stated that the work was not challenging and too repetitive, which lead to more disruptive behaviors. The high ability group reported positive relations with their teachers, peers and the school. (Ireson & Hallam, 2005).

CONCLUSION

In response to the changing environment of the educational system, tracking has diversely impacted Black students. It is clear that effective educational learning and its fundamental core theories have become the staple functioning element as the premise for educational tracking. Hence, the impact of the theories has created a diverse need to adapt to the needs of society. It was further elucidated that various domain of learning can impact the societal impact of learning itself—especially in the assessment of cognitive, affective, and motor principles. The learning process of the child is fundamental in understanding the need for tracking systems, and this framework has created widespread dialogue in establishing the organization of schooling in the United States.

Upon setting the framework, insight on the history of public education in the United States was presented, which finalized the conditions and the premise for the tracking system, which is one focus of this study. The educational system became the fundamental element of society in providing its members with the knowledge to continue the growth of society. Therefore, it is vital to sustain the growth of students through education. However, the early stages of the educational system are filled with racial segregation, as it was a primary social

problem at that time. This attitude became the premise of the racial achievement gap which affected the tracking system. The tracking system itself was explained in terms of its rationale, feasibility, and its impact on the society at large. Although its premise was positive and its intent was pure, it became a concept that was filled with much criticism. Some sides viewed the homogeneity of the system as developmental while others viewed it as very detrimental. Low-income groups were forced to the bottom of the educational ladder and were barred from the possibility of advancing to higher ability groups since standardized tests dictated their fate. This resulted in a loss of opportunities at high-paying jobs and as a result, future generations are caught in the figurative chains of poverty.

The No Child Left Behind Act sought to fix that problem by listing four critical provisions into the educational system: accountability, freedom of students to choose schools, refined research for test production, and enhanced quality and distribution of teachers. NCLB also prompted schools to focus on the students who needed the most attention. However, this Act was not without problems. Some studies proved that the class and racial achievement gap was not effectively narrowed since the law failed to account for external factors. While this is evident, No Child Left Behind provided some positive growth in the system and, to some extent, changed how tracking functions by specifically focusing on Black students. This, with respect to the criticisms of the Act, became the core focus in some school districts for establishing due change in the tracking system.

All of these details have been discussed within the context of Black students and their experiences with the tracking system. It is important to draw from these experiences and the research that reflects how the system has impacted them and understand the role that tracking has on their education. As such, tracking and ability grouping have been assessed to provide

solutions to the problems regarding the potential of Black students. NCLB showed potential, but improvements were needed to effectively bring about change. Mandatory education and attendance in public schools began with some pure, authentic goals and objectives, yet the results were not as positive or fruitful. The main purpose was to deliver and emphasize learning meant to develop and strengthen America to a more competitive and dynamic state (Streep, 2002).

The integration of state policies and government to improve student skills has become widespread in the public arena, school districts and states. Education has been noted as one of the most popular and fundamental basics in society due to its ability to give students the opportunity to reinvent their lives by reaching otherwise unattainable goals and achievements (Reese, 2011). As a result of state regulation and finance all citizens of the United States are privy to free basic schooling. Public education has been at the center of deliberation from its earliest expansion in regard to the execution of curriculum choices, policies, and reform. Public schools are therefore seen as an expensive and valuable entity apropos the delivery and completion of an education.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGY

This section of the dissertation will discuss the design and conceptual framework of the research study. The discussion will include the position of the researcher and specific features of qualitative research. Following, other sections included are an explanation and overview of research approach, the procedure for selection of participants, interview procedures, instrumentation and data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study. Dialogue regarding validity will also be explored.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study included the following research questions in an effort to highlight Black student responses and their experiences in a tracked curriculum since No Child Left Behind (NCLB):

1. As beginning Black college students look back on their experiences in high school, what impact if any do they think being tracked had on their attitudes, experiences and academic identities?

2. As beginning Black college students look back on their experiences in high school what perceptions, if any, do they have on the fairness of the practice of tracking and being tracked?

3. Do the Black students of the NCLB era feel that tracking supported the mandates of NCLB in its role to prepare them for college level education?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Creswell, (2009) defines qualitative research as:

A means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem. This process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (p.4).

Phenomenology represents one of the areas included in the area of qualitative research techniques. This branch of study was first started by Edmund Husserl during the twentieth century. Husserl concurred that a phenomenon could be researched through the lens of many

people who may have experienced the same phenomenon (1931, as cited in Moutakas, 1994). The phenomenon highlighted in this study is tracking and the experiences of the participants will lend to the general significance of the study.

Bogdan and Biklen, (2006) further posit that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand human experiences and behaviors better, as this method lends more realistic examples of identified behaviors which is easier for observation and the documentation of data. Creswell and Miller, (1997) identify this procedure as a positivist approach; whereas it views knowledge as being "objective; it does not depend on the perception of any one individual" (p.35).

MERITS OF PHENOMENOLOGY

Discovering the essence about something is the primary goal for a phenomenological study and, in essence, refers to a collection of experiences (Van Manen, 2002a). According to Kvale (1996) through interviews and communication phenomenology ignites the experiences of participants. Essence is revealed through intense reflection and interpretation of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994) and reveals itself even more after the data is coded and analyzed (Probert, 2006). This study will utilize phenomenology within the realm of education and will serve as a primary orientation (Van Manen, 2002a). Through the use of interviews with students the essence of tracking since the inception of No Child Left Behind should manifest itself. Also, through reflection upon my experience with tracking, and listening to the voices of other participants, a better understanding of tracking may be realized.

Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) explored phenomenology with research mentoring programs. This study supported the notion that a group of experiences with a phenomenon such

as mentoring resulted in the revelation or essence of the experiences from a general perspective. Phenomenology exposed the mutual relationship within the context of mentoring. Although the mentoring itself occurred in counseling, educational and medical contexts, the use of phenomenology as a research design helped to clarify how mentoring as a shared activity was beneficial to all parties of the mentoring scenario, yet it was only intended to assist the other person.

The primary goal in phenomenology is to highlight the phenomenon and articulate the experiences of the participants in an effort to disclose an overall essence of the participants lived experiences. As the researcher, I will borrow the experiences of the participants tracked in a high school setting prior to their admission to college. In this instance, "borrowing means to highlight the students tracked experiences and later analyze those experiences to gain an overall essence of tracking during the age of No Child Left Behind. Phenomenological studies aim to dialogue about the phenomenon (tracking) and not the participants (Van Manen, 2002a). Prior to collecting participant data, as the researcher I will need to be cognizant of and document my own experience with tracking. Moustakas (1994) and Probert (2006) define epoch or bracketing as the researcher's beliefs about the phenomenon which should be realized in advance. By doing so, prior assumptions about the phenomenon are postponed.

Van Manen (2002a) further posits that, epoch is "a 'bracketing' of the natural attitude' so that one can attend to a phenomenon as it shows itself" (p.7). As discussed earlier in the introduction, as the primary researcher for this study, my main task is to actively listen to the student's voices in an effort to share their input with the population at large. It is also my goal that the student's voices will function as the central player regarding tracking as opposed to a bigger scheme taking center stage. Delpit (1995) asserts that many researchers have highlighted

the distinction between being heard and being listened to. Any other themes realized during student interviews will be secondary to their direct experiences associated with tracking. Delpit (1995) asserts that many researchers have highlighted the distinction between being heard and being listened to. Yet, advocates generally agree that "student voice" is "an increasingly important element in understanding teaching and schooling more generally," (McCallum et al., 2000, p. 276).

FOUNDATIONS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The Civil Rights Era of the 1960's brought about a number of different policies to correct the issue of equity in education as well as voting, housing and employment. Along with other prohibitions, government sanctions which withheld federal monies were also used to reinforce compliance (Salamone, 1986). The 1983 "A Nation at Risk" report, "obliged someone to do something about schools, but it left the decision making to state policy actors" (Marshall et al.,1989, p.3). Policy making and federal power created an influx of social issues that became the impetus for critical policy methodologies which gave a voice to many who were previously ignored. Prunty (1985), as cited in Ball (1990) stated,

The personal values and political commitment of the critical policy analyst would be anchored in the vision of a moral order in which justice, equality and individual freedom are uncompromised by the avarice of a few. The critical analyst would endorse political, social and economic arrangements where persons are never treated as a means to an end, but treated as ends in their own right, (p.2). Supporting thoughts include:

Tenet One: Counter-storytelling. The use of this tenet in higher education provides faculty, staff and students of color a voice to tell their narratives with regards to marginalized

experiences in college campus where an institution is becoming inclusive and not simply superficially diverse.

Tenet Two: The permanence of racism. This tenet asserts that racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of American society, where, from a CRT perspective, racism is regarded as an inherent part of civilization, privileging White people over people of color in higher education and where diversity action plans become ineffective when racism is ignored in this regard.

Tenet Three: Whiteness as property. This tenet originated from the embedded racism in American society, where the notion of Whiteness operated on different levels, such as the right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right of exclusion (DeCuir & Dixson; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Tenet Four: Interest conversion. This thought postulates White people as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy, 2006), which is exemplified in affirmative action and diversity initiatives.

Tenet Five: Critique of liberalism. This tenet comes from the notion of color-blindness, the neutrality of the law and equal opportunity for all. According to this tenet, colorblindness is a mechanism allowing people to ignore racist policies that perpetuate social inequity, which can be found in the lack of inclusivity in the academic curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and student development theory used by student affairs professionals in higher education.

A number of tenets and ideas frame the work of critical race theorists in the field of education. Howard (2008) delineated four frames that shape the work of critical race theorists in education.

(1) They theorize about race along with other forms of subordination and the intersectionality of racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in the school curriculum; (2) challenge dominant ideologies that call for objectivity and neutrality in educational research (3) offer counter storying as a liberator and credible methodological tool in examining racial oppression; (4) incorporate transdisciplinary knowledge from women's studies and ethnic studies to better understand various manifestations of discrimination, (p. 963-964).

Millner (2008) further posits, "Until we pose the tough questions and engage in the analytic and critical work to solve "the race problem," we will continue seeing disparities," (p.43-44).   Solorzano and Yosso (2001) maintained that CRT "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice is used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 2).

Although a number of different perspectives exist in which to explore and understand these issues, critical race theory is closely aligned to the subject of this discussion. Tracking involves significant political, historical and sociological deliberations and critical race analysis will serve well as a result of its capacity to incorporate so many perspectives; particularly as these are connected to the history and current manifestations of race and racism in public schools (Delgado, 2000). It is also equally important that students are allowed to use their voices regarding tracking policies and its effects. Black students signify and bring to the table a very important population in - regards to tracking; although their opinions are typically unwelcomed, contentious or too dogmatic for adults to acknowledge without being pressured (Metra, 2004).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework utilized for this research inquiry is critical race theory (CRT) and was selected for two primary reasons; the current and past role that race has played in the schooling of Black students and its ability to assess the effect of racism in schools. Although CRT emerged out of law and critical legal studies, this theory/method is very popular among researchers and scholars in a number of disciplines such as education, psychology, political science and sociology. Regardless of the area of study, CRT researchers (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic et al., 2001) propose that notions of objectivity and neutrality of the law disregard the organizational inequalities in society.

As result, these inequalities give rise to the normalization and perpetuation of racism. CRT is grounded in the perception that racism is everlasting and within this vein, these claims result in the normalization and advancement of racism. CRT is therefore rooted in the perspective that racism is enduring and securely integrated into the society at large. It is woven into the fabric of society and is driven by six key assumptions which shape its approach to research which are important in understanding CRT as a theoretical framework. These six beliefs include the following:

1. Racism is Endemic: CRT contends that people of color are accustomed to racism which is not unusual but a familiar daily experience for them because it is engrained in society at large. Accordingly, race should be seen as a central rather than a marginal force that defines and explains human experiences (Solórzano & Bernai, 2001). CRT also suggests that racism is invisible to people with race privileges.

2. Social Construction. The next conjecture of CRT is that race is socially constructed (Bell, 2004). It further concedes that racism is structurally designed to depict people based on

discernible physical characteristics. These traits, according to CRT, are not aligned to one's genetic or biological existence. CRT further purports that this social construction of racism is a challenging dynamic in manipulating outcomes for racial minorities (Haney-Lopez, 2000), resulting in the actions of hegemonic groups who primarily determine race, utilizing entities such as the law and empirical knowledge to secure their interests.

3. Differential Racialization. Third, CRT argues that dominant groups in society can control and reconstruct minority groups in different ways at different times. For example, Asians were once unpopular in society when they were economically deemed as a threat to the national economy. Yet today, Asians are touted as the "model minority" (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). According to CRT, minority groups that are considered as "threatening" have limited access to social resources and opportunities.

4. Interest Convergence/Materialist Determinism: CRT suggests that racism provides material allowances to the majority race. Further, it purposes that the concerns of subjugated populations are only addressed when they unite with the interests of the majority group (i.e., whites) (Bell, 1980). As noted by Stec (2007), "acts that directly help blacks must implicate white interests because white economic (and other) interests and black oppression are inextricably interwoven and depend on each other for their survival" (p. 2). Those considered dominant support change only if it reinforces their own self-interest.

5. Increasing the Voices of the Oppressed: CRT supports the idea that minorities are typically marginalized or deleted from the historical reports given by dominant groups as these groups attempt to validate their power. CRT demands that the voices of oppressed groups be documented in all accounts of historical data because minorities are the best candidates to dialogue regarding racism due to the legitimacy of their experiences. As a result, new

methods should be utilized to articulate their experiences as members of oppressed groups in institutional settings (Ortiz & Jani, 2010).

6. Intersection of identities. Sixth, CRT recognizes the intersectionality of different kinds of oppression and does not minimize or ignore other forms of oppression, and it is understood that primarily focusing on race alone can nullify other forms of oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Thereby it accepts religion, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, resident status, and other variables as contributors that assist in shaping behavior and access to opportunities (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). CRT further confirms that without the use of a multidimensional approach to analysis, researchers might result in duplicating the same displays of oppression that they are attempting to resolve (Hutchinson, 2000).

These six beliefs infer that racism is a major feature in determining inequality in the United States. As cited in Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison stated:

Race has become metaphorical─ a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, and spurious and useless political assets in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before (p. 49).

From a theoretical perspective, CRT offers a lens to examine the experiences of Black students who were tracked during the inception of NCLB. Hopefully, this study and the

experiences described by the participants will serve as an incentive for changes in the policies that structure the educational curriculum and lives of Black students who are placed in tracked classes, and struggle academically following their enrollment in college. Analysis of data in this study was initially done using three of the six primary ideas embedded in critical race theory (CRT): racism is endemic, increasing the voices of the oppressed, and social construction. Any other themes were discussed accordingly.

