

University of Kentucky

UKnowledge

Theses and Dissertations--Educational Policy
Studies and Evaluation

Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation

2015

The Learning Station: A holistic single-case study of an after school program to address the achievement gap

Serenity Wright

University of Kentucky, swright@transy.edu

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Wright, Serenity, "The Learning Station: A holistic single-case study of an after school program to address the achievement gap" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations--Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation*. 33. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/epe_etds/33

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statement(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to UKnowledge as Additional File.

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless an embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Serenity Wright, Student

Dr. Beth Goldstein, Major Professor

Dr. Robert Shapiro, Director of Graduate Studies

THE LEARNING STATION: A HOLISTIC SINGLE-CASE STUDY OF AN AFTER
SCHOOL PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
Serenity Thé Wright

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Beth Goldstein, Professor of Education Policy Studies and Evaluation

Lexington, Kentucky

2015

Copyright © Serenity Thé Wright 2015

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE LEARNING STATION: A HOLISTIC SINGLE-CASE STUDY OF AN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The three parts of this dissertation provide multiple perspectives on a single-case study of the ways in which the achievement gap is defined in one Kentucky school district. The case study focuses on the Learning Station, an after-school tutoring program that intended to address the achievement gap for minority and low-income students. Given the intensity of high stakes testing and testing frequency becoming part of the national mainstream conversation, the first part provides a brief overview of the various state and district mandated tests that students are required to take throughout the course of the year. I use quantitative data to explore correlations between attendance in the after-school program and scores on state mandated assessment. The second part uses qualitative data from key adult stakeholders who developed the program to understand how various members of the home and school communities conceived and contextualized the Learning Station. This part discusses the conceptualization of the program using research on the importance of engaging members of the school, family and community spheres as a framework for success. The third part is my reflection as a classroom teacher on the impact of the focus on the achievement gap and how the after school program was meant to provide supports for students in this category. I pose the phrase opportunity gap as a more appropriate term for the challenges minority and low-income students face. I use the works of authors and practitioners such as Kozol, Coates, Delpit, Ladson-Billings, and Hersch, to contextualize the challenges I had in the classroom.

KEYWORDS: achievement gap, after school program, partnerships, opportunity gap, state mandated assessment

Serenity T Wright
Student's Signature
July 30, 2015
Date

THE LEARNING STATION: A HOLISTIC SINGLE-CASE STUDY OF AN AFTER
SCHOOL PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

By

Serenity The Wright

Beth Goldstein

Director of Dissertation

Robert Shapiro

Director of the Graduate School

July 30, 2015

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the study	1
Introduction.....	1
Case Study Design	10
Single-case, Holistic Design	11
Single-case Design.....	11
Holistic Units of Analysis.....	12
Selection of Research Site	13
Access and Researcher Role	13
History of the Learning Station.....	14
Chapter 2: Measuring the Achievement Gap: A quantitative perspective of a single-case study of the Learning Station.....	24
Synopsis	24
A brief overview of the No Child Left Behind Act	24
Benefits of NCLB	30
Drawbacks of NCLB.....	32
A brief overview of the achievement gap	36
High stakes tests.....	37
MAP.....	38
Quality Core.....	38
ACT.....	38
Career Readiness.....	39
Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.....	39
Work keys	40
Kentucky Online Testing	41
Kentucky Occupational Skills Standards Assessment.....	41
Compass.....	42
Framing the achievement gap	43
Methods.....	44
Learning Station as a tool for addressing the achievement gap.....	45
Data	46
Correlations.....	48
Repeated measures	51
Regression.....	55
Discussion	56
Limitations	59
Conclusion	60

Chapter 3: Coming Together: A qualitative perspective of a single-case study of the Learning Station.....	62
Synopsis	62
Introduction.....	63
Purpose of the study.....	65
Importance of the study	65
Research questions.....	67
Literature review	67
Solo County	74
Research design	79
To answer these research questions	80
Role of the researcher	82
Interviews.....	84
Teacher interview.....	84
Principal interview	87
Superintendent interview	89
School Social Worker interview	92
Parent interviews.....	94
Findings and Discussion	96
Mission.....	96
The achievement gap	99
The opportunity gap.....	101
Challenges.....	104
Discussion	109
Student	110
School	112
Community	114
Limitations	115
Next Steps.....	117
Conclusion	119
 Chapter 4: Achievement or opportunity gap: A teacher’s perspective	 121
Synopsis	121
Achievement gap or opportunity gap: A teacher’s perspective	121
Achievement gap or opportunity gap.....	126
Mindset to succeed.....	133
Academic success	135
Social success.....	150
Are they children or are they numbers?.....	154
Rapport, Respect, Care	157
Conclusion	160
 Chapter 5: Coda	 162

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Assessment rubric	166
Appendix B: Interview protocol	168
Appendix C: List of career and technical majors.....	170
Appendix D: Career clusters.....	171
Appendix E: Terms 2 and 3: Correlations between changes in MAP scores and Attendance	172
Appendix F: Term 2: Mean difference of gender on math and reading MAP scores.	173
Appendix G: Term 3: Mean difference of gender on math and reading MAP scores	174
Bibliography	175
VITA.....	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1, Descriptive Statistics.....	48
Table 2.2, Term 1 Correlations Between Changes in MAP Scores and Attendance.....	51
Table 2.3, Term 1 Mean Difference of Gender on Math and Reading Scores from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014.....	52
Table 2.4, Cohen's data	54

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1, National Trends of the Percentage of Low-Income Students.....	7
---	---

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

“Standardized tests can’t be the measure of all things that have to do with children.”
Ravitch 2012

Introduction

As an experienced teacher, I met often with the school social worker about several of my students. The school social worker was known to be an extremely caring individual who was welcoming of all students. I was known for a more tough love approach. We worked as a strong team for students’ academic success in all of their classes. But I’ll never forget the first time I felt completely helpless. I was in the social worker’s office meeting about a particular student, who I will refer to as John. John tended to frustrate his teachers because he never did his homework despite the fact that he was more than capable. He would constructively participate in class about half the time while spending the other time talking about skateboarding or otherwise distracting those around him. I liked John. I found him funny, lively and intelligent. But he was also exhausting. I was constantly asking John for his work, or trying to make accommodations because I knew he understood the material, he just preferred not to do his homework. On this day, though, the social worker and I were meeting because John had become aggressive verbally and in action in class. I was concerned because I had never seen him behave this way and when I made mention of calling home he said, “The beating is coming anyway whether you call or not...so I don’t care.”

Until he said that, I hadn’t noticed that he wore long sleeves every day. It had never occurred to me that his behavior was a coping mechanism. I also knew that sometimes students had a different version of the truth. As I sat with the social worker and relayed the story, she started to ask me a series of questions about his behavior. It

didn't take long to realize that this was a serious problem. In less than five minutes she was walking me through how to make an anonymous phone call to Child Protective Services. After five minutes of talking with Child Protective Services, I realized that I knew more about his situation than I had thought and I was devastated. Could I have done something sooner? How do I help him now? Is he going to be ok? Will he come to school tomorrow with visible marks? I left the social worker's office that day really worried.

John came to school the rest of that week. He was quiet and reserved. There was no joking and he did not participate in class. At the end of the week he brought me the form to complete so he could withdraw from school. He did not say anything when he handed it to me. He just looked at me. I started to ask questions but all he would say is, "My dad says this is best for me." I lost a student I cared about. The school lost a student who was a good test taker and was considered part of the achievement gap category. I barely made it back to my room before the tears started to flow.

I was so angry. I was angry at John's dad. I was angry at the system. I was angry at the school for making his absence about test scores. But, by the next week there was a different student in crisis and I moved on. The intense struggles of my students never seemed to lessen, while the amount of assessments continued to increase. I remember returning from maternity leave to a note from my long-term substitute that all content needed to be taught by the beginning of April in order to be ready for the state assessments. How were they supposed to be ready for these assessments when we were working to survive life every day?

A review of Kentucky's school assessment calendars indicated the many years when teachers were encouraged to ensure that the curriculum was covered by the second week of April due to the start of testing. School did not end until Memorial Day or later which often meant more than six weeks of testing for certain populations. The years with a difficult winter meant that while the academic calendar was extended, many state testing dates did not change so teachers lost even more instructional time with their students. Teachers struggled to cram content knowledge and test taking skills into a shortened academic calendar.

The three parts of this dissertation provide multiple perspectives on a single-case study of the ways in which the achievement gap is defined in the Solo County Public Schools district, Kentucky. I look specifically at the *Learning Station* program as a particular programmatic effort to help close the achievement gap and to contextualize this gap. The questions I asked were: How was the achievement gap defined in Solo County? How do members of the family, school and community spheres conceptualize a program to address the academic performance of the students in the gap? What are the potential effects on teachers with such an intense institutional focus on the scores and academic performance of students who have been categorized as part of the achievement gap?