EPOCH

While enrolled in high school in Pine Bluff, Arkansas I was very much aware of my placement in a mid-level math class as opposed to the advanced or upper level. Math had always been a challenge for me and despite having one of the best math teachers for mid-level classes such as algebra; it was clearly a struggle for me, which I later attributed to a basic fear of the subject itself. My greatest strength regarding my high school curriculum was English and journalism. I especially enjoyed writing short stories and poetry. I was both the first female and Black person to lead Quill and Scroll at my predominately White high school. Quill and Scroll is an international high school journalism honor society founded in 1926 that recognizes and encourages both individual and group achievements in scholastic journalism (Quill and Scroll Society, 1960). I was chosen along with a small select group of other Black students to be bussed to my new high school a number of years after the civil rights integration efforts in Little Rock, Arkansas.

After graduation, I enrolled in the local post- secondary school, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and graduated after four years of attendance. Later, I received a full scholarship to the University of Illinois in Urbana/Champaign and completed my master's degree along with

enrollment at Western Illinois University where I secured an Educational Specialist Degree. Although my enrollment in tracked math classes did not hinder me from attending college after high school, I was still very aware of the effects of tracking and experienced its effects while watching many of my classmates who did not go on to college. Many of them failed due to enrollment in tracked classes which did not prepare them for the college track. As an experienced educator having worked in the urban and suburban districts, I was very much aware of tracking and its ability to shape student futures regarding college attendance, and graduation.

This was specifically noted, regarding high school Black athletes who had aspirations of college enrollment and participation in college athletics. Many of these students were told near the end of their high school careers that they were not in the college track and that they would have to attend junior college prior to college enrollment to obtain the necessary classes and credits for college enrollment. My motivation for this study was directly driven from my observation of students in high school tracked classes while employed as an educator and school administrator. I believe that acknowledging my experiences prior to interviewing the study participants helped me to become more aware of the different interpretations regarding tracking.

SETTING

Participants for this study were recruited in the Midwest section of the country through flyers placed at community centers and libraries located within the vicinity of Chicago and its metropolitan area. The specific site for this study was conducted at a four-year accredited university located in the Chicago metro area where students were required to physically attend their classes as opposed to online learning. The goal was to include those students tracked prior to their enrollment in college during the inception of No Child Left Behind.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Creswell (1998) recommends a phenomenological study involve "long interviews with up to 10 people" (p. 65). Researchers who engage in qualitative design strive for interpretive information from a participant sample as small as one individual or up to everyone within the organization (McNabb, 2002). Boyd (2001) suggests that research saturation can usually be accomplished with two to 10 participants. The interviews conducted may last 30 minutes to 1 and 1/2 hours.

Based on my study's face to face interview design, I envisioned starting with a sampling of no more than 40 participants which resulted in a total of eight (8) Black participant's age eighteen (18) or older, including male and female participants. The researcher chose to select students enrolled in college, eighteen and older because students at this level tend to be developmentally more mature to handle the abstract concepts that were presented. Abstract thinking also focuses on the relationships between interpretations and includes the retrieval of past thoughts and memories (Dumontheil, 2014).

The participant's ages and their experiences also allowed them to be more familiar with these concepts. It was important to receive a comprehensive view of the experiences of Black students; therefore, male and female students were included in this study. Tracking did not just occur; it has thrived since the 20th century, when students were placed in different groups after a certain age based on perceived academic ability. Tracking was often based on class and vocational paths for those from working-class backgrounds and general education paths for wealthier students, as stated by Christina Theokas (2013), research director for the advocacy group Education Trust. There is also considerable evidence that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in gifted classes

in other countries where the majority of people are primarily White, such as Great Britain (Ford, 2010; Keen, 2005).

The following criterion for selection established was:

- Participants identified as Black students.

- Participants were over the age of eighteen.

- Confirmation of previous or current enrollment in a 4-year accredited, non-online college located in the Chicago Metro area.

- Enrollment as a high school student during the time of No Child Left Behind (2001-2015).

- Exposure to tracking (at high, average or low academic levels) in high school and have some knowledge of the No Child Left Behind Law.

Prior to conducting the initial interview, individual contact via phone was done with each participant to confirm that he/she understood and met the criteria for the study, and to schedule a date and time to complete the interview. I also informed participants that he/she would receive a $30 gift card to be used at a Whole Foods Grocery store to thank them for their time and contribution to the study, and that they must complete the interview in order to receive the gift card. Students were not required to wait for the optional transcript review session to receive the gift card. All students who became participants in the study were required to review and sign a consent form indicating that he or she understood how the study would be conducted, the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study, and that he or she was willing to participate.

The recruitment process included making phone contact with directors for programs such as TRIO Services which provides academic and mentor support for Black and first-generation college students. TRIO refers to a number (originally three, now eight) of U.S federal programs to increase access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students. The first reauthorization of The Higher Education Act in 1968 prompted the TRIO label that continues to exist today. Popular programs under TRIO include Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Service, which existed within the reauthorization of The Higher Education Act, specifically designed to assist eligible students to begin and complete post-secondary education (DOE, 2018). The phone conference included a description of the research study, anticipated commitment of TRIO staff, description of participants anticipated, verification of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and my contact information.

Following, an email was sent to each gatekeeper thanking them for the opportunity to meet with them to discuss the study. Also, during the initial contact with gatekeepers, I shared fliers to be displayed at the college and in various offices to find interest among students currently enrolled who met the criteria of the study. Qualitative researcher's select their data sources based on the research questions being investigated (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The researcher's primary concern was to study individuals in their natural context, with little interest in generalizing the results beyond the participants in the study.

The sampling procedure often used in qualitative research is purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1997), "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). The goal of purposeful sampling is not to obtain a large and representative sample; the

goal is to select persons, places, or things that can provide the richest and most detailed information to answer the research questions. Critical case sampling, whereas individuals are selected because they can "make a point dramatically" may also be included in this type of study (Patton, 1990, p. 174).

Snowball sampling was used to identify a few individuals with certain characteristics or experiences regarding participant selection. Then they were asked to nominate others with similar characteristics or experiences. It is also common to use this sampling technique with people whose membership in a specific group is not widely known (Crossman, 2018). Participants chosen for snowballing were solicited through community centers, churches and other social venues within the community such as Black fraternities and sororities where fliers describing the research and kinds of participants sought were disseminated. Typical sampling focuses on individuals who are selected because they have characteristics or experiences that are representative of many others. Opportunistic sampling was used to identify individuals who were not initially identified for the study but could be sampled because the opportunity presented itself.

Confirm and disconfirm sampling used to confirm or not confirm participants for the study was selected in order to see if participants supported or disconfirmed emerging explanations and theories. A combination of the above sampling procedures was used to identify participants for this study (Merriam, 2009). As the researcher, I also identified other gatekeepers, persons with an official or unofficial role who managed access to data, people and places at the study site to assist with the collection of data and/or participants. Gatekeepers are more likely to support the research if they see value in the research, either for themselves, or the research site (Wanat, 2008; Tilley et al., 2009).

During the individual face meeting, as researcher I introduced myself and provided a brief overview of the study, discussed the voluntary nature of participation, and assured all students that their privacy and confidentially would be protected. I continued the meeting by reading the consent form, obtaining their signed consent, thanking them for their participation and then began recording the interview. The interview was audio recorded so that the researcher and transcriber could make accurate notes of what was communicated. Also, during the interview, participant's legal names were not used, instead pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their identities and the confidentiality of what was shared. The interview was transcribed by professional transcribers, which did not include the actual names of the participants.

About two weeks after the interview participants were contacted via an optional phone call to review the transcribed notes. Participants were able to decide not to do this follow-up review when contacted, however, I did share with them that this would be an opportunity to ensure that they understood what was shared about their experiences with tracking. This review was scheduled for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Participants, who chose to take part in the review of their typed transcript, were emailed a copy of the transcript 24 hours before the phone review. This conversation was not recorded or transcribed. Participants were asked to review the transcript along with me, while on the phone, and point out any changes that needed to be made regarding their transcript. This procedure is common in qualitative research and known as member checking, which is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Suzanne et al., 2016).

In addition to specific questions, carefully tailored to gather data for the research questions guiding the research, participants were initially asked to respond to opinions and perceptions

regarding their previous school district. The survey questions were reviewed by peers to determine their effectiveness and reliability. To answer the more in-depth research questions such as, "what influence do students think being tracked had on their attitudes, experiences and academic identities"; the subject of tracking was broken down into several subtopics. Defined as thematizing (Kvale,1996) the why and what of tracking was further explored. Those subtopics typically include satisfaction with school, discussion of tracking with peers, amount of homework, perceptions of own track and tracks of others, perception of teachers, preparation of teachers, preparation for future learning (college or job training), and future plans (Boaler et al., 2000; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Shields, 2002; Vanfossen et al., 1987; Yonnezawa & Jones, 2006). A sample of the interview questions is included in the appendix section.

While an interviewer in a phenomenological study must prepare questions in advance, it is also permissible to ask follow-up questions as the interview unfolds because conversational tone and open-ended questions help to expose the intricacies of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Pollio et al., (1997) presented interviews in phenomenology as "an almost inevitable procedure for attaining a rigorous and significant description of the world of everyday human experiences as it is based and described by a specific individual in specific circumstances," (p. 28). The open-ended nature of semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to explore ideas and concepts as they occurred. The questions were peer reviewed by a dissertation committee member and colleague and revised as needed before the interviews to ensure that the interview questions would result in answers to the research questions. Peer review was discussed more in detail in the section which focuses on validity. Each interview lasted approximately one hour with breaks as needed by the participants. Following the data was coded and themes that surfaced most often were further discussed.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected via information students volunteered during their interviews. The participants interviewed were reflective of Black students from high to low tracks enrolled in the college setting. Students were asked a series of questions that ranged from what they liked or would have changed about their high school experience. Interviews lasted up to 1 and 1/2 hours, depending on the participant with appropriate breaks as requested by the participant.

The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Wolcott (1994) states that the purpose of phenomenology can occur if three activities to transform qualitative data are included: data description, data analysis, and data interpretation. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher also engaged in analyzing notes, memoing, and informal journaling activities (Maxwell, 2005).

The analysis process of this study was supported with the use of the NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software to code the transcribed text of the interviews, identify the location and frequency of significant components, group these components into categories, and create frequencies of the occurrence of significant components. NVivo 10 is a data analysis tool. It is not a theoretical frame or methodology, such as Critical Race Theory, (CRT).

CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

One research practice aimed at increasing credibility is triangulation (Cresswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that good qualitative research is reliable. To summarize, credible reports are those that readers feel trustworthy enough to act on and align decisions with accordingly (Tracy, 2010). The collection of data through multiple methods such

as interviews, note taking, and observations is one form of triangulation. By utilizing these methods, the process of, transferability (Morse et al., 2002) of this study to other colleges with Black students tracked during the era NCLB, (2001) is more likely. Trustworthiness of a study is determined by the quality of data, a rigorous analysis process, and the appropriate placement of theme to data (Maxwell, 2005) which was utilized with this study. Sometimes included in the umbrella of trustworthiness are terms such as transferability or confirmability (Morse et al., 2002).

Primary data analysis consisted of an overlapping procedure of categorizing and sorting the data generating initial codes and continuing with focused codes (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Interviews were transcribed by Rev.com and pseudonyms were used to protect student identities. The first wave of coding began with a review of the transcribed data from each interview. Following this review, initial codes were developed that surfaced from the data. After establishing the initial codes, I compiled tables to group the data from general codes into specific interrelated themes and concepts. By using tables, I was able to discover the frequency of responses and their relationship to specific categories. To conclude, the themes were examined in lieu of the phenomenon being investigated, the listed tenets of Critical Race Theory, and central responses of the participants to create predominant themes that represented their voices through conveyed experiences and opinions. Findings were noteworthy if they were repeated or demonstrated by one or more participants.

Some data was identified as being somewhat irrelevant to the study as it did not strongly support the findings. This information was also shared with my peer reviewer who also served as a communication tool to help determine what themes principally emerged from both rounds of coding. The ability of the researcher to apply the findings of the study to other settings is called

transferability (Richards, 2007). As further noted by Shenton (2004), it is often difficult to apply this definition to the findings in qualitative studies because the findings may be specific to a small number of participants who have experienced the singularities being studied. Qualitative studies reinforce transferability through the use of transcripts from interviews which display generous descriptions from the perception of the participants in the study (Mishana, 2004). These descriptions provided an in-depth account of experiences that occurred during the researcher's field experience and illustrated the ability to put cultural and social relationships into perspective (Mishana, 2004). The conclusion of the interviews with the participants in this study resulted in thorough narratives of the participant's experiences which served to support the notion of transferability. This is important because the Researcher should not focus only on the behavior and experiences of participants, but their context or perspective as well, so that both of these elements become meaningful to an outsider (Korstjens & Albine, 2018).

Through the construction of an audit trail reinforcement of confirmability was maintained. An audit trail may include journal notes, and reflective thoughts that highlight the data during the interview process (Gray, 2009 & Shenton, 2004). A journal was kept during the study to capture my ideas about information shared which was directly aligned to the research. Audit trails are an important part of the research study because it can illustrate the activity in which the meaning emerged from the data as opposed to being forced on the data (Maxwell et al., 2007).

PEER REVIEW AND MEMBER CHECKING

The next activity to be utilized for credibility was peer review (Cresswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). After writing the interview questions, I requested that one of my peers review

the questions. The peer reviewer chosen was someone who was familiar with the research topic. A faculty member on my university committee for the study was also asked to review the questions which helped to confirm whether or not the research questions would be answered correctly. The final activity that was utilized to ensure credibility was member checking (Cresswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). Member checking is the most significant component in the qualitative research study used to reinforce credibility (Shenton, 2004). Participants were given the opportunity to read the data transcripts prior to the completion of the study. The opportunity to review their responses was done to ensure an accurate account of their experiences (Percy & Benson, 2005). Participants were also given the definition of member checking along with the opportunity to ask questions.

DATA SHARING AND STORAGE

The principal investigator stored all data on her personal computer under password protection. The use of Rev.com, a professional transcription company was used to transcribe the interviews and ensure that the files were kept private and protected from unauthorized use. Rev.Com also provided a non-disclosure agreement signed by the transcriptionist. The Principal Investigator was the only person responsible for transferring interviews from the recorder to computer following receipt of transcription from the Transcriber. Student identities were also protected by assigning pseudonyms in place of their real names. To reinforce confidentiality, none of the data was shared without the express, written consent of the participants. The audio recordings were kept until accurate written notes were made along with data analysis. IRB recommends that data be kept up to one year before being destroyed following the completion of the study.