Tyack and Cuban (1995) frame reform movements in schools as constantly changing, ever seeking a magic solution but making incremental progress at best. Under this premise, the rhetoric and terminology may change but the grammar of schooling stays the same. The "grammar" of schooling includes the ways in which schools are divided in terms of time (meaning school day and delineations throughout the day), space (the notion of dividing spaces with school buildings), assigning students to rooms for

different subjects and by different grades, and that students work to earn grades and then passing grades earn students credits (85). Tyack and Cuban (1995) argue that reforms historically were changes around the center of education, the center being classroom instruction, but not to the instruction itself. Multiple researchers further argue that reform should be focused on the interactions between teachers and students, in order to be effective (Coleman Report 1966, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Tyack and Cuban, 1995).

Tyack and Cuban (1995) point out that student success as defined by policymakers is dependent on a test score (34). Peck and Reitzug (2013) argue that in addition to student academic success being determined by test scores, the value of the students themselves has been linked to student performance on the standardized tests. Those students who do not perform well on the test are, therefore, not meeting achievement standards. In the 1970s-1980s there was measureable progress in closing the academic achievement gap between white students and their minority counterparts (Borman 2005, Grissmer, Kirby, Berends, and Williamson 1994, Smith and O'Day 1991). This documented change was in part due to the intentional focus on addressing issues of poverty (Borman 2005, Grissmer et al 1994) and the heightened focus on test scores as a means for measuring success (Tyack and Cuban 1995). According to Tyack and Cuban, defining the achievement gap requires attention to school contexts: In what ways, for instance, do educational institutions use assessment data to identify an achievement gap and to what extent does the identified "gap" factor into school-level scores. Historically, education policy makers have applied blanket reform movements in an attempt to increase student performance (Borman 2005, Peck and Reitzug 2013). According to Tyack and Cuban, the development of "score cards" to differentiate

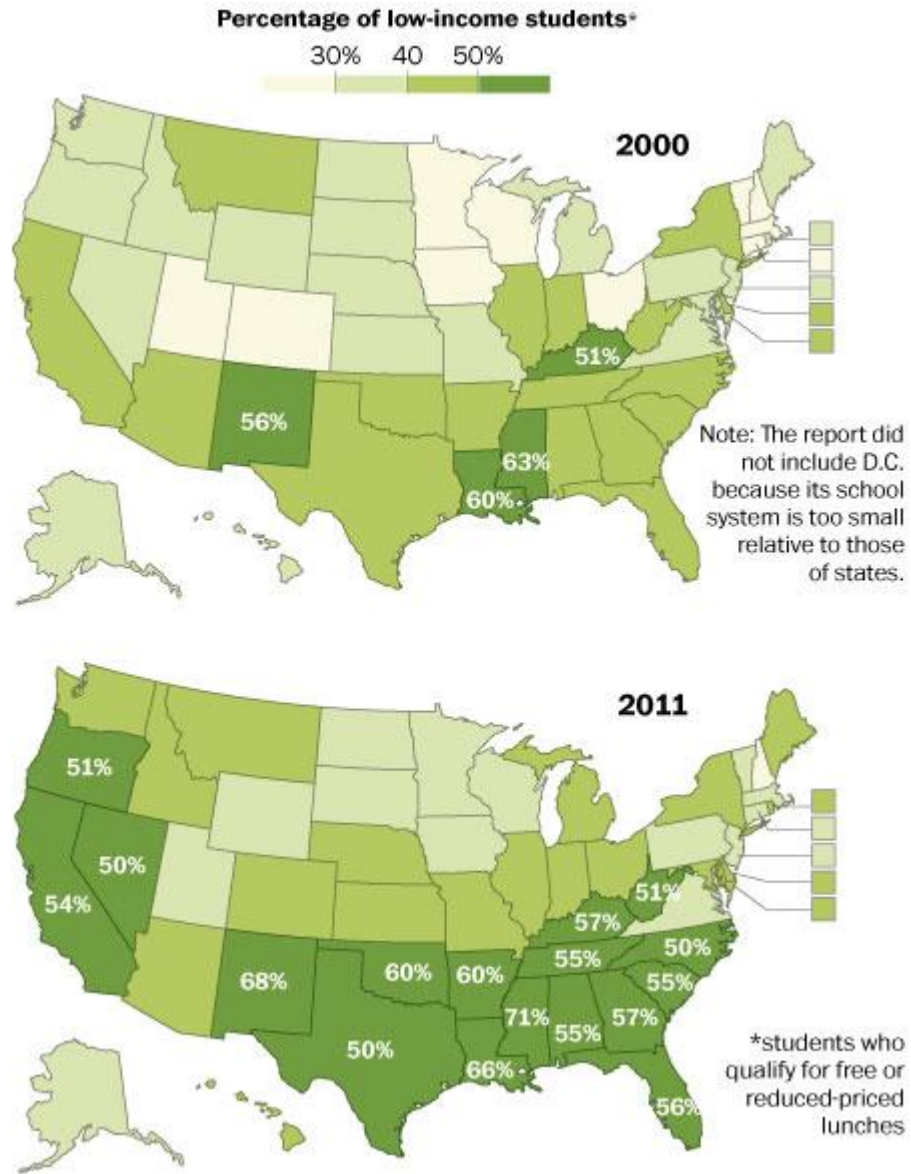
performance in and among schools and apply labels to the students behind the scores began as early as 1925. These score cards have been used to drive reform through threat instead of support (Jennings 2007)

Lyndon Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 funneled money towards low-income and impoverished schools as a means of addressing issues of poverty. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act has been reauthorized seven times since its original inception with the continued central goal of improving education opportunities for low income students (Strauss 2010). Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), education policy makers have focused more intentionally on the academic success of minority and low socioeconomic status groups, categorizing these students as the achievement gap due to their performance on tests. Researchers (Peck and Reitzug 2013, Hess 1999, Hess 2010, Tyack and Cuban 1995) argue that NCLB has caused schools to reform as quickly as possible through temporary and cyclical reform methods. Most administrators are asking teachers to look specifically at students who fall in the achievement gap category and evaluate the instructional practices teachers use to ensure that teachers are raising the test scores of students who are in the achievement gap category. Intentional focus and consideration through instructional content and support programs is being placed on the achievement gap at both the local and national level. One of the primary motivations for the more intentional focus on data driven instruction was an effort to address academic disparities between demographic groups. The goal for these data driven instructional practices was to help enhance improvement at all levels but specifically for academically struggling students. Students who typically perform the worst on standardized academic assessments tend to be ethnic minority or low-income

students. Students who fit these demographics are classified by education policy makers as the achievement gap.

In summarizing the various definitions of the achievement gap, education policy makers have identified a group of students, who, due to a variety of individual characteristics, tend to struggle in formal academic settings. In other words, students have been categorized by their social location. In some instances, parents, teachers and students focus on issues other than academic performance as the reasons that students receive a qualitatively different education. These include lack of access to resources, lack of culturally responsive teaching, and lack of access to educational resources. (Coleman Report 1966, Jennings 2007, Peck and Reitzug 2013). Dugger (1988) states that social location includes how a person is defined through race and class. The social cultural capital that students in the achievement gap possess could be primarily influenced by socio economic status (Coleman Report 1966, Jennings 2007, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Kao and Thompson 2003). Socioeconomic status brings with it a certain understanding of behaviors and opportunities. Students from low socio economic backgrounds have been shown to have different home lives after school than their more affluent counterparts, which could have a direct impact on their academic performance (Coleman Report 1966, Delpit 1995, Hersch 1998 and Ladson-Billings 1994). One way of measuring socioeconomic status in a school is by analyzing the free and reduced lunch numbers for that school. Jordan Weissman (2013) provides a frightening visual concerning the rate at which students who qualify for free and reduced lunches are growing in the United States.

Figure 1.1 National trends of the percentage of low-income students



In just a little more than a decade, not only has the percentage of students in a state with 50% or more free or reduced lunch students grown, but the number of states who have 50% or more of their students qualifying for free or reduced lunch has quadrupled. A research study conducted by UNICEF in 2005 further supports Weissman’s argument as it revealed that the United States had “one of the highest child

poverty rates of all of the industrialized nations” (UNICEF, Innocenti Research Center 2005). The state of poverty is significant to recognize because the students who qualify for free or reduced lunch tend to require more support from their schools in order to be academically successful. “In 2011, there were 17 states where at least half of all public school students came from low-income families, up from just four in 2000. Across the whole country, 48 percent of kids qualified as low income, up from 38 percent a decade earlier” (Weissman 2013). As the number of low-income students in a classroom has tripled in the last decade, our schools, and our students are becoming poorer. Weissman (2013) further stated that Kentucky has had a long history of leading the charts for schools where more than half the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch. Thus, by definition the achievement gap has become a category for a group of students who are categorized as minorities or those who qualify for free or reduced lunch. This will be discussed further as part of the case study.