LIMITATIONS

The research focused on a particular locale to collect data which implies that the results of the study may not be applicable across the state, or to the country as a whole. This is due to the fact that differences in students and state level educational measures may have an impact on student experiences. Another limitation may arise from the fact that the study results may not be applicable for future exploration after a certain time period; especially if there are modifications to the policy being investigated. Therefore, the study findings are time bound. Additionally, since the study was primarily qualitative in nature verses quantitative, this in itself may pose some limitations. Data and information collected from the interviews were qualitative, in an effort to get a more descriptive understanding of how tracking affects the educational experience of students. It was also the researcher's intent that student voice would give a richer more meaningful portrayal of the students' experiences.

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Black students enrolled in high school under the auspices of No Child Left Behind who transitioned to college despite challenges while enrolled in tracked classes as high or low achievers. Researchers tend to site the advantages and make comparisons of grouping students in low and high tracks which is most often difficult Slavin (1995). In this Study, several of the Black students were in high tracks during high school but shared many of the same experiences as those in low tracked classes. Understanding the students and their perspective requires a summary of their backgrounds which lends more insight to the readers about those experiences. The student's school environments included a predominantly white neighborhood school, a

private catholic school, and selective enrollment schools such as charter and magnet. Although a number of the students were designated as high performing by their schools, the segregation of tracking practices, coupled with the organization of curriculum left several of them devoid of any sense of agency and struggling to comfortably assimilate into their respective settings.

Ashley Wilson lived with her grandmother along with her brother where they were both enrolled in a predominantly Black, selective enrollment school in an urban school district. Ashley was placed in advanced placement classes based on her ability to test well. On the other hand, her brother was just the opposite and was placed in low level classes which, as stated by Ashley, contributed to his eventual dropout from high school. Ashley was very adamant about the lack of diversity, (very few Whites) in her school and felt that it created a void for her in terms of interacting in a more cultural environment. She was also able to receive a number of scholarships including a full ride to college.

Corey Mitchell, a pre-med student at her local college was raised by her single mother. Corey recalls the difficulty her mother encountered as a single mother and recalls how her mother worked multiple jobs to maintain a place for them to live. Yet, she contends that her mother was very much attuned to her receiving a good education. Corey also confirmed that they frequently moved to different towns throughout grade eight in which she attended a number of different schools but was able to keep up with her grades. After grade eight her mother acquired a more permanent job, and she was able to stay with the same group of kids throughout high school. Yet, the town where Corey resided consisted primarily of all White residents and very few Black students were enrolled in her school. She also confirmed that there were no Black students in her honors and advanced placement classes. Corey is currently a college freshman.

Erica Horn grew up in a diverse middle-class neighborhood, (primarily White, Black and Asian) in an urban city with both parents and a twin sister with whom she was very close. She and her twin were enrolled in the same classes throughout sixth grade which served as her primary support in school. Afterwards, their parents split the two of them up so that they could expand their social circles with other students. Ashley stated that her elementary school was in the middle of a university town and very diverse with a total of at least thirty students in each class. Ashley also stated that ability grouping and tracking of students in different academic classes was supported and encouraged by the administration, and specifically the school Principal. She also stated that her Principal received lots of support and accolades from the school community as a result of his ability to boost the schools state performance grades and was eventually promoted to a district position because of his success.

Robin Carter attended a private school in the inner city via a program entitled, the Inner-City Scholarship Fund which provided tuition assistance to disadvantaged kids who enrolled in Catholic schools. The scholarship was specifically earmarked for students living within urban cities whose parents did not want them to attend public schools. Robin confirmed that the scholarship had nothing to do with status, but she considered this to be a private school setting. Robins school was also comprised of primarily Black students, 95% Black students and three or four Black teachers. This was the primarily demographic throughout Robin's high school years. Robin stated that she always liked school and attributes her attitude about school to her parents who always reinforced the importance of a good education from a positive perspective.

Benjamin Carter was enrolled as a freshman in a large private college. He attended predominantly Black schools throughout his high school years. He was raised in a single parent home with his mother and one other brother. Overall, he described his school years as frustrating

and stressful. He further stated that his favorite class in elementary was, "recess. Academically Benjamin considered his overall performance in elementary as, "outstanding, He furthered acknowledge that he was attentive in class, and followed teacher directives, yet was shy, and introverted. Demographically, Benjamin's public high school included Black and Hispanic students, Black being the dominant population.

Benjamin also shared that most of the students were placed in vocational tracks and that the class selection was basically determined by counselors and teachers with no input from the students. His performance in high school academically was poor; with the exception of one English teacher who encouraged him to complete high school, Benjamin felt that teacher concern was primarily non-existent. Benjamin went on to graduate from high school and enrolled in a community college to improve his grades with the intention of going to a four-year university. Although, he was successful in getting admitted, he was "kicked out the first year. He then stated that this experience served as a wake-up call for him and he later applied to a more prestigious four-year college and was accepted and doing well at the onset of this interview.

Lee Williams attended an all-boys school in a suburban environment. He stated that his most outstanding memory was the death of his Father at the age of ten years old. Following he was raised by his Mother who was a single parent, but initially married enabling them to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Lee had two other brothers that were three to four years older. Throughout Lee's school years he attended predominantly White school's pre-high school. After elementary/middle school he attended an all-boys school which was predominantly White. Lee lived in a suburb where the racism and division between the White and Black population was very evident. Although he contends that he noticed the separation of students as early as fourth grade; he was academically advanced and was primarily placed in upper-level classes throughout

his high school career. Staff wise, there were very few Black teachers. Lee further confirmed that

he did not participate in sports but focused on academics exclusively because he wanted to get

into a good college.

Katina Johnson, a college freshmen attended a private predominantly White university

and lived with her Mother who was a single parent while in secondary school. She went to a

Catholic elementary school in a small town where she was one of two Black bi-racial students.

The school was located within a church. She further stated that the church was old and as a

whole did not have very much money for the students and also lacked funding for many extra-

curricular activities. Katina attended the school throughout eighth grade with a graduating class

of twenty-four students. One of Katina's fondest memories in elementary school was her ability

as an elementary student to start a petition targeted at creating a cheer leading squad as a sport.

She was successful but because of a lack of money, she was unable to participate as a cheer

leader on the squad but was given the role of assistant cheerleading coach.

She further stated that after she graduated from her elementary Catholic school;

cheerleading as a sport remained which continued to give her a heightened sense of pride. As a

very light skinned bi-racial girl, Katina further conveyed that her middle school years were very

difficult as she continued as only one of a few Black students in an all-White catholic school.

She stated that she was constantly bullied about her hair which was not chemically straightened.

She wore her natural hair braided. She further contends that the kids called her Snoop Dog which

was very painful for her because she didn't want to be called a Black man and considered it to be

very insulting. Katina further stated that she wanted to look like Paris Hilton which she

considered more socially acceptable because, "White girls are more popular which she felt would

make her more popular. Katina's exposure to bullying greatly affected herself–esteem. Her

mother finally agreed to straighten her hair which reduced some of the bullying but not completely.

In spite of the bullying, Katina contends that academically she performed well and was placed in college prep classes. Katina felt that the lower performing students should be placed in the lower tracks and that they were a hindrance to the high performing students. These students were primarily poor Black or White students. High school was very different for Katina as she attended a much larger, very diverse public high school. Katina stated that she finally felt that she was a part of a group with whom she could identify as she became acquainted with her first Black friend. High school was a very positive experience for Katina academically and otherwise. Tracking was very much a reality at her high school with the lower performing students who were predominantly Black.

Kanye West resided with his single mother and attended predominantly Black schools throughout his elementary school years that were partially mixed racially but primarily Black. His greatest memories from elementary school were his connections with his peers and the relationships he was able to foster and maintain with them. Yet he further stated that the teaching staff was predominantly White with very few Black teachers. Kanye stated that he lived in a very segregated city but celebrated a high rate of success in relation to other minorities in the area. He also confirmed that the public school he attended was located within one of the lowest performing school districts in comparison to others. Kanye was also a high performing student who was in the international baccalaureate program.

Collectively, three (3) of the participants in this study were enrolled in choice schools supported by vouchers or scholarships, consisting of all Black schools with one being majority White; five (5) participants attended regular public schools three of which were predominantly

White and the remaining two schools attended by participants were also composed of primarily Black students.

THEMATIC OVERVIEW:

The participants' interviews collectively identified five (5) distinct themes and characteristics supported by critical race theorists.

The first theme identified was, 'Race is endemic and socially constructed'. Critical race theorists contend that tracking is racist. Black students are more often placed into academic tracks and segregated educational settings that support reduced educational opportunities than those of Whites. This philosophy is also supported by CRT as one of the privileges of being White. (Oakes, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Oakes et al., 2000). As Jennifer Pierce, (2014) argues, "Racism is a socially and historically constructed concept. By that we mean that race is not some unchanging, biological essence, but rather a mal-liable social category created through the state, law, science, and/or social inter- action in particular historical times and places," (p. 259). Segregation can also be fueled by parental school choice, involving Black parents who are frustrated with public schools and seek voucher systems and charter schools for better opportunities for their kids. Several of the students in this study were enrolled in choice schools. This phenomenon is very prevalent in urban school areas where White parents tend to avoid schools with high Black populations, which researchers refer to as "White flight, (Billingham & Hunt 2016; Goyette et al., 2012; Saporito, 2003; Saporito & Lareau ,1999; Schneider & Buckley, 2002).

Charter schools have gained popularity as the new route to re-segregation in several large urban school districts; and the predominant race of the students enrolled are Black and minority

students. Race continues to affect one's level of education, housing and residential location, income and long-term wealth; race is significant and continues to matter, (Lee & Bean 2010; Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver and Schapiro, 1995; Pager et al., 2009). Likewise, Orfield et al., (2014) contend that, "when we think about the context of schools, we need to consider not just local neighborhoods but also local school districts and their boundary lines. These boundaries circumscribe so many important tangibles (namely, resources) and intangibles (curriculum, expectations, etc.) that define a school and the opportunities it provides.

Meanwhile, school district boundaries also define access and who "belongs"—distinctions that are shaped by age-old discriminatory housing policies and the current real estate market, (p. 225). The segregation and isolation reinforced by tracking practices emerged as the second theme from the interview transcripts, highlighting the discomfort created for the students while enrolled in high school. The existence of the high and low tracks, common within same school settings created a negative climate among several of the participants which led to feelings of isolation and a diminished sense of belonging. In a study conducted by Davis, (2014) to reveal whether school choice such as charter schools inhibit school segregation, the response was the same, as it was noted that these schools also reinforced isolation within classes and school wide. Along with the participants in this study, peers from other racial groups agree that students placed in like settings create a sense of belonging for minority students attending integrated schools, (Moody & Bearman, 2002). Heterogeneous ability grouping reinforces confidence and provides the tools to socially interact; which can lead to long term positives for all students, (Braddock, 1980; Dawkins & Braddock 1994).

The numbers of segregated schools in the U.S. have grown (Orfield, 2009). The Research significantly recognizes vast numbers of charter schools as segregated learning spaces, which is

evident from data collected at the state, district and national levels, (Carnoy et al., 2005; Finnigan et al., 2004; Frankenberg & Lee, 2003; Garcia, 2007; Nelson et al., 2000; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Black students in segregated schools are persistently subjected to vast educational and specific daily living challenges, (Linn & Welner, 2007). As a result of, Black students in segregated public or charter schools are denied access to many of the privileges and networking aligned with affluent employment and post-secondary opportunities extended to White students; segregation also inhibits their preparation for working in diverse settings, (Braddock, 2009).

The inequity and unfairness voiced by the students in tracked classes was the third (3rd) theme highlighted by the participants. Beyond equal educational opportunity, educational equity is based on fairness and promotes the real possibility of equality of outcomes for a broader range of students (Nieto, 1992, p. 306). Students do learn differently, but learning is not based on race. Tracking students into low curriculum tracks perpetuates inequality. This form of social stratification and inequality is a common experience for many Black students. In public schools across the country, students are designated to educational settings that emphasize both inequality and disregard for individual differences: "Students should be served equally according to his or her presumed, expressed and/or measured interests and capabilities" (Kilgore, 1991, p. 191).

Frameworks that ignore this structure cannot provide equity for Black students, because their academic ability cannot accurately be presumed, or predicted. According to Charles Clotfelter et al., (2008), a full eighty-four percent of racial/ethnic segregation in U.S. public schools occurs between and not within school districts; where Black students are lured into choice schools labeled as new opportunities for success, which is common in large urban districts.

Goodlad (1983) appropriately states, "The gap between our highly idealistic goals for schooling in our society and the differentiated opportunities condoned and supported in our schools is a monstrous hypocrisy" (p.161).

The fourth theme, identified was, lack of academic support from teachers and other administrators regarding track placements and classroom success. The decisions regarding student track placements vary among school districts. Some districts rely on a combination of measures such as testing, counselor referrals, along with teacher and administrative recommendations. In low-income schools, parents are generally not included in tracking decisions. Likewise, Black students are often enrolled in classes without being informed about the effects of these enrollments on their preparation for college.

Students placed in tracked classes are quite often distanced by teachers and left to fend for themselves regarding selection of classes or additional help with assignments. A primary theory behind tracking was to create a more desirable delivery of instruction for teachers. As a result of, classroom learning experiences for Black students are often laden with the completion of curriculum worksheets and rote memory activities as opposed to White students whose course of study includes more rigorous learning focusing on the use of more critical thinking skills. This response to student achievement reinforces a lack of confidence in the school at large and forces students to challenge the skills of their teachers, (Ogbu, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Stinson, 2006). Karolyn Tyson (2011) argues, "despite changes that have given today's tracking systems a different appearance, some aspects (and outcomes) remain the same. In particular, input from educators and school administrators continue to play a major role in the courses

students take" (p. 135). Research demonstrates a linkage between race and teacher and counselor track recommendations (Bernhardt, 2014).

The final theme identified was, NCLB and its effect on the participant's preparation for college. The participants enrolled in this study were all post high school college students, who experienced some form of tracking in high school. No Child Left Behind mandated students throughout public schools enrolled in grades 3-8 and high school reading and math classes to reach yearly achievement goals and proficiency on track prior to graduation and be prepared for college. This requirement was required for all students regardless of racial or socio-economic status. Teachers were also required to be highly qualified with the minimum of a bachelor's degree in their subject areas, (NCLB, 2001).

Researchers argue that NCLB's primary focus was standardized testing. Pauline Lipman (2011) refers to standardized testing as lack of respect for the many skills and abilities of educators and students reduced to the measure of biased testing. Furthermore, as an educator I can attest to the fact that focusing on "testing only does not reinforce student success in high school." The goal of NCLB was to secure for Black students, equal educational opportunities enhanced and informed by teaching instruction and school organization supported by research and science. Goldrick-Rab & Mazzeo (2005) maintain that school curriculum and the organization of schools can greatly influence student success and preparation for college. Yet, in order to benefit from this arrangement Black students must be afforded the same equal access to high level opportunities as White students.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND INTERVIEWS

Utilizing the prism of critical race theory, the core thesis presented in this review attempts to exemplify the notion that in the United States, government education systems traditionally seek to maintain control of public schools and give the impression of unity through White supremacist ideology and socio-cultural expectations. (Apple, 2004; Au, 2012; Carruthers, 1994; Mills, 1997; Pinar, 1993; Shujaa (1994). CRT is used as a methodological instrument to better analyze the experiences of traditionally under-represented minorities through the K-12 school pipeline and discuss the position of segregation and educational inequalities, (Ledesma & Calderшon, 2015, p.206; Zamudio et al., 2011, p.206).