School report cards are integral to the grammar of schooling (Tyack and Cuban 1995). One of the ways that Kentucky schools are receiving pressure is through their school report cards. School scores and academic performance levels are becoming increasingly more integrated into societal vernacular with each passing year as scores are published locally, state wide and nationally. This highly visible public representation of school performance is adding pressure on individual schools and districts to raise student scores. Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear’s proposed education budget (released January 21, 2014) made a financial commitment to programs that serve diverse populations. In other words, schools are receiving institutional pressures from departments of education and also from communities. Many departments are meeting to

discuss ways in which the departments can use their data to enhance student learning. In Solo County, departments created weekly learning checks to be able to compare student progress amongst subject teams; the district purchased benchmark assessment software so that each department could enter the standards for the subject areas and track student performance on assessments on the standards; and Quality Core type assessments were given on a regular basis to help acclimate students to the testing system.

The following parts discuss the achievement gap, analyze the impact of an after school academic program designed to support the achievement gap, and contextualize the relationship between the classroom teacher and achievement gap students.

Case Study Design

The parts in this series use a holistic single-case study approach to analyze the impact and contextualization of an after school tutoring program. Yin (2003) argues that the “case study as a research strategy comprises an all-encompassing method- covering the logic design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis...a comprehensive research strategy” (14). Yin (2003) further explained the different types of case studies depending on the types of questions that the researcher is attempting to answer. This case study is an exploratory holistic single-case study that addresses “what” and “how” questions (22).

Each of these parts provides a unique element to the case study whose overall purpose is to analyze one school’s approach to closing the achievement gap through an after-school tutoring program. The first part provides quantitative data concerning the outcomes of the Learning Station program in terms of the relationship between attendance and academic performance. The second part uses a qualitative research

design to contextualize of the *Learning Station* program from perspectives of school personnel, family and community. Finally, the third part provides auto-ethnographic reflections from my time as a classroom teacher, set in conversation with other teacher narratives.

Single-case, Holistic Design

Yin (2003) proposed the single-case design and the multiple-case design as the primary types of case studies. The distinguishing difference between the two is the contextual conditions. A single-case looks at one set of contextual conditions while the multiple-case design method is beneficial when analyzing situations from multiple contexts. I analyze a single context, an after school tutoring program, in this manuscript from various perspectives. It is important to analyze after school programs within their particular school context. While this approach does not allow for comparisons across other programs, it does allow for more in-depth analysis of this particular program. Within these types of case study designs, Yin also distinguished between an embedded case study and a holistic case study. Yin argued that a holistic approach is beneficial when the nature of the topic is itself holistic. In addition, due to the broad nature and expansive research on the topic of the achievement gap, this is a holistic single-case study. Given the multiple perspectives analyzed as part of this case study, a single case design using holistic evidence was best. Since I am not using other programs as comparison samples, it was important that I gain an in-depth understanding of this particular program in order to fully understand it. Several quantitative analyses are presented to explore any relationship between attendance in the program and scores on a specific state mandated assessment. Interviews of many adult participants were analyzed

in order to contextualize the program. However, no students were interviewed as part of this process, eliminating a key perspective in understanding the program¹.

Single-case design. Yin (2003) identified five rationales (but recognized that there could be more) for using a single-case design. One rationale is a *critical* case which tests a well-formulated theory; for rare cases there is the *extreme* or *unique* case; a *representative* or *typical* case is when the situation is perceived to be an everyday occurrence; a *revelatory* case is necessary when a researcher is able to analyze a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible; and a *longitudinal* case studies a situation over time (40-41). One of the primary pitfalls of the single case design is that if the situation is not studied carefully then sometimes the case can turn out to be something different than expected (42).

A single-case design for this study was selected because the context is a representative case. The site of the study was Solo County High School (SCHS, a pseudonym), the only public high school in Solo County. According to the district records, approximately 1250 are students enrolled in SCHS with socioeconomic and racial diversity that is reflective of the community. This will be discussed further in the second part. Since this case study focused on one program in a school it is considered a single context and hence, a single-case study.

A drawback for a single-case design is that there are no other samples to compare to the results found in this study. If my quantitative data indicates a significant correlation between attendance in the program and scores on the state mandated

¹ The justification for not interviewing students as part of this study will be discussed briefly in the second article.

assessment, I do not have other programs with which to corroborate my findings. Also, this design method does not allow for multiple perspectives on program designs in an effort to understand which specific features of a particular program contribute to the results.

Holistic units of analysis. A holistic analysis approach was chosen because this case study analyzes the *Learning Station* program as a whole. This looks at the “global nature of the program” (Yin, 2003, 43). Yin warned that this analytical method hinders the researcher in analyzing any specific phenomena. This can cause the data to “lack any clear evidence” (45). I attempt to address this by collecting multiple types of data in the forms of quantitative analysis, interviews of adults connected with the program and field observations. But, it is important to recognize the limits introduced by having omitted the student perspective from the data collection. By not including the student perspective in the data collection, the student goals for the program are not included, the perceptions by the adults of the benefits of the program cannot be affirmed or disputed by those actually in the program and student input in terms of needs by the program are not included.

Similarly, Yin (2003) recommends that multiple-case studies be conducted when possible. The comparative analysis inherent in multiple-case designs allows the researcher to strengthen the argument established. Even though an abundance of research exists on programs of this nature, analyzing this after school program from multiple perspectives provides a more in-depth analysis of the program. As stated above, while a multiple-case design would allow me to corroborate my findings, the holistic nature of this single-case study will provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Selection of the research site. For this single-case study, I was limited in possible sites given I was a classroom teacher when this project was started. Since SCHS is the only public high school in the county the travel time to another school would have limited my ability to conduct the research. Thus, my criterion for site selection was based on practicality. I chose to use a program that I had been a part of establishing in the school in which I was teaching. My initial motivation was to be able to justify the need for funding for continued program funding to the teachers, school administration and district administration.

Access and researcher role. As a co-founder of the early versions of the *Learning Station* program I had years of notes regarding adjustments, observations, challenges, and successes. Starting in the fall of the 2013-2014 school year, I was appointed as the Academic and Behavior Interventionist for the school and program manager for the *Learning Station*. I regularly attended one session a week and documented proceedings while managing the behavioral conduct of the students in the room in order to reflect and make any necessary logistical programmatic adjustments. In October of 2013 I approached the school principal to ask permission to conduct an official research study of the program. In mid-December of that school year I accepted a job outside the Solo County school system and worked with the school and district administration to ensure that I would still be able to attend sessions of the program. I did not have trouble gaining support and consent from the school and district administration. Before I left the school at the mid-year break I transferred all data collection responsibilities to another teacher who participated in the program.

History of *The Learning Station*

The origins of *The Learning Station* conform in important ways to Tyack and Cuban's (1995) description of a reform that attempted to solve issues in education without addressing the "grammar of schooling" (85). The *Station* was intended to narrow the achievement gap by offering more time and support for academics through an after school tutoring program designed for low-achieving students. The *Station* was intended to support achievement since it supplemented the teaching that was happening in the classrooms (Coleman Report 1966, Borman 2005). As program coordinators, and teachers in the building, discussed the need to help students who were struggling academically the broad categories identified for support were time and tutoring. Tyack and Cuban (1995) would argue that this is in keeping with typical educational reforms in that the grammar of schooling was not being addressed, nor were more meaningful interactions in between the student and teachers being created. They argued that in order to address achievement through reform more must be offered. Offering more included everything except more opportunities. The Coleman Report (1966) stated that minority students had a lack of access to opportunities, both curricular and extracurricular, that would lead to academic success (21). Again, this concept of more did not include opportunities through changes in the grammar of schooling but more of the structure that is already in place. By providing students with more time to complete assignments, more academic support through tutoring, and time to complete missed assessments, the *Learning Station* did not change what was occurring in classrooms but provided more of the same which would hopefully lead to academic success.

The Learning Station program stemmed from a conversation between myself and the school social worker during the 2010-2011 school year as we talked about struggling students who were performing poorly academically. Even though tutoring was provided by individual teachers before and after school every day we felt as though these students needed extra attention. We recognized a need to provide an organized tutoring environment to provide students with the opportunity to receive support. This support included opportunities to be fed, receive academic support and feel included. Several of the academically struggling students we knew had stated that they wish they could stay late or come early but there were transportation issues that they could not overcome due to work or family commitments so we provided them with transportation as well. We brainstormed a draft of a program proposal and met with the school principal to discuss options. The purpose of the program was not to address skills (reading, writing, etc.) but to be a place where students could get homework done and receive extra tutoring to better understand concepts. The short-term program goal was to increase student performance on in-class assessments. Program coordinators were hopeful that, in an effort to help justify the program, standardized testing data would show a direct correlation between attendance in the program and performance on the test. Upon presenting our proposal to the principal, we felt encouraged and motivated. He was very supportive of the program idea and found us funds to finance teachers, food and transportation for the program. Once teachers committed to the program and a formal budget was submitted, it was determined that in order to fund the program one of the three key elements would have to go: paying for teachers, paying for food or paying for transportation. After having one-on-one discussions with each of the teachers who I had recruited to the program, they all

agreed to participate despite loss of compensation for their time in order to keep food and transportation for the program. Students were intentionally targeted based on academic success patterns. Information letters were sent home about the program along with permission slips and a schedule of club meeting dates for parents to select when their student would need to ride the bus. An informative email was then sent to the entire faculty outlining the goals and details of the program along with a participant roster. Additionally, information was sent to teachers outlining the system for sending work for students to complete.

Students reported to my classroom as soon as the bell rang at the end of the day. Either the school social worker or myself met them at the door to have each student sign in while the other helped distribute snacks. Students were given 15 minutes to eat their snack and then divided up into the content area in which they needed help. There were three different classrooms where students could receive help. Math was conducted in the classroom of the participating math teacher in the hallway perpendicular to mine. I could literally see into the math classroom from my classroom window. Science tutoring was conducted in a classroom in a hallway perpendicular to the end of the hall of the math classroom. Students who needed help with social studies, English, electives, or needed to speak with the social worker stayed in my classroom. There were two primary reasons for using the different classrooms. One, since teachers were volunteering their time, one of their requests was to be able to provide tutoring from their own classrooms in order to ensure that they had all the materials they would need to teach their content areas. The second primary reason was to help eliminate distractions. The hope was that by providing a content specific environment, with fewer students, that students would be

more intentionally focused on their work. Initially, students could travel freely between the rooms in order to get assignments completed. However, we learned very quickly that despite the close proximity and the line of site, students still managed to disappear en route to the different rooms. At the end of the two-hour session, students who rode the district supplied bus home were released first. These students were escorted to the bus by the school social worker who ensured that they got on the correct bus. Within the first few weeks, the number of students who needed to ride the bus home dwindled to barely a handful. The only reason that the district agreed to provide transportation for these students was because many who had been identified as needing help argued that they could not stay after school because of a lack of transportation home. However, this argument was clearly voided very quickly when very few students actually took advantage of this provision.

This initial version of the *Learning Station* program ran for two terms during the 2010-2011 school year. The school social worker and I were told at the end of that year that the program would not be funded for the 2011-2012 school year. However, during the third trimester of the 2011-2012 school year one of the associate principals attempted to find a teacher who would coordinate the program in the face of evidence that minority and low-income students were struggling academically. I was on maternity leave during this time so there was a need for a replacement coordinator, but given the amount of time and energy required to run the program, and the lack of funding, no one would volunteer. As a result, there was no program during the 2011-2012 school year.

With the revival of *Learning Station* at the end of the 2012-2013 school year and the intention to have the program for the entire 2013-2014 academic year, the issues of

work for students, space and transportation were once again revisited. In order to encourage students to be more responsible for their work, the program coordinators and administrators chose to require students to be responsible for collecting the work themselves. Teachers had the opportunity and the option to send work to the program coordinators or through involved teachers, but the emphasis was placed on the student to come with work. Second, the program was moved into the school library so that all students were in one central location. Content areas then had assigned sections in which they met every week so students knew where to consistently expect teachers to be available for help. Finally, it was decided that given the low number of students who took advantage of the transportation home that the program would not offer this service again.

The primary goal of the program was to provide students with an opportunity to receive additional support (academic, social and personal). The purpose of the program was not to work on academic skills such as reading. To the faculty in the building, program coordinators touted extra tutoring and homework help as the primary goal for the program. For administrators in the building, program coordinators promoted the notion that performance on standardized tests could increase as a result of attendance in the program. An underlying goal of the program was the teaching and development of life skills. Students need certain skills as they exit schools into their communities that allow them to be informed, active and engaged citizens. These are skills that you typically do not learn when preparing for a standardized tests. Skills such as respecting difference, agency, and cosmopolitanism (Appiah 2006, Griffin 1992, and Parker 2003) are just a few examples. These skills were positioned as district goals for learning but not

obtainable goals for the program. As part of the philosophy for the district, instructional programs should “build skills vital to the welfare of the individual and the nation (SCPS.com).” Since the program was designed reactively to address the needs of struggling students, the intent and focus of the program was to help students be immediately successful. The focus was on the welfare of the individual. According to the Coleman Report (1966), standardized tests are a measure of opportunities (29). This program was designed to provide students with an opportunity to learn, thus supporting students in being more academically successful. Success was defined as higher grades in their courses with the hope of impact on students’ state assessment scores. The tutoring that occurred during *Learning Station* sessions was important for short term student success. Ravitch (2010a) argued that her most memorable teacher was the one who taught her about character and personal responsibility; skills vital to being an individual. I often told my students that if they remembered nothing of the content that I taught, I hoped they would remember how to be responsible, how to form an opinion, think critically, and be organized. I agree with Ravitch that these skills of character and personal responsibility are necessary for life success, but they are not learned through preparing the content that will be tested on a standardized test. Programs like the *Learning Station* could fill in the learning gap for what federal policy makers will not allow educators to teach. This initial approach to the *Learning Station* was done in the philosophical spirit of Nel Noddings. Using concepts from Noddings (2005), it was the shared goal of the school social worker and I that we would care for minority and low-income students who were struggling academically by providing them with an opportunity for help. The school social worker and I knew these students, as a whole,

struggled to eat after school so we provided them with a full meal. We knew these students struggled in distractive learning environments; so we attempted to minimize distractions and the size of the teaching population. We heard the students when they mentioned the lack of resources at home for projects or academic help so we implemented a parent curriculum in order to engage the parents in the process. We attempted to accommodate every excuse that the students could provide in order to not stay thus eliminating their ability to remove themselves from the support. However, in the end, this approach seemed to further disengage students from their academic responsibilities and adjustments needed to be made. In an attempt to transfer ownership to students, we provided them with academic planners and a club website to help them keep track of assignments, meeting dates and updates.

A substantial body of research addresses after school programs that have similar goals to the *Learning Station* program. The Southern Regional Education Board (2010) and The Journal of Negro Education (2011) have published articles analyzing the outcomes of these programs. The Southern Regional Education Board (2010) article, *Giving students Extra Support to Meet Standards in Challenging Academic and Career Course: High Schools that Work*, analyzes after school programs in eight different states. This article identifies the key elements of a successful after school tutoring program as those that are comprehensive, and engage all members of the school community in addition to the home and the community. Hynes and Sanders (2011) in their article in the Journal of Negro Education, used nationally representative data over a 10 year period from 1995-2005 to determine the impacts of after school tutoring programs to address the academic disparity between blacks and whites. This study showed that nationally, black

students were significantly more likely than white students to attend and benefit from after school tutoring programs. The in depth qualitative data from The Southern Regional Education Board and the extensive quantitative data from Hynes and Sanders provide a nationally representative example of how to develop a successful after school tutoring program to close the achievement gap. All of the programs reviewed in these journals, including the *Learning Station*, maintain the typical pattern of reform in which efforts were temporary and reincarnated efforts, quick fixes, aimed at particular groups, with an extensive focus on policy talk and calls for action but very little movement in the implementation of change to the grammar of schooling (Hess 1999, Hess 2010, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Tyack and Cuban 1995). This dissertation presents three different perspectives on one high school's attempt to close the Achievement Gap in an effort to contribute to this body of research.

The first part titled, "Measuring the Achievement Gap: A quantitative perspective on a single-case study of the Learning Station" focuses specifically on the ways in which Solo County High School defined and collected data on the Achievement Gap during the 2013-2014 school year. With the intensity of high stakes testing and testing frequency becoming part of mainstream conversation, I provide a brief overview of the various state and district mandated tests that students are required to take throughout the course of the year. This study analyzed the ways in which the school was required to define the achievement gap. The study used the *Learning Station* as a case study to discover whether or not the after school tutoring program contributed to the educational success of students in the achievement gap through an analysis of achievement gap students' scores on high stakes tests and in the classroom.

The second part titled: “Coming Together: A qualitative perspective on a single-case study of the *Learning Station*” uses field work to explore the conceptualization of a specific academic program that intentionally targeted students in the achievement gap in a high school setting. This part discusses the conceptualization of the *Learning Station* using research on the importance of engaging members of the school, family and community spheres as a framework for success. Interviews were conducted with key adult stakeholders in the development of the program. It is a description and analysis of the construction and perceived impact of the program from their perspectives. There were two main groups of participants. The primary group of participants was the teachers who were involved with the program at every session. These participating teachers were identified as primary because they were involved regularly in the creation and delivery of the program and were able to provide a sense of the impacts of the program. The second group consists of the district Superintendent, the school Principal, the program co-founder, and parents who serve on the school’s Site Based Decision Making Council’s (SBDM) Community Relations committee. The administration and parents were identified as secondary since, while they were invested in the program, they have been minimally involved in the execution of the program. The parents were chosen because in addition to serving on the SBDM committee, they also had students who attended the program. The interview questions for all groups were rooted in their perspectives of the program and The Gap, why the program was developed and, in their opinions about how or why student learning has been affected by the *Learning Station*.