Critical race theorists further agree that Black students have been historically marginalized and can extend critical information from their experiences in tracked classes. This knowledge is mandatory for school officials if they are truly concerned about Black students and their advancement to specific domains in society such as college placement. CRT also infers student voice important for student self-esteem which does not only give students personal satisfaction but also a sense of agency. To address the alienation of young people and to strengthen school improvement efforts overall, schools must focus on increasing student voice to ensure equitable organizational reform and practice. (Mitra et al., 2012).

The primary target of this study was ability grouping such as tracking, yet the students also voiced their opinions on curriculum, teacher student relations and other classroom and school-wide practices. In school structures where student input is not valued, students often outline their school experiences as unfamiliar places, "where no one empathizes or shows any

concern for them," (Cook-Sather et al., 2015; Earls, 2003; Heath and McLaughlin, 1993; Pope, 2001). This type of isolation leads to high school student's becoming detached from high schools (Cothran and Ennis, 2000). A myriad of academic and social influence was stressed by all of the eight participants in this study, which was evident by specific themes derived from their interviews. The use of passages from participant interviews is a common technique used in studies to highlight findings and research questions (Saldana, 2015). The excerpts from the participant interviews described their individual experiences and perceptions in tracked classes.

Integral to this study were the experiences of the students while enrolled in high school and several of the questions were specific to their elementary years which served as icebreakers and helped them feel comfortable in sharing their responses. It is also valuable to acknowledge that many of the participants stated that academic tracking decisions made for them in elementary school impacted them greatly during their high school years which is supported by research previously discussed. Overall, the students were very vocal regarding the existence of tracking while in elementary school. The excerpts below shed even more light on the participant's and specific examples of critical race theory and the themes identified in this study.

Katina's graduating class consisted of twenty-four students in which she identified as one of two Black bi-racial students. Although this was a small private school, the goal was not focused on diversity and the recruitment of more Black students. This is representative of CRT's "permanence of racism in White schools and duplicated throughout public schooling in support of a White supremacist agenda to separate Black and White students. Katina's experience in a predominantly White segregated environment is indicative of the research conducted by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark (as cited by Boyd, 2016). The research involved children choosing between Black and White dolls to play with which helped to

reinforce and identify the damage to self-esteem incurred by Black students in segregated schools and led to Thurgood Marshall's success in the case, Brown vs. the Board of Education (Bergner, 2009). Summer (2017) also highlighted the effect of environment on one's actions and self-concept.

Katina's struggle to survive in a segregated school created an on-going mass of confusion and insecurity which was difficult. Yet, Katina was very adamant about wanting to be White, in spite of the bullying. Katina reflects in her next discussion regarding her attempt to fit in socially with her White classmates.

Katina, Well, I was verbally bullied, I would say but I wouldn't say physically. "I remember before I got my hair straightened, my mom would give me these Black hairstyles; I guess you would say my hair was braided, but not extension-wise, it was just braids. I used to be called Snoop Dog because they would say I looked like Snoop Dog, "I saw it as an insult and I'm like I don't want to look like a Black man, I wanted to look like Paris Hilton. I don't know, I wanted to be nice and pretty and I wanted to look more like the White girl because I felt like that was where social acceptance was, and I knew that I would get more popularity if I looked more like the White girls.

Katina's mêlée with racism supports, "intersection of identities, a CRT tenet that recognizes the intersectionality of different kinds of oppression and does not minimize or ignore other forms of oppression, and it is understood that primarily focusing on race alone can nullify other forms of oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Instead, the focus should be given not only to the color component of the dispute with Katrina but also to the disclosed psychological implications. Another underlying paradigm, regarding the CRT tenet, "the permanence of racism

is equally underscored in Katina's interview and supports the idea of White Supremacy and its ability to control and reconstruct minorities in different ways at different times.

The burden of racism in a predominantly White school had a profound effect on Katina's identity as a light skinned Black girl. Critical race theorists support the philosophy of Frantz Fanon (1952/2008) author of "In Black Skin, White Mask, who argues that it is essential for the study of race relations between the White and the Black community to understand the influence of racism on Black consciousness and the creation of identity. His research presents a scientific psychoanalysis of race, which also includes input from other Black participants in his birthplace, the island of Martinique.

The primary objective was to reveal how racism is inflicted on Blacks through their choice of words, schooling, and exposure to White culture and its impact on the structure of their identity. From one perspective, he argues that under the rule of oppression, Black's resort to self-contempt because they have been conditioned to aspire to Whiteness. The author also contends that racism is forced on Blacks when White people recognize what they lack or obtain and project these emotions on Blacks to preserve White dominance.

He presents his critique in an evolutionary way, starting his research with an understanding of how language is used to shape Blacks into a position, where sensitivity to and acceptance of White language leads them to adopt self-contempt and the desire to be White and connected to a White world. Fanon's (1952/2008) critical "psychoanalysis of bigotry" offers an indication of the psychological damage Katina suffered as a result of racism.

Katina's position is also evident regarding, the CRT tenet, "Whiteness as property. Her pale complexion and White appearance did little to shield her from the same derogatory mockery and ethnic degradation common to many Blacks with darker skin tones. Whiteness as a right to

property was also reflected in the seminal case known as Plessy vs. Ferguson (Davis, 2012).

Plessy was a Louisiana native who seemed to be passing as a White man because of his seven-

eighths of white blood and one-eighth black blood. Unfortunately, Plessy was not given the

majority's coveted privileges to the liberties of the Constitution. These White rights are likewise

very guarded in public schools. Katina's view of Whiteness indicated that she should receive

access to the same benefits and liberties extended to her White classmates. It also seemed less

complicated to be White instead of Black, which as a consequence of racism, is an idea

embedded in this country's structure. In contrast, Katina describes her high school experience as

strikingly different as she was exposed to a more diverse population, including meeting her first

Black friend and teacher, thereby eliminating identity issues that she experienced in elementary

school. When asked, were there any other Black students in your high school classes Katina,

responded:

> Yes, there was a lot and that was another thing that was changing, is that I did see
>
> a diversity of races that I did not see in my elementary school." "I went from a
>
> predominantly White elementary school to, it wasn't even predominantly
>
> anything, I didn't even know.

When asked, how this new experience made her feel she injected,

> it was initially overwhelming, but also welcoming, that's where I understood,
>
> 'Oh', so I'm Black, whoa, I do fit into this category and I'm not the only Black
>
> person in the class anymore, and it felt good, but I was also afraid because I was
>
> like, I don't know how they're going to look at me, am I going to be the White girl
>
> in the group because of the way I look? It was different, but I think when I was a

freshman, I met my first Black friend there and it was definitely a learning experience.

When asked, what her favorite class in high school was and why "Katina" stated:

I would say psychology, it was actually my senior year, and it was my first advanced placement class; I think that's when I realized I liked psychology, but I also think it was my favorite because my teacher was a Black woman and I think it was the first time I actually had a Black woman as my teacher; she also had curly hair, and that was something that was different; All the other teachers that I had, they were White but it was a mix, I had White males and White females, but I think she motivated me and she inspired me just socially and of course within the psychology class itself.

Katina's lack of Black teacher role models was highlighted in a National Teacher and Principal Survey by NCES (2017/2018), documenting that between race and ethnicity vs. race of the student population White teachers represented the majority of the teachers hired in those school districts. Yet, even in districts where the majority of students were not White, the bulk of teachers working also identified as White (NCES 2017/2018). This is a pattern that is most often seen in urban and suburban school districts where Black students are the majority population further reinforcing the concept of CRT and the intentional practice of segregating Black and White populations.

Erica, who identified as one of the most frustrated and vocal candidates in this study was primarily enrolled in college track classes in high school, yet her response below regarding her belief about tracking supports research on mixed ability classes and their effect on positive academic competition and student confidence which she endorsed as a benefit to all students.

When asked if being tracked into mixed ability classes would hinder her academically Erica responded:

> I don't think so because I think that seeing people on different levels than my own, gave me the confidence that I was doing something right, or like, I don't know, achieving the goals of the class; So, I think if I was placed in classes where the other students were lower, it would have really challenged my thinking about the class, and I would have felt more motivated to maybe speak up and answer questions, not that I wasn't smart enough for the content, I don't know, but my perception that I was academically higher than the rest of the students, or some of the other students in my class, gave me the confidence to keep achieving excellence.

Erica's response and experience with tracking in the subsequent excerpt is defined as Intersection of identities. This CRT tenet reasons that the nature of race held the ability to affect the mood, academic self-estimate, and sense of belonging for Erica in her account of the lack of support from her White teachers. As previously observed in my role as an educator, teachers' lack of concern is common in urban schools that hire mostly White teachers for Black students. Research specifically targeted toward Black girls emphasizes the effect of academic self-estimate on their educational outcomes (Saunders et al., 2004). Negative perceptions from teachers and administrators hindered them from working to their full potential (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Furthermore, if they are not challenged, they become disengaged which can lead to negative school experiences (Russell, 2005). Erica's discontent with her school's educational environment demonstrates her awareness of race and how it works in favor of White students as opposed to Black students:

Yeah. It was always the White people who lived in my diverse neighborhood that

were at the top of their class, I think that had to do with the environmental setting

and how comfortable you are in yours and I think the White students were smarter

than the Black students in terms of academics because they were treated better

from day one by the White teachers as having better academic skills than the rest

of us.

Critical race theorists do not uphold discourses that perpetuate White dominance and

Black inferiority in intelligence and social contributions. It appears that the White teachers at

Erica's school were not transparent in communicating to Black students that they were

undervalued compared to their White counterparts. Grier and Cobbs, in Black Rage (1992), offer

an overview of case studies to expose the psychological trauma of racism to the Black psyche.

Their research examines topics related to identification struggles and high negative feelings

experienced by Black people in U.S. culture. It suggests that these behaviors may be clarified

and explored in the broader social, political, and economic context that supports White

supremacy. Erica continued:

White teachers reinforced this idea of academic superiority towards the White

students which proved to be true until the end of their high school career because

they were constantly challenged at that level, and they kept advancing. So not

receiving the same support from the White teachers and constantly seeing my

classmates as low-level achievers, hindered their overall success and, I think from

the very beginning, they were seen as being smarter than Black students, though

they weren't necessarily, they were held to that idea by the teachers, so then they

became smarter by graduation.

Research conducted by Rosenthal and Harris (1985, as cited in Crisp & Turner, 2009; Karakowsky et al., 2012) support the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy in which teachers' expectations of students and their classroom performance can greatly impact their output and academic performance. The study further conveyed that when teachers do not extend positive feedback, create callous classroom environments, or fail to call on all students to respond critically, their actions can create negative effects for students. An earlier study by Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) in which teachers were told that a specific group of students identified as late learners would become smarter within the course of the year as compared to a control group who were given no positive expectation increased in academic ability as predicted. As supported by critical race theorists, segregation creates and perpetuates racial differences in school communities; compared to their White counterparts, Black students are less likely to have teachers who provide supportive and conducive learning environments (Aud et al., 2010; Berg et al., 2013; Bottiani et al., 2016; Massey, 2007).

The lack of support from teachers and other faculty regarding track placements was also shared in the next excerpt from Erica as her White high school Principal used tracking as a tool for his own personal advancement. The principal's attitude also supports Au (2009) citing high stakes testing as a scapegoat for "the structural nature of racial inequality within the ideology of individual meritocracy (p. 40). Erica's principal was successful in selling the idea that standardized testing would serve as a primary determinant of their success and station in life, yet he failed to discuss the other forms of measurement that are useful in determining student success.

Critical theorists acknowledge racism and "the permanence of racism as well-established, entrenched and persistent within schools structurally situated from the top down. Public school

programs reflect a racialized framework and hierarchy that maintains educational inequalities between Black and White students. Racism at Erica's school was exclusive to the teaching personnel and rooted within the administration at her school through her principal, who promoted and supported organizing students into different classes to support segregation. Erica said:

> I remember how enthusiastic everyone was about tracking because we were in transition at my high school between principals, and our principal actually got promoted to be part of the school board or something, so, we were looking for candidates for a new principal, and we were attending all of these assemblies for candidates to compete for principal because they wanted the student body to be involved in the decision making, and one of the candidates who later became the principal eventually, basically sold his candidacy for becoming principal of our high school through tracking and the idea that we could raise our test scores, based on the way we learn and achieve.
>
> Our school was very focused on college, and achieving the right grades to get into college, and he basically sold his whole point on tracking and he got all of the parent's super excited about it, and I just remember thinking it was a really good thing for our school too, because nobody takes tests the same, and in order for people to learn, we have to understand where they're starting at, and that everybody's starting at a different place.

Lopez (2003) contends that Administrators need to participate in critical discussion regarding the impact of racism on the structure of schools and disadvantaged populations. Standardized testing should be a critical part of this discussion. Lipman (2011) concludes that

these students and their parents are frequently the scapegoats for policies that influence

economic disinvestment in neighborhoods, closing schools, loss of human capital, and

neighborhood gentrification (Lipman, 2011, p. 98). Participant Erica's answer to the theme,

"Inadequate support from teachers and faculty for college readiness failed to support NCLB

guidelines." Her response below further strengthened the argument that she did not have access

to a program deserving of the rigor required to succeed more successfully in college. Erica's

response to "Critical thinking skills were not encouraged":

> No, not at this level. Going in freshman year, I definitely felt like I wasn't
>
> prepared, and I didn't have the correct tools to talk about what I was necessarily
>
> missing or what I was thinking of, or even if I was thinking about what I needed
>
> at all, yeah, in classes that required participation, I wasn't prepared at all; I had
>
> problems thinking on the spot and reflecting.

NCLB originated "from within the historical condition of color blindness" (Leonardo,

2009, p.134.) Although educational reform efforts proposed the elimination of the color line by

refusing to accept marginalized educational efforts regarding the achievement of children from

all racial, ethnic, and economic subgroups, in reality it reinforced the color line (Freeman, 2005).

Kanye's comments clearly align with CRT and the revealed theme, regarding the

inequities created by the separation and segregation of the students. Kanye's school was located

in a highly segregated primarily Black urban area with few resources as compared to the quality

of his White suburban counterparts that lived in more affluent districts. In this case, Kanye's

analogy reflects the power of "Whiteness as Property as the privilege and acquisition of a

rigorous curriculum aligned to college success in his school setting was denied for many non-

White students. Aud (2010) and his observation regarding Black schools and the lack of quality

educational resources supports CRT as it confronts racialized power relations within schools that control access to a rigorous curriculum. Kanye noted.:

My city in particular, was one of the most segregated cities but also had the highest disproportionate rates in terms of African American success in relation to other ethnicities, and another thing was, the public school I attended was also one of the lower performing of school districts with fewer resources in comparison to White suburban schools.

When placed in advanced classes with few Black students, in his tenth and eleventh grade classes Kanye described his experience as 'frustrating':

I wouldn't say I was in the class by myself, but I was kind of in the class by myself, so, it's like all the time, I couldn't really find anybody that I could really relate to or honestly felt comfortable asking for help.

This feeling of isolation replicated throughout the majority of the participants interviewed. Kanye's lack of confidence in the classroom also indicated an absence of teacher experience. They are primarily responsible for ensuring that students receive the necessary support based on scientifically based research methods of instruction and motivation strategies. NCLB (2001) reinforced this concept stating that numerous studies present clear indicators that one of the most important measurements of student success is the quality of their teachers which includes the teacher's ability to address the academic needs of all students during the delivery of instruction.

Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) also maintain that teachers with high rates of attrition are common in disadvantaged, poor urban schools as compared to affluent school communities which results in more novice and less experienced teachers. Likewise, it is no secret that when

large numbers of White students leave urban schools, this shift in demographics quite often

results in growing suburbs with newer and more advanced schools.

In spite of Kanye's ability to thrive in many of his classes Kanye felt that NCLB did not prepare

many of the students at his school for college as he further elaborated:

> I would say just seeing the opportunities that were available, in terms of access to
>
> certain resources and college readiness and that kind of preparation, it was very
>
> much different for some of us; I know a lot of the courses we had like the basic
>
> reading, math, science, English skills, and those kinds of courses were okay, but
>
> when you look at the schools that were out in suburban areas that were not within
>
> the city public schools, they took accounting classes instead of the workshop
>
> class, those career driven classes that were preparing them for the next level.

CRT's' "Whiteness as Property" promotes existing education systems and ignores its

influence that excludes Black students from the same quality learning opportunities as Whites.

According to Yosso (2002), "[a] critical race curriculum exposes the White privilege supported

by traditional curriculum structures and challenges schools to dismantle them" (p.93). No Child

Left Behind and its failure to provide adequate college prep skills for many students of color was

cited by Hammond (2004) who argued, "fear of the United States losing the global race in

education justifies the implementation of a new set of standards, the Common Core, which

arguably merely dumped "new standards on old inequalities (Darling-Hammond 2004, p.12).

Ashley's experience and knowledge of tracking intertwines with two (2) important CRT

tenets, the nature and structure of racism and Whiteness as property which highlighted themes #1

and #3, the permanence of racism and the inequity, and unfairness of tracking. Ashley, who lived

with her grandmother, was enrolled in a charter school which was predominantly Black and

located in a low-income urban area where she was placed in advanced classes, in comparison to her brother, who she felt was the victim of a system that did not support him because he was capable of performing the work but placed in the lower tracks. She also indicated that he was always in trouble and eventually dropped out of high school. A fundamental concern with urban schools is the high incident of poverty, which creates other negative issues such as low academic achievement (Tomaskovic & Crowley, 2006; Rusk, 2003). The process of sorting students into tracks and sorting within tracks does not happen naturally. Ashley continued:

> Well now that I realize it I didn't really think much of it, but now that I look back on it, tracking was a way to divide students and not make the environment so inclusive for everyone, because even with the gifted program, I knew in elementary school a lot of the other kids would be jealous of us, and they would say we had special privileges, which I didn't feel like we did, but in a certain way we did because we had more resources that they should've also been welcome to, but they weren't; So, I feel like that's definitely an issue that should be worked on for everybody, because in a sense they were left behind because we were progressing and pretty much everyone in my classroom got accepted into a gifted classroom or would continue to still do good in whatever high school they decided to go to; while the other students were forgotten and they were in the mindset of just wanting to graduate and they really didn't care where they went.

Ashley's comment in the previous excerpt also highlights the unfairness of tracking and the division that it created among Black students as she recalled being tested into high track classes as early as second grade with many of the other students who were left behind. Tracking generally occurs in Middle School, but some schools do track during the elementary years.

Research on tracking supports the notion that tracking remains a viable source for organizing and assigning students in elementary reading and math courses, (Buttaro & Catsambis, 2019). When asked if she felt that, differences in track placements affect high school experiences for Black students Ashley implied:

> Yes, because I feel like when students know they're placed in different settings, they act differently because they feel like they don't have the same opportunities or advantages that other students have, so, it leaves them really not caring about their education because they're like, oh well, the system doesn't care about me, so why should I care, they probably think it's a destiny type thing, it's their fate; like, well, nobody else cares so I don't care either and it just makes them, I don't know lack pursuing higher education opportunities and just really not wanting to go forward with education because they feel like no one supports them.

Critical race theory's 'Whiteness as property" supports White students and ignores Black students such as Ashley's brother, who felt inferior and unimportant to his teachers. This lack of concern led to student discipline issues and the eventual dropout for Ashley's brother. While theoretically granting all schools a fair chance to follow the government's prescribed expectations, NCLB gave Whiteness the sole freedom to mark schools and students of color as failings. NCLB focused on a Whiteness philosophy that favored racial disparities as a natural distinction rather than a result. With little or no regard for structural, societal, or historical causes for inequalities in school performance, NCLB exacerbated a different, more nuanced racism, a "colorblind" racism, by perpetuating the notion that achievement gap is the result of natural and/or cultural differences, rather than social outcomes (Leonardo, 2009, p. 188).

Ashley's comments are aligned with a CRT component described as "the notion of color-blindness. According to this tenet, color blindness is a system that allows us to disregard discriminatory practices that have contributed to the failure of Black students and exacerbated racial inequalities. Furthermore, the permanence of racism cannot be taken into consideration for color blindness. Color blindness, as Williams (1997) suggests, has made it very difficult to question the ways in which White entitlement is integrated and the perpetuating effects of Whiteness.

Thus, the colorblind debate most often relates to persons of color because being White is perceived as "natural." In addition, CRT scholars argue that colorblindness has been implemented as a means to justify and eliminate race-based initiatives aimed at addressing societal inequity. In other words, suggesting that racism can be colorblind avoids the idea that inequity and oppression are systemic objects that cannot quickly be remedied by denying racism in today's society. Furthermore, embracing a colorblind philosophy does not remove the chance that racism and discrimination will persist or disappear. Robins, frustration with the theme regarding the inequity and the fairness of tracking was voiced as follows:

> Just all through high school up to my senior year we had a White college counselor and she was very biased, and had favorites; In my senior class we had three White students and the rest of us were either Black or another racial minority and we all felt like she had them as a priority on her list to get things done even though there were students who had the grades or there were students who were doing this program where, let's say that if a student wanted to stay in the state for college and they had to take a summer course before they entered

college, this lady literally signed people up the day before the application was
due.

Explicit to CRT's "interest convergence tenet was the Counselors' failure to provide the same services to the Black and White students. This also represents an example of the change that occurs as the Black students in Robin's class received the college program application as if their participation was not a priority (one day before the deadline). The Whiteness as property tenet was also a lead player in this scenario. Being White afforded the other students' exposure to the counselor's assistance with the applications in a timely fashion. Lopez (2003) noted, "Racism always remains firmly in place but social progress advances at the pace that White people determine is reasonable and judicious" (p. 84). Change is often purposefully and skillfully slow and at the will and design of those in power. Counselors in high schools contribute to this inequity by their disregard for the sharing of information necessary for all students to participate in programs that ensure their enrollment in college. Robin noted, "She didn't treat students as a priority if they were either Black or they weren't in an advanced placement or honors course."

Although Robin's school demographic was predominantly Black, the attention that the White College Counselor provided to the few White students in her classes was very obvious to her as compared to the lack of support to the Black student's regarding college placements. The interest-convergent principle infers that interests of Blacks are in opposition to or at "odds with those in power," and it becomes increasingly difficult to expose racism and to pursue racial equality (Leigh, 2003, p. 277).

Robin's comments below further support CRT's segregation and the socially constructed racism that she experienced. Robin received a voucher for what she considered private schooling; yet demographically the school was 95% black with only three or four Black teachers.

Choice schools primarily serve low-income students in urban cities such as California, Arizona and Florida of which 60 percent are Black and Latino versus 44 percent in regular public schools (Abernathy, 2007). Robin continued:

> I went to private school but I was on the scholarship fund that was called the Inner-City Scholarship Fund, so students who lived in the inner city whose parents wanted them to go to private school received funding to go to that school and that's what my school mostly consisted of, it wasn't people who flung around a lot of money, it was more so people who lived in the inner city who got funding for their kids to go to private school.

A primary tenet of CRT is the perpetuity of racism in society or as Bell (1992), one of the founding fathers of CRT, states "racism is a permanent component of American life" (p. 13). This widespread existence of racism clearly implies that political, economic and social spheres are controlled by racist hierarchical systems. Such systems delegate the privilege of Whites and the resulting negation of the rights of Black students in all areas, including schooling. Robins recall when asked about the number of Black teachers in her school is an example of CRT's" 'permanence of racism, situated in public schooling. When asked about the number of Black students or Black teachers in her elementary school, Robin responded, "We had a lot of Black students, and it was probably like 90%, 95% Black students and we had like three or four Black teachers."

The elementary and secondary educator workforce is overwhelmingly homogenous, consisting of 82 percent White teachers in public schools (Kimmel, 2013). More Black teachers can help narrow the achievement gap; this should evoke school boards and administrators to recruit actively and retain Black teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll & May,2011). Several

research studies support the idea that students with more positive feelings about their teachers (Auerbach, 2007; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Shipp, 1999) exhibit more favorable outputs, including grades, overall interest, and motivation (Midgley et al., 1989; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Wentzel, 2002). Yet, an abundantly White staff of teachers are working with majority Black / non-White student populations, which is a long-term practice prevalent in urban schools and not likely to change very soon (Berchini, 2015; Strauss, 2015; Rich 2015).

Black people continue to be negatively influenced by prejudice and the consequences of racism affecting public schools. Whites set up a mechanism to intentionally protect their class, remove key players from the discussion, and, when asked about it, stifle the argument about their racism with misleading comments about the reality of the allegations (Leonardo, 2004). Woodson (2006), Omi and Winant (1986), and other scholars in the field of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Lynn 1999), note race is a key organizing category for inequality because of the permanence of racial ideology and White supremacy in American society (Omi and Winant 1986). Critical race theory (CRT) posits that racism is a normal, inherent feature of American society.

In eighth grade Robin, continued to describe her school experience as hectic and somewhat overwhelming:

> In eighth grade, we had two class groups; they were called 8A and 8B. 8A was a group of students who were very intelligent, had separate teachers, and classrooms, and a separate schedule; and then 8B were the students who either had to take writing or a reading class and they were in the lower grades or they just didn't care about their work and they were put in a separate class, with different teachers, and schedules, so, we were literally divided all throughout

eighth grade; We had different things to do, I remember I had friends who were

8B and I was 8A and this was one of the top high schools in our area, and you had

to apply to get in and the only people who got the application were the people in

8A, people in 8B didn't even get the application, so, we had different experiences

in eighth grade going into high school.

Robin's experience with tracking in eighth grade is supported by Gramsci and central to

CRT's scholarship in law. Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony defines hegemony as (1) "the

spontaneous' consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on

social life by the dominant fundamental group"; and (2) "the apparatus of state coercive power

which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not, "consent" either actively or

passively" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). In other words, the theory of hegemony posits that in every

facet of life, the ideology of the dominant class exerts control over the subordinate masses. The

elites' beliefs, attitudes, and traditions became "normalized" into mainstream consciousness such

that the formations of law, language, and customs are patterned after the constructs of the ruling

class. From the onset, CRT's place "race and racism … as the central pillars of hegemonic

power" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. xxii). Robins, response regarding NCLB and her preparation for

college included the following:

Academic rigor-wise... in some classes yes, some classes no, like in my history

class I felt like probably from seventh grade to my sophomore year of high school

that I learned the same thing over and over again. I felt like history was so

redundant. We learned about the Civil War, we learned about Reconstruction, and

then we learned about World War I and World War II, I felt like those were the

only things that we learned about from those time periods; when I was in the

eleventh grade, I started taking a world history class, so I learned something

different then, but I feel like for a large chunk of my life I didn't learn that much

about history.

Robin's experience in her history class did not include any discussion of Black history

and how it played a major role in the establishment of this country, yet the inclusion of Black

history is quite often excluded from history classes in public schools, which is another feature of

"Whiteness as Property as the history of Whites is only considered legitimate. Acknowledging

the power of education in her memoir, Assata Shamir (2001) concedes: "No one is going to give

you the education you need to overthrow them, and nobody is going to teach you your true

heroes, if they know that this knowledge will help set you free" (p.181).

As Robins interview reiterated, White supremacist philosophies maintain a curriculum

that gives rise to the racism that affects the way Black students think and exists to perpetuate

their prescribed White supremacist positions. For this cause, in a dynamic community with

disproportionate wealth, the only way for the oppressive White society to retain its power is to

have curricular messages perpetuating White supremacy and non-White inferiority.

Understanding Robin's response to a discriminatory White curricular agenda aligns with Freire's

(2001) study and criticism of conventional schooling, emphasizing how traditional education

perpetuates inequality and racism. Though Freire's (2001) research focuses on his work in Brazil

to combat economic injustice, his analysis and criticism of a conventional education transfers to

our traditional education's racial oppression prevalent in public schools.

White teachers and their knowledge of Black history can serve as a positive link in

bridging relationships with Black students. In Michael Apples essay, "The Text and Cultural

Politics" (1992) he maintains that teachers, students, and schools must duplicate information in

the curriculum that exemplifies the experiences and history that is critical to the democratic

structure of schooling as opposed to an organization for social control. This theory was also

demonstrated by Robin's teachers in her use of the Bluford series for a high school honors

English course. A vast majority of school districts in predominantly southern states appoint

curriculum textbook groups who are charged with the duty of selecting the textbooks that will be

utilized by school districts statewide; publishers then compete for these contracts which allow

the committees to determine what information will be considered as legitimate or appropriate to

student learning (Apple, 1992).

McCarty (2003) identifies the teacher as a significant, powerful figure in the classroom

that should be trained with a clear discussion focused on the CRT tenet, "Whiteness as property

and racism prior to teaching Black students. The series of books named the Bluford series was

written for students at the intermediate reading level, which was not designed for high school

students, because the Bluford series was designed for students enrolled at the 5th and 6th grade

levels, and not deemed as rigorous curriculum for advanced students. Along with other

curriculum issues stressed below and the reality of only writing one research paper in high

school Robin argued:

> The Bluford series was used repeatedly throughout my high school experience
> which did not prepare me for college level reading or writing classes; We only
> read Bluford series in my ninth-grade honors English class, my teacher gave us
> the stereotypical books about the Black experience like the Bluford series, and I
> was just like, these books take fifteen minutes to read, I don't feel challenged, and
> she got upset with me.