The third part titled, “Achievement or Opportunity Gap: A teacher’s perspective” focuses on the realistic trials, tribulations and successes both in and out of the classroom

from my perspective as a classroom teacher. I use the works of Jonathan Kozol and Rodney Coates as supporting context for my reflections. Kozol was instrumental in defining me as a pre-service teacher and Coates has had a significant impact on how I view education policy. I also provide a personal analysis of the achievement gap and an account of the development, implementation and maintenance of the *Learning Station*.

Chapter 2

Measuring the Achievement Gap: A quantitative perspective of a single-case study of the Learning Station

Synopsis

In this part I discuss the ways in which schools in Kentucky defined the achievement gap among students and the role high stakes tests played in defining the gap and assessing school performance in narrowing the gap. I look specifically at how the achievement gap has been defined by the KY Department of Education and in turn by the Solo County Public Schools district. In addition to discussing the various tests and rubrics used to measure school performance, I present findings from an analysis of assessment data linked to one high school program, a *Learning Station*, designed to narrow the achievement gap within the high school. Solo County developed the *Learning Station* as one academic support for students identified as struggling academically and falling into an achievement gap. As part of an exploratory holistic single-case study of Solo County's *Learning Station*, I collected quantitative data on test scores and attendance of Learning Station participants to assess the impacts of this program on student participation and academic performance (Yin 2003).

A Brief Overview of the No Child Left Behind Act

Education reform is not new. Researchers (Borman 2005, Grissmer et al 1994, Jennings 2007, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Rowan 1990, Smith and O'Day 1991, Tyack and Cuban 1995) discuss the long history of patterns of school reform. They posit that the substantial amount of work in talking about policy and the call for action seldom translate into action, in the implementation phase. The adjustments are to the surface of education

institutions with very little change to the grammar of schooling. Schools as institutions, by and large, remain the same. Lashaw (2010) argues that education reform “movements often promise more than they deliver” (Lashaw, 2010, 323). In many ways, education reform tends to operate on a pendulum. Researchers (Hess 1999, Peck and Reitzug 2013) argue that most reform efforts are reincarnations of previous reforms with different rhetoric. The words for the initiative may change but the intent behind the reform is the same. Tyack and Cuban (1995) posit that the rhetoric around classroom instruction changes while making minimal adjustments to instructional practices. The pieces of education reform such as assessments, objectives, scores, and outcomes never go away; the spotlight might temporarily shift to a different focus for a period of time but it always returns. The immutability of education reform has caused a chasm between education and society. Parents, teachers and students have constantly called education policy makers in to question. Politicians debate and doubt the agendas of opposing sides. Tyack and Cuban (1995) discussed the tensions between education and society. These researchers argue that identified issues in society are often transferred into the education sphere as a solution to the social ill. *Tinkering Toward Utopia* discusses the policy and pedagogical issues that result because of this practice. Their discussions of the implementation of educational changes to pedagogy and practice critique the formulaic model that has been used historically. Changes to policy and practice fail, according to Tyack and Cuban, when the development and implementation of these are instituted and mandated from a top down approach versus an involved and informed teacher-led initiative. Thus, according to Tyack and Cuban, initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act were destined to fail from the beginning due to its top down approach from the highest

level of the federal government. Tyack and Cuban did not attempt to argue that these policy changes and initiatives were new in any way, but focused on the ways that they were in constant mutation. In fact, they document 100 years of reform around similar initiatives with incremental changes to classroom instruction. This is the key element for educational reform; the idea that it is malleable. Unfortunately, malleability is dependent on the policy makers.

When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was put into law, it drastically increased the role of the federal government in education (Ravitch 2010b). The primary focus of NCLB was to focus on groups that had been historically marginalized or ignored in public schooling. NCLB forced schools to analyze data through required standardized testing and disaggregate that data based on race, ethnicity, free or reduced lunch, special education, and English Language Learners. According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), educational reforms tend to target specific groups rather than address possible failures in the larger educational enterprise. These researchers note that the education system recognizes that all children are different, but by giving students different labels, especially those “who did not fit [the school’s] definition of normal” then each child would have a place (20). Assigning students the label of being part of the “achievement gap”, was a way to appear to be addressing the topic without being forced to make changes to the institution. NCLB, for instance, was another reauthorization of Lyndon Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Neill 2010, feb.newamerica.net, n.d., www.ed.gov). This modern inception of a previous reform was geared towards more intentionally monitoring and testing students identified as falling in the achievement gap category. Thus, education saw a reinstatement of an old reform

movement that had been reshaped and labeled as something new and innovative that would ensure that the students given the label achievement gap were learning. As discussed in previous sections, this approach to reform is the traditional norm. The purpose of NCLB is to ensure that “all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (<http://www2.ed.gov/>).” In addition to requiring that students be proficient in reading and math by 2014, schools were required to provide students with the opportunity to learn. As schools, teachers, parents, and students struggled to adapt to changes that required schools to reach unrealistic goal of proficiency, bitterness and resentment grew as hope and renewal dwindled amongst those invested in education. From my own experience, teachers recognized quickly that the goal to have every child proficient by 2014 was not practical; teachers and administrators were frustrated with the new mandates from NCLB and the lack of funds to support the initiatives; and students and teachers became disheartened with the unspoken need to focus on test taking skills instead of content.

With the election of President Obama came a renewed sense of hope among teachers for an era of change and support for education. Much to the chagrin of many in education, the Obama Administration did little to change NCLB. Tyack and Cuban (1995) would most likely describe this as a typical response to educational reform. “[A]lthough policy talk about reform has had a utopian ring, actual reforms have been gradual and incremental- tinkering with the system (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, 5).” Under the Obama administration, there has been some tinkering from the NCLB reforms created

by the Bush administration, but the heightened focus on College and Career Readiness (www.ed.gov) has tightened the strangle hold of testing on education. In an Education Week (2011) article, McNeil and Klein, note that while the Obama Administration may be relaxing the deadline for all students to be proficient in math and reading by 2014, it comes at a cost for teachers. The increased emphasis on college and career readiness which is measured through more tests (www.act.org), as well as the introduction of teacher evaluations based on student performance on the test (Camera 2014, Jennings 2012) actually enhances the focus on testing. “The Administration removed some of the more onerous aspects of NCLB but nonetheless staunchly maintained a tight Federal grip over the nation’s schools. The expectation that 100 percent of all students would be proficient by 2014 was replaced by the expectation that all students would be ‘college-ready and career-ready’ by 2020” (Ravitch 2010a). Noguera (2009) argued that the increased role of the federal government in public education through testing might be a key legacy of the Bush Administration. The continued emphasis on testing was supposed to advance the achievement of minority students through the quality of education (Coleman Report 1966). The emphasis on standardized testing has remained a pillar of education. There was some adjustment such as “encouraging common academic standards and school reform [College and Career Readiness and the adoption of Common Core], waving key provisions of NCLB [like the requirement for all students to be proficient in reading and math by 2014] (Jennings 2012)” to the program but the emphasis was still on testing and assessment. “Tinkering is one way of preserving what is valuable and reworking what is not (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, 5).” The focus on test scores and data was preserved. The rhetoric shifted from having all students perform as

proficient on these tests to ensuring that all students were college and career ready. Administrators were still driving teachers to ensure improvement in test scores to prevent Federal penalties. More opportunities were not being provided for students but the focus on testing was maintained. Students became numbers, benchmark scores, and were no longer seen as children. In order to attempt to gain buy in for the revised NCLB, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, offered money to schools (Ravitch 2010a) in an attempt to capitalize on the American competitive nature. States competed for economic stimulus funds to support the constantly decreasing education budget.

NCLB gave parents hope that its initiatives for educators would close the achievement gap between white or affluent students and minority (typically black and Hispanic) and low-income students (Hunter and Bartee, 2003, Lewis, 2003, Mumford 2007). Many stakeholders in education have been hopeful that with each minute adjustment to NCLB the initiative would get better, more practical. Thus, while the spotlight may not be directly on the No Child Left Behind Act as a whole anymore, education reform continues to highlight different aspects of a modified version of NCLB.

Over the course of the last decade, the spotlight has hovered around testing as the method to measure student performance and success. The intensity of the focus on school performance has continued to increase as additional points of data collection have continued to be added to schools through various methods of measurement. From student report cards to school report cards, from classroom tests to national exams, schools, teachers and students are constantly being measured against various benchmarks. Capitalizing on the Western culture of individual competition to drive education

performance, schools are being punished or rewarded based on their performance. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was the tipping point for the focus on the role of testing in identifying the academic performance of specific groups in schools. NCLB highlighted the achievement gap in schools. NCLB immediately became a polarizing political issue that has continued to divide members of government and educators at all levels. As with any reform initiative, NCLB did not come without its own positives and negatives which are discussed in the next two sections.