Critical race theorists claim that White Supremacist rhetoric and conventional American public-school curricula are aligned to perpetuate racial hegemony as noted in CRT's tenet of "intersectionality". Schools are the organizations responsible for training children for the society they reside in and preparation for higher learning. Black students' engagement with the curriculum is deliberately intended to affect their social orientation and their desire to effectively enter and succeed in society which CRT infers as a direct result of the color of their skin.

Robin's inadequate academic preparation for college clearly supports this concept. Yet, it is important to note that Blacks were denied access to a rigorous education many years prior to public schooling today as this omission is deeply rooted in racism. For example, Mills (1997) concurs stating, "Originally denied education, Blacks were later, in the postbellum period given an education appropriate to post-chattel status—the denial of a past, of history, of achievement— so that as far as possible they would accept their prescribed roles of servant and menial laborer, comic coons and Sambos, grateful Uncle Toms and Aunt Jemma's" (p.88). Robin explained:

> When I came to college, I got to write my second research paper in my entire life and I only had one research paper and that was in my psychology class and students who took psychology had to take a math test so it was like another thing in my high school you had to take before psychology, and we had to do well in the previous math class; So, I get into college and I had like a seven-page research paper, and I complained, I don't know what I'm doing; So, I feel like my high school did not fully teach me the things I needed to know for college.

NCLB mandated states to create standards and curriculums that were academically challenging for students and to measure those standards by demographic groups for which they were held accountable (Datnow & Park, 2009). Black students cannot be

expected to perform and be successful in college if they are exposed to low level curriculum and poor instruction, "Although NCLB took an important step by mandating academic standards, it did not require these standards to address students' preparation for college and careers; academic proficiency was narrowly defined as student performance in reading and math, and NCLB included no accountability mandate to ensure students' career readiness", (Malin, 2017, p. 813).

Erica stated:

> My science classes got extremely difficult too. I was never good in science so I took biology my freshman year and I was just shocked and I was like oh cells, mitochondria, all these things I didn't really understand; math-wise, I was put into an honors algebra class my freshman year, but I had juniors in high school in my class and I was just stunned, cause I was like, I don't know what I'm doing and they don't know what they're doing, so we're all lost; writing-wise; I felt like my writing class was pretty good, I just felt like my teacher wasn't the right teacher to teach a class full of Black students.

Teel and Obidah (2008), discuss the impact of the teacher's knowledge of racial and cultural influences and its effect on the educational advancement of Black students. They further contend that if these competencies are reinforced, students will be exposed to a more expansive curriculum and become more critical thinkers in the classroom. Cultural knowledge and sensitivity are an important factor when working with diverse groups of students.

The next three participants underscored two predominant themes echoed throughout this study which included, NCLB and its effort to prepare students for college, and the fairness of tracking.

RACIAL AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PREPARATION

Teachers who do not value or encourage peer-to-peer interaction jeopardize their students' emotional and cultural growth. Education is a setting that enables students to communicate successfully with one another. Prudence Carter conveys the concept of schools as not just places where students learn to read, compose, and view objectively, but also as vast social structures (Carter et al., 2013).

Corey, a college pre-med major, was raised by her single Mother who faced ongoing economic hardships in search of higher paying jobs which led to many different schools throughout her daughter's years of schooling. Yet, Corey felt that she was always a serious student when it came to her studies and stated that in spite of the hardship her Mother placed high value on education and adult success. Regarding the fairness of tracking, participant Corey voiced:

> I think when you're in lower-level classes you are just kind of invisible to your teachers, you don't really ... I don't want to say you don't have the same ambition, but you don't really know all that's out there and all that you can do with different subjects; I feel like schools say, Okay, you have to do these core sub-classes, but what does that mean for you when you're in lower classes. The lower classes want help you be a doctor or an engineer and there are all of these subdivisions of careers that you could do, but I feel like kids in the lower-level classes aren't exposed to that as much as kids in advanced placement classes.

Corey also conveyed that her enrollment as the only Black student in advanced classes led to isolation from the other White students who were unwilling to work with her cooperatively on classroom projects. The CRT tenet realized in Corey's experience with tracking is the

"permanence of racism". In spite of her high academic achievement which earned her entrance to a high performing school, she was still ignored by her White teachers who were intentionally colorblind to Corey's needs in relation to the other White students in her class. This level of attention was reserved for Whites only and resulted in low self- esteem and a diminished sense of belonging for Corey.

She further concluded that, being in advanced classes does not exclusively mean that one has all of the answers because there were many times when she needed extra help and felt lost in her all-White advanced classes. These community and school characteristics have an important impact on educational attainment at the individual level, and thereby play a central role in the preservation of racial differences in educational settings (Crowder & Scott, 2003/2011; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Quillian 2014; Wodtke et.al, 2011). From this perspective, segregation in the public school is envisioned as a primary cause of extensive and persistent racial and ethnic challenges in education (Condron et al., 2013).

TRACKING, A PRIMARY DETERRENT TO QUALITY SCHOOLING

In 2017, just 11 percent of Black students reached at least three benchmark preparation levels for college and career, including their test results in English, literacy, math, and science (ACT Report on College and Career Readiness). Black students' achievement has been somewhat consistent since 2012. In New York, the State Department of Education (DOE) announced that just 18% to 21% of Black male high school graduates were "college and job-ready" when they graduated (Expanded Success Initiative, 2012). Benjamin, who voiced tracking as negative and unfair, commented:

When you have a tracking system like this it doesn't really help when you just

basically put one third of the student population into a higher level and then have

everyone else just placed into lower learning systems, that doesn't really help

because it's not helping them move forward; you just basically pre-condition them

to have a vocational job, not even looking towards the idea of going to college.

His response to NCLB and its effort to prepare students for post- secondary education
was as follows:

The school system was pretty much vocational tracking. Like you had a few

academic advisors who were really pushing for children to go to college and so

forth but most of it was vocational, so you had mechanic shops and trades and so

forth.

The CRT tenet, "Interest convergence places Whites in hierarchical positions to organize
and distribute information and knowledge through the curriculum". As a professional having
worked in education, the overall organization of schools is a primary entry point for widespread
control and direction of White and Black students. This action includes controlling textbooks,
school design such as tracking (the separation of students into homogenous groups), and how
and who delivers the instruction to students as early as elementary school.

Whites in power shape the curriculum to benefit White interests. Accordingly, the
transition to an industrial society prompted the rise of a curriculum geared toward low-paying
non-professional occupations as an opportunity to address how to provide workers for the
industrial workplace (Watkins, 2001). The preservation of a college education for White middle-
and upper-class pupils demands the redirection of minority students into vocational and
occupational training systems.

In a study by Lewis and Cheng (2006), in schools with high percentages of Black and economically poor minority populations, non-college tracks served as the primary curriculum. The study also found that the placement of students on specific tracks was socially constructed as the study surveys completed by principals reinforced this theory. Saddler et al., (2011) argued that organizing students by ability in public schools ensures that minority enrollment in vocational programs remains high compared to college track programs.

Regarding the success of NCLB, Benjamin concluded, "No Child Left Behind, even though it had good intentions, was flawed and it really did not help African Americans and other minorities get a leg up in the world."

TRACKING AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

In the United States, a primary belief is that schooling serves as a social standing symbol (Kingston et al., 2003). Education is an institution (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008) portrayed as a 'general solution to all types of systemic and personal issues which authoritatively assigns individuals to various social roles. Students are assumed to be mindful of these disparities because they must face the implications (Tannock, 2008). Yet, this realization quite often occurs after graduation. Lee, described the effect of tracking and the impact of NCLB on his education stating:

> I can recall many friends and acquaintances who attended high school with me and who were smarter than me, but were placed in lower classes; and who have kind of suffered for it now, because they didn't get into the best colleges, and they didn't get the best scholarships; you know, some of them are still at home, some of them took other routes,

some of them went to the military, and some of them just got trade jobs; so, I'd say tracking does really affect everyone's education in different ways.

Lee's account of the missed opportunities experienced by his classmates acknowledges CRT's 'permanence of racism. The denial of a quality education and disregard for their academic ability based on race was used with tracking. As a final result, many of his classmates suffered greatly. Lee also acknowledged the positive effects of his enrollment in advanced placement classes in comparison to his college prep classes:

> I myself have been considered the average student in classes with upper students and it did help me to succeed, and I excelled, and I got a better understanding for whatever subject we were learning at the time. I can recall physics, which was a big thing with me. I had a lot of trouble with physics at first, which was considered a higher-level class, but being in that class with other higher-level kids helped me pick it up and really start to understand how to think about physics and that helped my learning curve.

Lee did not experience what many would call a balanced educational experience because he was led to believe that he should focus exclusively on academics. This was to some extent a result of all of his K-12 exposure in predominantly segregated all White schools and neighborhoods which drove him to believe that he had to constantly compete academically with no additional time for extracurricular activities. There are numerous studies that have shown the positive outcomes on high school students who participate in sports. The results include better grades for participants (Darling et al., 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Silliker & Quirk, 1997).

Student athletes also strive for more advanced post college and career choices which may result in higher pay (Darling et al., 2005; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Sabo et al., 1993), and view school attendance in a more positive way (Darling et al., 2005) as compared to those students who do not participate in high school sports. As an educator with over fifteen years of experience in high schools, I have also noted the positive academic effect of sports on student attitudes such as focusing on teamwork in the classroom, positive self-esteem and self-discipline.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS AND FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

The participants in this research encountered racism within their schools and communities in varying degrees. Several of them could easily define tracking and student division based on skin color as culturally motivated and structurally ingrained in their education as early as grade school. Student interviews revealed many examples; Corey lived in a predominantly White, segregated neighborhood while enrolled in high school as the only Black in her class. In her memoir, Rebecca Carroll (2021) relives what it means to assimilate as the child of White adoptive parents while embracing your identity as a Black woman surrounded by the pervasive influence of Whiteness.

Gary Orfield (2013) reflects on racial problems, discussing the intertwined nature and heinous effects of housing and school discrimination. Housing is connected to educational opportunities. Segregated communities, along with segregated classes, result in unequal schooling. School desegregation attempts from the 1960s to the 1980s allowed millions of students of color, mostly Black students in the South, to attend middle-class, all-White schools. However, much of the benefits of urban desegregation have vanished. The United States remains a highly stratified and divided society consisting of a non-White population of children excluded from critical educational resources due to where they reside. Orfield (2013) contends that fair housing and school rights must be negotiated and secured once more.

Robin experienced a lack of quality teachers and a mediocre curriculum while enrolled in a predominantly Black urban school consisting of a small population of Whites, few Black teachers, and a White counselor. To be effective, any change in the curriculum also requires fundamental changes in teachers' and student beliefs about teaching and student ability. By

eliminating curriculum boundaries, schools can reinforce the equal distribution of resources; this practice can provide access to the same opportunities for all students (Carter, 2008).

In education, Whiteness affected the students' educational personalities and aspirations in both constructive and negative ways. Students' educational experiences can help them to understand and survive institutional inequality. The impact of these experiences on students will contribute to the formation of their academic identities. Racism is embedded not only in organizations such as local school boards, governments, and school curriculum but also in faculty and staff members. Whiteness is essential to the existence of White supremacy within public schools in the United States.

In this study, critical race theory and student voice served as primary tools in analyzing the effect of tracking following the inception of No Child Left Behind (2001). CRT further supports the theory that racism is socially construed, organized, and based on a person's physical characteristics. This was also highlighted as the most prevalent theme throughout the participant's interviews. Prior to Brown vs. the Board of Education, Black students were isolated from White students into segregated classes as a direct result of racism. This action was not an initial response to their mental capacity to do the work. Critical race theorists define this action as structural racism which is intentionally embodied for the primary purpose of racially dividing students. Hegemonic groups determine race, using the law and empirical knowledge and neoliberal policies to secure their interests. Blacks are marginalized as Whites use this approach to validate their power and White supremacy.

Data from participant interviews were utilized to contextualize the participant's experiences and clearly identify what they had to say followed by a summary of the findings Many researchers contend that while most school reforms seek to change students, according to

CRT, student voice places students as agents in the reform process. Through active engagement in change, students see that they can be knowledge creators and not just receivers. The term student voice can range from the most basic level of youth sharing their opinions on problems and potential solutions: to allowing young people to collaborate with adults to address the issues in their schools; to youth taking the lead on seeking change (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2018).

Data analysis supports the first research question, 'As beginning, Black college students look back on their experiences in high school, what impact if any do they think being tracked had on their attitudes, experiences and academic identities; and the most outstanding component of critical race theory, 'Race is endemic and socially constructed, as the majority of the students realized that they were being tracked into different classes as early as elementary school, which validates the top-down institutionalized prominence of tracking. The practice of tracking became even more evident to the participants as they moved through junior high school. Several of them stated that they did not know what to call it, other than just separation; yet they did understand that the kids who were moved were identified as being academically inferior and not as smart as their peers.

In support of the second research question; As beginning Black college students look back on their experiences in high school, what perceptions if any do, they have on the fairness of the practice of tracking and being tracked? Five out of the eight students interviewed felt that the teachers and the school administrators did not adequately prepare them for tracking as it was not discussed with the students in terms of the overall impact on their grades and educational choices. The CRT tenet, "Whiteness as Property dominated the student experiences as they were denied access to a rigorous, challenging curriculum. Benjamin stated that his high school was

primarily organized to direct students toward vocational paths. Lee, who was in the high track, acknowledged that a number of his classmates who were placed in the lower tracks were actually very capable of doing the work, but low self-esteem and lack of teacher concern and support prevented them from working harder.

The students placed in advanced classes spoke frequently about the isolation that tracking created for them as they were tracked into classes that were majority White and Asian, with very few Black students. Katina's experience being one of only two Black students in a small suburban White school subjected her to excessive and constant bullying based on her hair and physical characteristics. Katina's experience in a predominantly White school revealed CRT's, "racism and its permanence" and "Whiteness as property" as primary contributors to her struggle with identity crisis as it was difficult trying to acknowledge her Blackness in a school setting where she was not socially accepted as a Black bi-racial student or a White student.

Following Katina's exposure to her first Black teacher and friend in a diverse high school setting she was able to rebuild her self-esteem. This in turn afforded the opportunity to celebrate a sense of belonging and identity in an environment which made her feel valuable.

Kanye further noted the tracking schedule being used as a school organizational tool that separated him from other Black students and prevented him from bonding with them throughout the day. Kanye who attended high school in the city was specifically attuned to the differences between White and Black access to better resources which are common denominators of tracking and segregation. Students are denied positive peer relations and social networking when schools are divided by class and race. The equity provided by integration is greatly diminished when Black, White, rich and poor students are enrolled and tracked into different classes based on

academic ability. As a result, equal divide of resources is also weakened (Wells et al., 2016). The "permanence of racism" and "Whiteness as property" dominated Kanye's experience with tracking.

Several of the participants, such as Robin specifically, felt that throughout their high school years, the White students were always given better educational opportunities regarding class placements clearly indicative of CRT's Whiteness as Property and the permanence of racism which from their observation and experience led to better college and university admissions. She also acknowledged that the teachers provided positive motivation and accolades towards the White students which was not extended to the Blacks who worked equally as hard. This response is common for those who are sanctioned with CRT's notion of "White privilege in American society at large". Research conducted by Stanley et al., also maintained that all of the Black students in advanced classes with Whites felt that they had to perform above and beyond the performance of the White students throughout their educational years, (2019).

The participants were also aware of the differences in teacher quality common to the theory of CRT's "Whiteness as Property that existed as a result of tracking and racism within the schools and communities. The duty of segregation and its role in student placement was very evident. One student attended a White Catholic school while enrolled in elementary; one was placed in a charter school through the voucher system because her parents did not want her to attend the inter-city school, one was placed in a majority White all-boys' high school, and another was placed in a public White school located in the predominantly White community she lived in with her mother. With the exclusion of three participants, Corey and Katina; and Robin the majority of all the interview participants in this study attended schools which were 90 to 95% Black which for this study confirmed CRT's "permanence of racism". Diversity and integration

within these schools was clearly not a priority. Tracking, busing, White flight and the voucher system have resulted in more racial segregation than the pre-integration era (Sadler et al., 2007).

Academically, several of the high tracked students, such as Lee and Robin, felt that being in mixed classes allowed them to be seen as smarter than their counterparts and actually motivated them to perform more aggressively. Advocates for heterogeneous classrooms argue that Black students are systemically being eliminated within the educational system. In spite of the overwhelming evidence of the negative effects of tracking, the amount of resistance is significant, with limited discussion relative to race, but clearly aligned to the preservation of privilege and a curriculum of high track students.

In reference to the third research question, Do the Black students of the NCLB era feel that tracking supported the goals of NCLB in its role to prepare them for a college level education; Kanye, Ashley and Lee who were in advanced classes agreed that being able to study in high track classes prepared them for better college and university opportunities, yet the majority were very adamant in reference to the stress and opportunities lost resulting from their placements which included those in high track classes; yet even those students enrolled in high track classes were negatively affected by CRT's" permanence of racism. Robin was very frustrated that she was only given the opportunity to submit one research paper in high school prior to her freshman year of college further acknowledging CRT's, "Whiteness as Property". Accepted into a four-year university, becomes a moot point if the students are not equipped with the information and knowledge to be successful.

Erica was disappointed that the Counselor was primarily supportive of the White students regarding applications and preparation for college; students are very cognizant of those teachers who care about them and those who do not. Genuine relationships are built on authentic

connections (Viadero, 2002). Benjamin was so ill-prepared following high school that he was forced to enroll in a junior college to improve his grades for acceptance to a four-year university. With the exception of Katina and her difficulty with identity crisis, the remaining students favored placements in racially balanced heterogeneous classes. Regarding No Child Left Behind and its promise to prepare them for college level performance, the majority response was negative as only three out of the eight interview participants agreed. In conclusion, this study supported the research questions as hypothesized, as NCLB did not support their efforts in gaining adequate access and preparation for college and the "permanence of racism and "Whiteness as property" proved to be in direct conflict to the student's success and the promise of equitable assess to a quality education as supported by critical race theorists.

In the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Roberts (2007) wrote that the correction of segregation based on race would not be permitted noting, "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race," he announced, "is to stop discrimination on the basis of race." Chief Roberts in essence reinforced the notion of colorblindness as a constitution allegedly crafted to protect the colorblind rights enjoyed by Whites in de-facto segregation in education, housing and employment. This action continues to subject Black students to inadequately funded crowded schools with low level courses, poor instructional equipment, and teachers with limited professional teacher qualities. This proclamation served as support and sanction for the practice of White privilege because it did not need to be labeled.

Haney-Lopez (2006) notes, "Colorblindness is not a prescription but an ideology, a set of understandings that delimits how people comprehend, rationalize, and act in the world (p. 157). The organization of NCLB and choice schools do not support equity in education because Charter schools with predominant populations of Black students simply reinforce tracking and

segregation. In 2007, the Supreme Court blocked White school communities from using race for student placements. To avoid the Court's decision, economic status was sought as a means of maintaining predominantly White schools without the use of racism (Kahlenberg, 2006). In 2008, the New York Times Magazine referred to this practice as, "a form of White privilege used as a new approach to integrating students" (Smith, 2008).

Lillian Dowdell Drakeford argues, "Race is both minimized and maximized. It is minimized because the historical and structural accumulations of advantage and disadvantage caused by race and racism are not considered to be factors that affect teaching or learning. Without ever mentioning race, schools are again profoundly re-segregated and unequal. The heightened threat of race and diversity legitimizes zero-tolerance for dress, behavior, language, and almost anything that is deemed deviant (non-White); renewed talk of a new crisis in education energizes the push for privatizing education under the guise of choice as evidenced by the explosion of charter schools (p. 53).

NCLB was grounded in the following premises: (1) all children can learn at a high level; (2) the achievement gap between Black children and White children (as well as between rich and poor) is not acceptable; and (3) the educational system must be held accountable for closing this gap and providing all children with the education they need to achieve at high levels, (NCLB, 2001). No Child Left Behind is best remembered as a collection of neo-liberal educational policies entrenched in colorblind rhetoric. In order to be effective, laws passed to improve the lives of underprivileged students in public schools must first address the systemic, economic and political inequities that create these disparities, otherwise their influence cannot ensure or reinforce any benefits, (Race and public policy program, 2003).

SUMMARY: ACHIEVEMENT GAP, NCLB AND TRACKING

Research has uncovered numerous mechanisms that link race to educational outcomes. I argue that structural racism, a social system in which racial categorization serves as a primary organizing feature bestowing privilege on some groups and limited access to others, serves as the fundamental cause of racial disparities in educational outcomes, thereby widening the achievement gap. Rather than merely saying that institutional inequality contributes to the perpetuation of educational differences in the United States, one's race is considered the root cause of ethnic disparities in academic achievement (Reskin, 2012; Seamster & Ray, 2018). Since Whites have greater access to capital of all sorts, their educational privilege has persisted despite White supremacy of culture as a whole. The fundamental dynamics that connect race and educational outcomes may shift, but the relative hierarchical positioning of White and Black Americans in terms of educational outcomes remains essentially constant.

Another way that a racialized social structure affects people's lives in the United States is by deciding when and with whom people reside. Residential and school discrimination is, therefore, an additional element relating ethnicity to educational achievement. (Sharkey, 2010; Sharkey & Elwert, 2011; Sharkey, TiradoStrayer, Papachristos, & Raver, 2012; Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011); (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Bennett, 2011; Berends & Pealoza, 2010; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Condron, Tope, Steidl, & Freeman, 2014). As a result, residential discrimination and the unraveling of legislation providing for race-based school placements imply that racial inequality is a dominant characteristic of the US educational system (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012; Reardon & Owens, 2014). Furthermore, there is no doubt that minority students enter schools with more minority students, less funding, and poor performance; for

example, about half of Black students attend schools with achievement levels below the 30th percentile, relative to just around 15 percent of White students (Logan, Minca, & Adar 2012).

No Child Left Behind was recognized as a civil rights statute that provided additional support to socially disadvantaged children (Richard Rothstein, Class, and Schooling, 2004). Yet, there exists limited conversation regarding the notion that racial inequality has increased in public schools, and failure rates are higher in low-income populations. In these primarily Black populations, ability grouping and tracking often re-segregates children between and within schools, restricting minority student's admission to college preparatory classes and the best teachers (Unfinished Business: Closing the Achievement Gap in Our Nation's Schools, Pedro Noguera and Jean Wing, 2006). In this study, the participants experienced social and achievement deficits in varying degrees which became evident from placements in predominantly Black populated schools, inadequate educational resources, poor teacher quality, and lack of rigorous curricula. As a result, this study also helped to highlight the relationship between education, race, and the achievement gap evident from their interviews.

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act, requiring states to gather statistics on student performance and disaggregate test results by ethnicity and other socioeconomic and educational variables, public conversations regarding structural academic inequalities increased dramatically. Researchers regard this occurrence as one of the most outstanding features of the NCLB movement. As a result, data on student achievement from public school districts throughout the nation have been made available and debated. Unfortunately, national debates about racial performance gaps have done nothing to narrow the gap or encourage widespread educational change. Dropout rates continue to be strong, especially among urban Black males (Jennifer Gonzalez, 2010).

According to Taylor (2006), narrowing the achievement gap is a target that has brought together a diverse range of stakeholders. However, developing successful solutions necessitates a shared understanding of what triggered, perpetuated, and prolonged it in the first place. Critical race theory was chosen as the theoretical frame for this study based on its ability to recognize race as a central force directly aligned to tracking, segregation and the achievement gap. It is impossible to create a coherent collection of strategies and priorities without a unifying theoretical context. Where NCLB success goals failed, stakeholders resorted to blame-shifting entities between teachers, parents, and school administrators blaming politicians, and so on, resulting in a fragmentation of commitment, resources, and effectiveness.

To understand the priorities of NCLB and other reform models, educators must learn more about reforming schools and boosting Black students by identifying and acknowledging what is beneficial and detrimental (Sunderman, Kim, Orfield, and Orfield, 2005). Turning around low-performing schools is possible, but it necessitates money, successful tactics, and years of hard work and educational funding to develop educators' and organizations' capacity to do so. One impediment to developing reform plans is that the ethnic success divide has become undertheorized and misunderstood. We need, but do not yet have, persuading and reliable systems of exposing racialized traditions and activities of public schools to eradicate them.

Cultural disparities in research reveal that race is not a widely accepted concept as a primary reason for the achievement gap. Instead, there exist visible and dynamic phenomena of ill-defined categories that overlap race, history, identity, and class (Omi & Winant, 1994; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Many White people find it impossible to accept that their systems are not colorblind (Howard, 1999; Johnson (2002) and Kailin (1999). Consequently, strategists have invested lots of money, time, and resources to persuade White educators that

social disparities exist instead of exploring creative and supportive tactics to put an end to them.

Research has uncovered numerous mechanisms that link race to educational outcomes. Racial

disparity in educational outcomes results from structural racism, a classification in which race

serves as the predominant feature granting benefits to some groups while denying others.

Despite proof of its importance in educational success, the traditional data aggregations

of the performance disparity are overwhelmingly ethnic, with less focus on economic status.

Racial divisions are loosely described and often intersect. NCLB-mandated standardized exams,

for example, were only offered in English. By oversimplifying and centralizing race, the data

implies that there are inherent gaps among ethnic groups, whether deliberately or unintentionally.

According to CRT researchers, specific test scores are an indicator of structural racism rather

than ethnicity. There was minimal indication that NCLB increased students' academic

performance six years after it was signed into legislation (Lee, 2006). Data from 11 urban school

districts involved in the National Assessment of Educational Progress Trial Urban District

Assessment reported the improvements marginal at best. Only two of the eleven participating

districts' average reading scores improved from 2005 to 2007, and four of the eleven districts'

average reading scores increased from 2005 to 2007. Average math scores improved in four of

the eleven districts at grade four and six of the eleven districts at grade eight (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2007).

Contemporary geneticists contend that racial distinctions have no biological origin

(Venter et al., 2001); for group disparities in test results, which are thus a result of how different

races are viewed and taught in U.S. public schools. Many organizational and institutional factors,

according to research, have perpetuated and sustained the achievement gap (Noguera,

Achievement Gap in the United States, 2001), including disparate conditions (Kozol, 1992);

lower teacher education and experience (Haycock, Jerald, & Huang, 2001; Oakes, 1985); and teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and expectations (Darling-Hammond, 1997; DeCuir, 2011). (Sanders, Wright, & Horn, 1997; McLaren, 1994).

Teachers' efficacy is one of the most significant variables influencing disparities in students' academic development, but such teachers are scarce in minority schools. Students who have three years in a row of successful teachers—well-trained, knowledgeable, and willing to articulate clearly—outperform students who have three years in a row of unsuccessful teachers by fifty percentile points (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Even a single year with a poor instructor has long-term consequences measured by student performance up to four years afterward. On the other hand, Black students are the least likely to be trained by effective instructors (Haycock, 2001). Teachers with no qualifications, education, or specialized preparation are more prevalent in schools with a heavy percentage of Black students.

Roderick Carey (2014) argues that the labels and categories we use to understand and address the achievement divide often help to fan the fire, pulling focus away from possible remedies for the achievement gap and more toward the societal expectations through which it exists. The unchallenged modes of race and class-based comparison, the vigorous application of labels and categories (Brantlinger, 2006), and the intense accountability associated with testing, and the media which brought it all to the public's attention (Kelly & Majerus, 2011; Kumashiro, 2012), have all contributed. From my experience in public schooling, the way in which problems are framed can have a direct effect on the solutions that are explored.

Many have become so proficient in the achievement gap discourse's jargon that it's become impossible to see not merely   why the underlying definitions and symbols may be troublesome but also how options that might contribute to more comprehensive remedies are out

of control. Carey further acknowledges that academics, policymakers, and professionals need to recognize that marginalized students due to their race, gender, and social background are also the students classified as lagging in the achievement gap debate. When the simple classification of the achievement gap is overwhelmingly associated with labels such as Black, at risk, and disadvantaged, we have a broken structure at best and a culturally and linguistically discriminatory system at worse. Carey uses a cultural lens to examine a range of issues to continue reshaping how we can address these disparities.

Carey shares the following insight as a starting point for reshaping our thinking towards public educational change:

First, the achievement gap's language, designed to distinguish between inherent comparisons of non-Whites to Whites, is based on standardized test outcomes, including just "one part to a far more complicated and intricate truth of what students know" (Milner, 2013). I agree that these comparisons are dehumanizing and counterproductive. Excessively comparing children without paying attention to the categories and labels that deemphasize their experiences and the societal inequalities of race, class, and gender have shown deleterious consequences (McDermott & Varenne, 2006) Labels for schools and students operate to disregard the importance of cultural information (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004), academic ability, and interpretations of others that do not embody White ideas and beliefs and serve to elevate White students as the model from which all students can conform (Love, 2004). Broad strategies and strategic objectives may continue to fall short of the target until they consider the nuances inherent in Black students and their backgrounds.