Benefits of NCLB. As a classroom teacher whose entire career was working with minority and low-income students it is my opinion that at its core NCLB had great potential as an initiative. It mandated a regular testing system that would hold schools and teachers accountable for the students whom they served. Specifically, it would highlight the level of academic performance of low- income and minority students in comparison with their more affluent and, typically, white peers. Data were no longer a suggestion or an analytical system to be used sporadically and sparingly. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students were thrust into an educational world where data defined their abilities, dictated their activities and determined their opportunities. As a result of this, certain sub-groups of students were thrust into the forefront. Students of low socioeconomic status, minorities, English language learners, and students with disabilities quickly became the focus of schools across the nation as an Achievement Gap (Darling Hammond 2010, ETS Policy notes 2005, Haycock 2006, The Warren Institute 2007, Zavadsky 2006). These students were categorized for their lack of performance on state and national tests. NCLB required that schools address this group of students and erase the Achievement Gap by ensuring that all students be proficient by 2014. One of the

benefits to NCLB was the standardization of academic expectations. In addition to the expectation that all students be proficient by 2014, NCLB was also meant to increase academic expectations. Desimone (2013) conducted a study with 32 schools in 10 districts and five states. She interviewed 60 teachers, 32 principals, 14 district administrators, and seven state officials. These data showed that teachers' perceptions of NCLB was that it provided more "conceptual forms of learning, problem solving, and real-world learning" (Desimone 61). Additionally, the teachers in the research study also stated that the standards were "emphasizing areas previously not covered, focusing more on student understanding rather than getting the right answers, and presenting lessons in ways designed to increase student comprehension and retention" (p. 61). The Warren Institute (2007) argues that one of the greatest potential outcomes of NCLB was that it would eliminate the ability of poor teachers and poor schools to make excuses for why their students were not performing. The Warren Institute (2007) further argues that NCLB will provide "high quality assessment needed for effective school reform" (3). In other words, the assessments and data tracking implemented by NCLB will force the necessary changes that need to happen in schools to ensure that all students are learning. How could anything that mandated all students learn be a negative? I discuss later the issues that arose as part of this mandate.

Evidence of school performance was released annually so that parents could know the status of the school system. The amount of time that schools spent analyzing standardized testing data increase significantly each year NCLB was in place under President Bush. Under the Obama Administration, the amount of time spent on analyzing data has leveled off and the focus of the data analysis has become more

intentional. Schools were challenged by NCLB to not just track the data that they were collecting but to then make measureable adjustments to their instructional practices from the data. By effectively using the data that had been collected, schools could then adjust and strengthen the curriculum that was being taught (Zavadsky 2006). Zavadsky (2006) identified five school districts in a study that had proven to make substantial growth under NCLB. According to Zavadsky, the reason for their success was under two major initiatives: curriculum and data. In terms of curriculum, these school districts: supported teachers through curriculum maps, worked to vertically align the curriculum and conducted a rigorous schedule of walkthroughs as formative evaluation of the curriculum. For data, these school districts: implemented common benchmark assessments, use data to drive instruction, and facilitated teacher conversations about underperforming groups. The goal of NCLB was to hold schools and teachers accountable for the performance of all of its students. It mandated that all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014. In 2008, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg argued that with his Mayoral control over schools under NCLB, he managed to close the gap in his schools (Haimson and Ravitch 2013). However, national tests showed that the schools made little to no gains under the NCLB initiatives (Borman 2005, Haefner and Fitchett 2013, Kumashiro 2015 and Ravitch 2009). How effective were the NCLB initiatives in terms of student learning? And, how effective were these tests as measuring tools of student knowledge?

Drawbacks of NCLB. Teachers who object to NCLB, generally disagree with its intense focus on measuring student performance and then punishing schools and teachers for the students who don't perform (Cawelti 2006, Ravitch 2010b and Stiggins and Chapuis 2005). Unfortunately, it appears that NCLB has had little impact on

achievement. While students have shown some improvements in reading and math since the implementation of NCLB, the test data clearly shows that there was almost double the amount of improvement in scores prior to the enactment of NCLB (Borman 2005, Ravitch 2010b). In fact, studies show that in the last decade there has been minimal improvement in closing the achievement gap between white and African American students (Haefner and Fitchett 2013, Kumashiro 2015 and Ravitch 2009). Guisbond, Neill and Shaeffer (2012) found that growth on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments were higher before the implementation of NCLB. For example, math scores between 1996-2003 increased by 11 points, but between 2003-2011 only increased six points. Reading scores have barely increased (three points) since the implementation of NCLB. NCLB's intense focus on standardized testing expanded Federal control into every public school in the United States (Jennings 2007, Ravitch 2010b). This increased Federal control has removed control from administrators' abilities to run their schools. In addition to controlling the administrative workings of schools, the intense focus on test scores hinders the true practice and nature of education (Diamond and Spillane 2004, Partnership for 21st Century Skills 2009, Ravitch 2010a). In other words, schools are no longer creating lifelong learners but good test takers. According to Stiggins and Chappuis (2005), part of the problem in using data from standardized assessment to drive instruction is that the feedback is infrequent and too broad. As a result of the focus on testing, students have been leaving high schools with a lack of basic background knowledge and skills because teachers have been forced to rush the learning process in order to have time to teach for the tests. No educator has ever wanted to teach for a test.

We want them to face life's joys and travails with courage and humor. We hope that they will be kind and compassionate in their dealings with others. We want them to have a sense of justice and fairness. We want them to understand our nation and our world and the challenges we face. We want them to be active, responsible citizens, prepared to think issues through carefully, to listen to differing views, and to reach decisions rationally. We want them to learn science and mathematics so they understand the problems of modern life and participate in finding solutions. We want them to enjoy the rich artistic and cultural heritage of our society and other societies. If these are our goals, the current narrow, utilitarian focus of our national testing regime is not sufficient to reach any of them. Indeed, to the extent that we make the testing regime our master, we may see our true goals recede farther and farther into the distance. By our current methods, we may be training (not education) a generation of children who are repelled by learning, thinking that it means only drudgery, worksheets, test preparation, and test-taking. (Ravitch 2010a, 34)

Thus, as a result of NCLB, teachers have been unable to create and instill a passion for learning. In an "Open Letter to Congress and the Obama Administration from Educational Researchers Nationwide" (2015), other negative consequences of NCLB include:

making schooling less engaging and creative, deprofessionalizing teachers and teaching, abandoning our past pursuit of learning that fully encompasses arts, music, social studies and science, and marginalizing values and skills that help students develop the ability to cooperate, problem solve, reason, make sound judgments, and function effectively as democratic citizens (5).

Students learning has become about test taking strategies and speed of knowledge recall versus inquiry, discovery and creativity. In terms of student learning, accountability through NCLB has caused teachers to adjust the content that they are teaching in order to have time to teach test taking skills (Desimone 2013, Guisbond, Neill and Schaeffer 2012, Nichols and Berliner 2007, Ravitch 2010b, Ravitch 2010a, Toch 2006, Whitenack and Swanson 2010). Teachers are also crunched for instructional time due to the amount

of testing that occurs. Therefore, the content that students learn has been taught at such rapid speeds that not all students have been able to grasp and master important concepts.

NCLB has also been criticized for the subject matter that has been tested. The focus on English and Math to judge students' intelligence and schools' ability to teach was flawed. It was because of this mandate that many schools shifted funding away from the Arts, and course allotments for Social Studies in order to ensure that students received more seat time in the tested subject areas. NCLB required that teachers narrow the focus of the content in which they taught, and that schools made academic course decisions that favored more seat time for the tested subjects. Solo County High School changed the school day schedule in order to allow for all students to be in an English and Math class year round. This was a major adjustment for the students and teachers to ensure more seat time in English and in Math in the hopes of improving test scores in these content areas. This academic funneling of knowledge has meant that the vast majority of students have not received the background knowledge of subject matter necessary to continue scholastically (Ravitch and Cortese 2009, Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing 1999). Research has shown that a large majority of people are concerned with this approach to judging schools and students (Cawelti 2006, Rose & Gallop 2006). A student's level of academic intelligence cannot be determined solely based on the student's ability to perform on English and Math tests alone.

In addition to the loss of a holistic academic education with the focus on English and Math was the push for creating a benchmark level of academic achievement. The more influential negative of NCLB was the mandate that all students reach proficiency by 2014. Failure was not in what the mandate was asking but the way in which schools

responded to the mandate in order to meet the audacious claim. Schools and school districts across the nation adjusted their standards, definition of proficient, and scoring systems in order to show that on some exams the schools were making progress. (Cawelti 2006, Darling Hammond 2010, Guisbond, Neill and Schaeffer 2012, Haimson and Ravitch 2010a, Ravitch 2010b, Ravitch 2013, and Templeton 2011) The intense nature of testing has caused students to be identified by numbers (Peck and Reitzug 2013). Teachers are more aware of which students in their classes are not meeting an arbitrary benchmark score than which students may need additional academic and social support due to uncontrollable circumstances on the part of the student outside the home. Since teachers do not have the time to get to know and support the whole student, academic achievement has suffered. This has been proven in the lack of academic progress that has been made since the inception and implementation of NCLB.

Brief overview of the achievement gap

At its most basic definition, the achievement gap is the scholastic difference between ethnic and socioeconomic groups. By extension, Education Week (2011) defined the gap as

the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized test scores, course selection, drop out rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African- American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low income families and those who are better off.

Although these groupings may seem contrite, it is in fact crucial in terms of today's concern over high stakes testing and student performance. I agree that it is important to analyze the academic success of students in order to ensure that the public education system is meeting the needs for all students. However, I contest the primary classification of this group by their ethnicity and socio-economic status in conjunction with the ability to perform on tests that require a certain cultural capital in order for students to be successful. Definitions of the achievement gap that have become common place in educational lingo ignore those low socioeconomic, African-American and Hispanic students who are successful academically and thus do not fit the definition. As this term has gained weight in education policy at all levels, several major groups such as the NEA, ETS and the National Center for Education Statistics have contributed to the research in understanding this term and others have issued statements about the ways in which schools can address the Achievement Gap.

High stakes tests

Students have always been tested. The number of tests, focus of tests and the types of tests that students have been mandated to take over the years has changed. So have the ways in which students' performance on the high stakes tests affects schools. This section discusses the various tests that are used at Solo County High School. It looks at the different tests that are used at Solo County High School in order to set the context for the ways in which the school and school district is measuring student performance for college and career readiness.

According to the school assessment coordinator at Solo County High School, all tests are nationally written, but state mandated. Each state can choose which tests it will require its students to take. Additionally, districts can mandate that students take additional tests as well. (Interview 2/18/14). The following three tests are the current mandated assessments for Solo County High School to indicate college readiness:

MAP. The test is written by the North West Education Association (NWEA). This is a reading and math test. This is an adaptive test that is used to track student growth from fall to winter to spring. As an adaptive test, the level of difficulty of the questions adjusts to the test taker so that it serves as a more accurate representation of each student's academic level and ability. The reading assessment also provides teachers with a lexile level for the student. (www.nwea.org) Teachers can use this data in selecting resources for the students to read as part of the course curriculum.

Quality Core. Quality Core provides the End of Course assessments for certain courses. These tests were developed from a national movement to ensure students had mastered content material for certain core classes for graduation (Interview with Regina Taylor 2/18/14). End of Course exams are administered on the school's schedule based on when students complete the course.

ACT. The ACT is a nationally written and district mandated test. It is the third in a series of related tests. These tests measure English, Reading comprehension, Math, and Science. Kentucky mandates that students in the 8th grade take the EXPLORE test. Students in the 10th grade take the PLAN test and students in the 11th grade take the ACT. The Woodford County School district mandates that students also take the EXPLORE test in the 7th grade and the PLAN in the 9th grade. The purpose of the early additional

testing is to gain data on students to help better situate them in courses that meet their academic needs.

Career Readiness

The philosophical base for the career readiness assessments broadly resembles those for college readiness. These assessments have a focus on math and reading skills for the function of these skills in the work force. The Kentucky Department of Education (2014) defines a career ready student as a student who “is preparatory in a Career and Technical Education career major and has reached benchmarks on WorkKeys or ASVAB and KOSSA or an Industry Certificate” (November 24, 2014). The definition of preparatory is a student who has, “completed two career and technical education credits in a preparatory program and is enrolled in a third credit course(s)” (February 28, 2014). In other words, according to the Kentucky Department of Education, a career ready student is someone who has completed a certain number of credits in a recognized career path program and has met the academic assessment requirements. In summary, to be career ready, a student must have completed a technical and academic path. There are a variety of ways to reach each of these career paths.

In order to be considered career ready, a student is required to complete a technical and an academic path. The technical path requires the student to complete an approved career major (See appendix D for a full list of career majors offered in the state of Kentucky. See Appendix C for a full list of career majors offered at Solo County High School.) Below lists a brief description of each test for career readiness.

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test is a career placement test in for students

considering a military option. The ASVAB is a multiple aptitude test that can provide any student with potential career options (todays.military.com). “The ASVAB consists of the following eight individual tests:

- General Science
- Arithmetic Reasoning
- Word Knowledge
- Paragraph Comprehension
- Mathematics Knowledge
- Electronics Information
- Auto and Shop Information
- Mechanical Comprehension

Students are provided with scores on each of these individual tests and three Career Exploration Score composites: Verbal Skills, Math Skills and Science and Technical Skills. The battery takes approximately three hours to complete” (todaysmilitary.com). Due to the multiple academic components of this test, students can use their score on the ASVAB to move them towards college and career readiness. In order for the ASVAB score to count, students need to earn at least a 50 on the test (interview Regina Taylor 12/12/14). This test serves two primary purposes for many high school students. For students who are interested in a military career after high school, the school is providing them with the opportunity to take the ASVAB which is mandatory for their enlistment. Additionally, it provides another opportunity for students to prove that they are College and Career ready.

WorkKeys. An ACT produced test that measures “foundational and soft skills” (www.act.org) to determine the job readiness of potential employees. According to the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) (2014), the WorkKeys assessment measures skills that employers deem crucial for success in the job market. Students are

required to pass three WorkKeys tests. The three tests include applied mathematics, information location and reading for information. Students are considered to have met benchmark if they achieve at least a Silver level certificate on the WorkKeys assessment (interview with Regina Taylor 12/12/14).

Kentucky Online Testing (KYOTE). The Kentucky Online Testing system provides placement assessments for students who have not met benchmark scores on the ACT. The KYOTE placement exams are specifically in the subject areas of reading, math and writing (education.ky.gov 11/3/14). Students who have not met benchmark on the ACT in reading, writing and math are not guaranteed placement into college credit bearing courses once the students go to college. High Schools can only give each student this assessment twice. If the student is within two points of the benchmark score then the school can give the test a third time. A student can take the test as often as necessary at an offsite location such as a community college. (interview Regina Taylor 12/12/14) The KYOTE allows these students one more opportunity to meet benchmark in order to be admitted into credit bearing courses. (interview Regina Taylor 12/12/14) In addition to this test being beneficial for schools by potentially increasing their school score for College and Career Readiness for each student who meets a benchmark score, it also has financial implications for the students. Students who are placed in remedial courses at the college level are paying to take a class but not receiving any college credit for that class. If students do not meet benchmark scores on the ACT, the KYOTE test provides students and schools with another opportunity.

Kentucky Occupational Skills Standards Assessment (KOSSA). The Kentucky Occupational Skills Standards Assessment was designed by employers and is a

performance based training and assessment system to ensure students are ready for the technical field and work force after high school (October 20, 2014 education.kde.org). Students on a career path can take this assessment or receive an industry certificate to qualify them as career ready (interview with Regina Taylor 12/12/14).

Compass. The Compass test is a computer based test given to grade 12 students who do not meet benchmark on the ACT. Students can take a full test, but it allows students to take only a math, reading or English section. According to the Kentucky Department of Education, meeting the benchmarks on the Compass assessment benefits:

- Students and Parents by allowing placement into college credit-bearing courses
 - Schools by improving the College and/or Career Readiness Rate
 - Postsecondary institutions by reducing the need for remedial classes.
- (www.kde.org 12/1/2014)

This test can only be given to a student twice on the high school campus. If students need to take the test more than twice to meet benchmark, students can go to an off campus site such as a community college and take it as often as necessary. (Interview with Regina Taylor 12/12/14)

These assessments are designed to measure whether a student is career ready. If a student never reaches benchmark on these tests it doesn't mean that they cannot graduate or go to college. Students who do not meet benchmark will have to take a developmental course in college. These developmental courses cost the same but do not count for credit (interview with Regina Taylor 12/12/2014). For example, if a student does not meet benchmark on the English Compass test then that student would take English 90 in college and need to pass that class before being eligible to take English 101.

Framing the achievement gap

Many of the national groups who have helped to define the achievement gap for secondary education formed their definitions through measuring student performance. Academic achievement as measured in terms of performance on high stakes testing, drop out and graduation rates, and behavioral referrals have helped to link the individual and institutional characteristics when providing statistical measures to define the gap. Unbridled Learning: College and/or Career Readiness for All (Appendix A) is the rubric that outlines the variety of ways in Kentucky in which students are divided and weighted in terms of value for school scores in the different categories. Major headings for these titles may vary across states, but the content in which schools are assessed stays the same. Since this part (as well as Articles Two and Three) is focused on a particular program in Kentucky, it seemed valuable to look at the rhetoric for school assessment in this state. The Unbridled Learning rubric indicates the various ways that students who fall into the Achievement Gap category are measured for school performance.