Second, a cultural change away from contentious labels and divisions to interpret what students achieve and should do on high-stakes exams is necessary. This approach represents a

pedagogical shift toward authentic, inclusive, and holistic instructor and student success (Sunderman & Kim, 2005). Additionally, educators must constantly challenge how we measure students' knowledge and how we use this material. It is critical for educators to continually challenge widely held assumptions on what constitutes information and how we react to students. While standardized testing results show minimal understandings about what students recognize (Milner, 2013), what we do with pupils, instruction, and schools as a consequence of these results does far more damage.

Thirdly, and in a related vein, Carey, (2014) argues that we must continually scrutinize the terms and labels we use to refer to children, their classrooms, and those who educate them for potential ways in which they can further marginalize already disadvantaged children. This focus is a fundamental shift because labels denote significant cultural connotations, defining not just one's current position but also one's likely trajectory. One approach to do this is to change classroom, district, and state assessment policies to place a greater emphasis on school achievements rather than on developing modern and more precise rubrics and predictive means to track school deficiencies. Numerous media sources have portrayed a broad picture of public education, omitting the complexity and contradictions inherent in classrooms. News organizations champion "gold ribbon" colleges and express alarm for "failing schools" (Kelly & Majerus, 2011). According to Kumashiro (2012), the media inundates the American audience with tales about failed schools and a pervasive and highly complicated public education problem, creating an overwhelming feeling of helplessness resulting from the problem's scale and nature.

Thus, if education issues are cultural rather than just academic, we must be more considerate about how the public accesses knowledge about schooling and explores answers requiring more than just teachers and pupils. To assist in this, we must be more mindful of the

impact that television stories and emotionally charged films like Waiting for "Superman" have on colleges, instructors, students, and others in the area who can assist. By actively engaging writers, and filmmakers in educational research workshops, and policymaking, they can help promote a more realistic and detailed portrayal of public education in the United States, (Carey, 2014).

Fourth, Carey contends that a renewed dedication to education as a "public" entity is needed. Public schools play a critical role in reinforcing that we live up to our pledge of current and future political equality for all people.   However, too many have abandoned public schooling, as shown by how seriously parents take the names attached to schools while deciding where to enroll their children (Kelly & Majerus, 2011). The achievement disparity debate contributes to criticisms of democratic structures that institutionalize a pervasive and discursive devaluation of public education. Public schools are known as part of the community, and everyone bears the blame for their performance or loss. Changing how we discuss, represent in television and videos, and comprehend schools is the most effective way to address this reality. According to McDermott and Varenne (2006), "culture is not a cause of a present self; culture is the current impediment to the creation of possible potential selves" (p. 8). The achievement gap discourse's names, terminology, and inherent symbols are threats to the possible worlds these children will build for us.

Tracking, a form of ability grouping is the process of separating students for teaching based on their assumed academic abilities, either within a class or into different groups. Students are sorted in high schools by their perceived ability into a set of courses with distinct curricula where they take   high, medium, or low-level classes similar to their assigned tracks (academic, general, or vocational). At the end of middle school, most students are participating in one of

these tracks, (Futrell and Gomez, 2008). Students on the higher-level track are frequently

exposed to enriched, engaging material, while those on the lower-level track receive repetitive

lessons that prompt them to fill in blanks on a worksheet. Students in the first category receive a

program that reinforces how to read and adapt what they have studied. Students in the second

group receive a more watered-down curriculum that focuses on memorization (Ascher, 1992;

Burris & Welner, 2005, Wheelock, 1992).

    Although heterogeneous classification requires creative classroom teaching strategies, it

is unjust to continue activities that disproportionately favor students from advantaged

households. Less advantaged parents, too, want the advantages of an enriched education for their

children. We cannot neglect the reality that talent classification has culminated in the division of

students by color, ethnic origin, and socioeconomic class for more than five decades. Research

has established that minority and low-income students at all skill levels are overrepresented in

lower tracks and unfairly denied access to higher tracks (Ascher, 1992; Burris & Welner, 2005;

Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

The more stringent the tracking scheme, the more academic results have shown little

gains to overall student achievement and significant harm to equity. Students assigned to

different tracks in high school suffer more inequity over time, and the rise in disparity is

heightened in schools where students remain in these tracks (Gamoran 1992). The students in

this research were fully aware of the teaching and learning gaps in their classrooms and schools

due to their tracking experiences. Students who wished to improve their academic performance

encountered roadblocks. Several study participants expressed an interest in taking advanced

placement classes but indicated that guidance counselors and other people at the school did not

approve their plans. To have some chance of narrowing the achievement gap, we must first

ensure that all students have fair access to a high-quality education.

CHAPTER VI: RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Tracking places Black and White students in different academic programs, which reinforces segregation, and creates inequitable access to educational resources thereby weakening the educational opportunity for all students. The recommendations in this section offer research-based reforms for the reduction and possible elimination of tracking in this country. As a starting point, educational researchers must continue to utilize critical race theory as a methodology and spotlight on the inequities in U.S. public schools and share this information with school districts throughout the country. Critical race theory has been consistently utilized as a lens to investigate and scrutinize racist activity throughout public schooling and its policies (Ladson-Billings & William Tate, 1995; Lynn and Dixson, 2013; Solóranzo & Yosso, 2002; Stovall 2006; Tate 1997; Yosso, 2006).

Originating from its legal premise critical race theorists continue to identify systemic racism which is traditionally rooted in teaching styles, learning, and the basic concept of race (Connor et al., 2016; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Gillborn, 2008; Vaught, 2011). Tracking began has a primary tool for the sorting and separation of Black students from White students in schools across the country. Critical Race studies in education then—like critical pedagogy—is ultimately concerned with employing multiple methods and borrowing from diverse traditions in the law, sociology, ethnic studies and other fields to formulate a robust analysis of race and racism as a social, political and economic system of advantages and disadvantages accorded to social groups based on their skin color and status in a clearly defined racial hierarchy (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 282).

The incorporation of more research regarding the effects of racially minority concentrated classrooms in public schools and within classrooms is particularly important for schools located in large urban cities where this practice is most common. It is also beneficial for this information to be included in professional learning communities and shared with teachers. One of the most significant studies," the Coleman Report, Equality of Educational Opportunity (2010) revealed that students from impoverished neighborhoods who attend school with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform better academically compared to students in segregated schools (Borman & Dowling (2010); Wells et al. (2016); Mickelson (2008); Schwartz (2011).

Researchers should strive to conduct research which simultaneously exploring the Black students experience with tracking and White students, which might help to create a broader point of view (Vogl & Preckel, 2014; Fram, et al. 2007). This research can then be used to bring these groups together and discuss their opinions and views since in reality they are the ones who are most directly impacted by these racist practices. As a Black student who was bussed to a predominantly White school in the 1970's, there was a clear racial divide between the Blacks and Whites at my high school, which even led to separate high school proms. Over fifteen years ago, a combined classroom reunion was held where Black and White students from my graduating class actually came together and concluded that we were simply following what our parents wanted us to do, as our voices were not solicited or even considered as valuable input. Discussion of findings and research regarding student voice and their experiences is imperative if their needs are truly going to be realized and supported. As teachers, parents and administrators, it is imperative that we are diligent in our efforts to magnify the utilization of student voice

within the areas of diversity, education and racism in public schools (Quinn, 2016). This in turn

may serve as a stronger deterrent regarding unequal educational policies in schools.

Schools and educational leaders need more focus on recruiting and retaining Black

teachers as role models for Black students in predominantly Black schools dominated by White

teachers (Amiot, 2020; Easton-Brooks, 2019; Evans & Leonard, 2013). Since 2014, Black

students continue to represent the bulk of those students identified as minority. Yet, after two

decades the number of Black teachers assigned to Black students has remained stagnant with

little growth (Bond et al., 2015). Bates & Glick assert the importance of this disparity as

increased Black teacher/student matching has shown higher academic success for those students

(2013). Other researchers including Egalite et al., (2015) also concur. This integration has

likewise been associated with greater social and emotional development but documented as a

deterrent to cultural harmony and communication for White teachers and Black students (Benner

& Yan, 2014; Blake et al., 2016; Irvine, 1990). Orfield et al. (2014) target the overwhelming

growth of segregation located in the south and urban school districts as a primary contribution

for this deficiency as schools are currently as segregated as they were ten years following the

Brown desegregation decision.

Professional learning communities in school districts should explore studies conducted

from the start of elementary through high school which discuss student tracking experiences in

an effort to help to eliminate some of the limitations specific to studies that choose high school

populations exclusively. A majority of the students in this study were placed in tracked classes as

early as elementary. In spite of numerous research and argument regarding the educational

inequity and long-term effects of tracking on Black students, tracking has resurged in urban and

suburban schools. Advocates continue to defend this practice as the best approach to differences

in student learning as a means of supporting the multi-faceted needs of all students. Yet, the existence of abundant reliable longitudinal research to assess critic's allegations is minimal. One study commissioned by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education in 1998 included 7,800 students with data collected from kindergarten through eighth grade. This represented the first study highlighting long term evidence connecting tracking and grouping to inequities in education (Fuligni, 1995; Johnson, 2011; Wilkinson, 2013)

To strengthen relationships between White teachers and Black students, Universities and K-12 public schools should include multi-cultural education delivery techniques in teacher pre-service programs. Cultural awareness is important for teacher success. School districts must invest in professional development workshops that incorporate examples of research-based classroom success strategies for all teachers but specifically non-White teachers. As evidenced by Kellough & Carjuzaa (2006), "First, your students must feel that the classroom environment supports their efforts. Second, your students must sense that you care about their learning and that they are welcome in your classroom, this is true for most students, regardless of the level of education. Third, students must understand that although the expected learning will be challenging, it is not impossible for them to achieve" (p.66). In a country that employs primarily White teachers in large Black populated schools, districts must include and encourage discussion about race, tracking and equity issues in professional development workshops and identify strategies against colorblind racist attitudes that ignore race as a powerful element that works against the success of minority students.

To reinforce and support district wide educational opportunity numerous scholars suggest reform models such as de-tracking and challenging curriculums for all students. De-tracking may involve providing professional development with differentiated instruction within classrooms,

and scheduling of students in heterogeneous classes with supplemental support. This is a

research-based approach that has proven beneficial for the complete elimination of tracking

(Mehan, 2015; Burris et al., 2010). Various studies allege and have demonstrated that tracking

results from reasoning that is not aligned to student achievement (Garet & DeLany, 1988;

George, 1992; Goyochea, 2000; Lucas, 1999; Oakes, 2005; Useem, 1992; Wells & Oakes, 1996;

Wells & Serna, 1996; Welner, 2001a). In a case study by, Burris et al., (2008) engaging 1500

students in an urban school district the outcome supported the notion that rigorous, high level

curriculum and de-tracked classrooms can result in positive effects for student achievement. In

2005, at the National Education Summit on High Schools, governors from around the country

ended their meeting with a report titled, "An Action Agenda for Improving America's High

Schools which included the following statement:

> American high schools typically track some students into a rigorous college- program,
>
> others into vocational programs with less-rigorous curriculum and still others into a
>
> general track. Today, all students need to learn the rigorous content usually reserved for
>
> college-bound students, particularly in math and English (Conklin & Curran, et al. 2005,
>
> p. 11).

From my observation, the practice of tracking has merely been given new pathways through

school choice and charter schools, as the recommendations for improvement were noteworthy

but lacked the essential components to ensure actual implementation for change. As I quickly

learned during my years in school administration, it doesn't happen if not consistently monitored.

To reinforce equal access to educational opportunity, school/community partnerships with

parents are critical regarding student placements and parents of Black students should be

included in all tracking decisions for Black students. In doing so, full disclosure and

transparency should be provided and shared. High and low track students included in this study voiced some of the same types of issues as evidenced by research and were extremely critical in some of their assessments. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education identified in its 2008 school monitoring outcomes report, 'partnerships with families as one of the lowest areas of compliance met by school districts. Supported by the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Markow et al., 2012), this issue was also documented throughout the country by teachers and administrators as being one of the most difficult parts of their jobs.

Parent and teacher associations must become a fluid part of the community and school to include much more than fundraising and sports for all students and their parents. School improvement efforts should engage and include parents from the very start of the school year to the end. Counselors should communicate with parents regarding student placements as opposed to merely making these choices for them. The more difficult part is actually getting it done. Trust between teachers and families demands planning, collaboration and time. This professional development initiative can result in teachers who are comfortable with Black students and prepared to "honor and recognize families' existing knowledge, skill, and forms of engagement; create and sustain school and district cultures that welcome, invite, and promote family engagement; and develop family engagement initiatives and connect them to student learning and development (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

All of these issues deserve more future research and scholarly attention. Tracking is the act of separating students based on race and their academic ability levels, yet the disparities reinforced by this practice are still very obvious after decades of exposure. It would be wise to acknowledge

the theory and principles of critical race theorists, echoed in part by Justice Sotomayor in the case, Schuette v. Bamn, (2014):

> "We ought not sit back and wish away, rather than confront, the racial inequality that exists in our society. It is this view that works harm, by perpetuating the facile notion that what makes race matter is acknowledging the simple truth that race does matter."

> Justice Sonia Sotomayor, (2014).

APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Services

Institutional Review Board

1 East Jackson Boulevard

Chicago, Illinois 60604

Office: 312-362-7593

Fax: 312-362-7574

Research Involving Human Subjects

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDACTION

To: Gwenda Walters,

PhD Graduate Student, College of Education

Date: February 25, 2019

Re: Research Protocol # GW113017EDU-C1

"Tracking and Experiences of African American Students Since the Inception of No Child Left
    Behind"

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research
    activity.

Review Details

This submission is a continuing review.

Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 45 CFR 46.110
    under the following category:

"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research
    purposes."

"(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies."

Approval   Details

Your research continuing review submission was reviewed and approved on February 25, 2019.

Approval date: February 28, 2019

Please note: Under the revised regulations, protocols requiring expedited review no longer require annual continuing review. We have transitioned your protocol to the revised regulations. However, if any changes are made to your research, you still need to submit an amendment prior to initiating the amendment changes.

Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:

1) None. No further recruitment or enrollment.

Other approved study documents:

1) None. No further recruitment or enrollment.

Number of approved participants: 40 Total (7 Enrolled)

2

You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) None.

Approved Performance sites:

Reminders

☐ Because you have indicated that new subject recruitment and enrollment, the Board has not re-approved your consent, parent/guardian permission, or assent document(s). Should you determine that additional recruitment and new subject enrollment is necessary, you are required to resubmit your document(s) for the review and approval by the IRB prior to beginning new subject recruitment and enrollment.

☐ Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.

☐ Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.

☐ You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.

☐ Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-6168 or via email at jbloom8@depaul.edu.

For the Board,

Jessica Bloom, MPH

Research Protections Coordinator

Office of Research Services

Cc: Jeffrey Kuzmic, PhD, Faculty, College of Education

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