The first category is listed as Next Generation Learners. According to the Kentucky Department of Education, Next Generation Learners refers to the component of school assessment that is focused on student data (www.education.ky.gov 2/21/15). This category count for 77% of the overall school score. This category includes students in the achievement gap. The achievement gap also has its own category and is worth 20% of the overall school score. In addition to these two categories, scores and performance levels for students in the achievement gap are also measured in the growth, college and career readiness, and achievement categories as well. For the College and Career Readiness category, schools are awarded one point for every student that is college ready;

one point for every student that is career ready; and one and a half points for each student who is college and career ready. For those students who do not qualify, no value is added to the school report card. (Interview with Regina Taylor 12/12/14) This illustrates the significance of these students' academic performance to schools and the necessity for schools to focus on classroom strategies and programs that support their academic success. With these assessment tools in mind and their illustration of the significance for academic success for students in the achievement gap, if the quantitative data from this study as well as the qualitative data from part II prove to have a positive impact on student success then this could become more important across the nation as schools continue to look for ways to support these students and improve their test scores. An underlying goal of this study is to ask whether the Learning Station program model is beneficial to student learning as demonstrated through improvement on test scores indicated through the quantitative data collected.

Methods

This exploratory case study used a single-case study of a high school after school program in a small perceptively rural school district in the upper South of the United States. The goal of the study was to examine the relationship between the after school program and the academic achievement of the program participants. Yin (2003) states that case studies can be used to analyze contextual conditions. I believe that the contextual conditions of this school and the program that members of the school community designed to meet the needs of its students makes it a valuable focus for a case study. The main research question for the present study is: How do after school programs contribute to the ability for schools close the achievement gap?

Learning Station as a tool for addressing the achievement gap

Learning Station was one academic strategy employed by Solo County High School in order to attempt to address the academic disparity for academically struggling students. In keeping with Tyack and Cuban's (1995) explanation of how reform manifests in schools, this program focused on the peripheral issues of academic success and not the potential disparities of classroom instruction. Yet researchers (Jennings 2007, Peck and Reitzug 2013, The Coleman Report 1966) claim that programs like the Learning Station play an important role in the academic success of students. The purpose of the program was to provide a space for students to receive additional academic support through extra tutoring, re-teaching or a space to complete homework assignments. The program was not designed to teach civic values. It ran two days a week after school in the school library. Each day had its own specific teachers who attended.

At the end of the 2013-14 school year, I accessed *Learning Station* data in the form of attendance records, midterm grades and end of term grades from the academic year. The data was provided to me by the school data specialist and was already de-identified of any student information. Several statistical tests were conducted. The independent variables for this case study were: gender, grade level, fall MAP scores, and attendance. Attendance was monitored in terms of program participants who attended the program sessions and signed in. The dependent variables for this case study were achievement as classified through classroom and MAP scores. Classroom scores were collected from the midterm grade reports and end of term grade reports for all three terms for both program participants and all students who met the qualifications of the

achievement gap. MAP scores were also collected for the fall and spring sessions both for program participants and for all students who met the qualifications of the achievement gap.

Data

Several different tests were run in order to attempt to determine the quantitative impact of the *Learning Station* program on student performance on state tests and classroom scores. SPSS was the statistical program that was used in order to conduct the quantitative tests. The MAP test was used to measure student performance at the state level. This particular state mandated test was chosen as it was the only test that measured student performance over time and adjusted to their individual abilities. Students were tested in their English and Math classes during the fall and spring semesters. The raw scores for each of these tests were used as part of the data collection as well as whether the student showed an increase or a decrease in the test results. In addition to the raw variables of students' MAP scores and change in scores, a variable was also created to indicate whether a student increased or decreased on the Reading or Math MAP assessments from the fall to the spring test. Students were also demographically coded by gender and grade level. The level of attendance at the midterm point and the end of term points were kept in their raw intervals as well as coded in groups. Midterm and end of term grades were also kept as raw scores. All of the tests that were run were conducted based on those who attended within each individual term. Since students could attend the program of their own choice, each term was seen as a separate entity. The numbers of students attending in each term fluctuated as students added or removed themselves from the program. Additionally, it is important to note that there were no

racial or socioeconomic status demographics provided by the school. I know from my own personal field observations of the program, and having been a teacher in the building for so long, what the general racial and class demographics are but I was not given this information by the school.

The first term had the most number of students in attendance (n=110). Terms 2 and 3 had comparable numbers of students in attendance (Term 2 n=103 and Term 3 n=102). It is important to note that not all of the students in each term are different students. The school did not provide information in the de-identified data that would allow me to extract repeat students in each term. I ran several different tests in order to determine the quantitative effects of the program. A descriptive statistics chart is included below.

Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Total N	110	103	102
Gender Reading MAP assessment	45% female	44% female	43% female
Gender Math MAP assessment	48% female	45% female	44% female
N of students who took the Math MAP test	92	92	93
N of students who took the reading MAP test	88	88	89
Mean (SD) of Mid-term attendance	2.42 (2.59)	1.51 (1.79)	1.58 (2.18)
Mean (SD) of End of Term attendance	4.95 (4.35)	3.55 (3.92)	2.75 (3.91)
Mean (SD) of raw Math MAP scores	219.94 (15.65)	217.48 (25.84)	219.63 (15.75)
Mean (SD) of raw reading MAP scores	215.76 (14.37)	215.16 (14.48)	215.16 (14.48)
Mean (SD) of Change in Math MAP scores	.95 (10.01)	1.57 (9.95)	1.57 (9.86)
Mean (SD) of Change in Reading MAP score	3.09 (11.79)	2.90 (11.92)	3.73 (11.84)
Cohen's d of gender (female) on Math MAP score	.06 (-.31)	.17 (-.28)	.07 (-.38)
r of gender (female) on Math MAP score	.03 (-.15)	.09 (-.14)	.03 (-.18)
Cohen's d of gender (female) on Reading MAP score	-.22 (-.17)	-.25 (-.23)	-.29 (-.18)
r of gender (female) on Math MAP score	-.11 (-.09)	-.13 (-.11)	-.14 (-.09)

Correlations. The first rounds of tests were correlations. Within each term, correlation tests were run for student attendance and MAP scores. The goal of these tests was to determine if there was a change in performance on the MAP test and if this could

be attributed, in part, to student attendance in the *Learning Station* program. My theory was that there would be change in a positive direction. These tests were run using the raw number of times students attended the program at their fall and spring MAP scores for math and reading.

Correlation tests were the first tests conducted to attempt to determine if there were any relationships between various factors to determine quantitative success from the *Learning Station*. In order to examine the direction of change in students' scores; attendance (mid-term and end of term) on the change (increase or decrease) in their math MAP score, correlation analysis was conducted. One hundred and ten students attended the program during Term 1 (n=110). Of the 110 students, only 92 took the math MAP exam in the fall and in the spring. For Term 2, there were 103 students who attended the program. Of those who attended the program only 89 of them took the math MAP test. During Term 3, 102 students attended the program. This was the only term where all of the students who attended the program had scores for the math MAP test. For Term 1 changes in math MAP scores were not significant, but positively correlated with mid-term ($r = .11$, $p = .29$) and the end of term ($r = .10$, $p = .36$) attendance. Although the results were not statistically significant, the positive relationship between math MAP score change and program attendance were in the predicted direction. For Term 2, the correlations between math MAP score and mid-term ($r = -.02$, $p = .89$), and end of term ($r = .04$, $p = .79$) were not significant, indicating no relationship between attendance and math MAP score change. The correlations for Term 3 produced similar results: mid-term ($r = .05$, $p = .58$), and end of term ($r = .06$, $p = .55$). Overall, the results indicate that there was no relationship between program attendance and math MAP score.

The next set of correlations tests that were conducted included the students' reading MAP scores against their mid-term and end of term attendance in Learning Station. In order to examine the direction of change in students' scores; attendance (mid-term and end of term) on the change (increase or decrease) in their reading MAP score, correlation analysis was conducted. One hundred and ten students attended the program during Term 1. Of the 110 students, only 88 students took the reading MAP test. Four fewer students took the reading test than the math test. This could have been because these four students were enrolled in an English course that was not tested. Term 2 showed 103 students who attended the program. Of those students who attended the program during Term 2, 88 of them took the reading MAP test. During Term 3, 102 students attended the program. This was the only term that showed all students had taken the reading MAP test.

For Term 1 changes in reading MAP changes were not significant. Data shows that there were notable negative correlations in reading MAP scores from the mid-term ($r = -.03$, $p = .78$) to the end of term ($r = -.12$, $p = .27$). These results indicated a negative correlation between reading MAP score change and program attendance. For Term 2, the correlations between reading MAP score and mid-term ($r = -.10$, $p = .35$), and end of term ($r = -.05$, $p = .68$), while not significant are notable indicating a negative correlation between attendance and reading MAP score change. The correlations for Term 3 showed reading MAP score change and attendance at mid-term ($r = .06$, $p = .55$) and end of term ($r = .10$, $p = .31$). Overall, there were no significant changes in the results between program attendance and reading MAP scores.

Table 2.2: Term 1 correlations between change in MAP scores and attendance

Change in Math and Reading MAP Scores Correlation (p-value) with Attendance

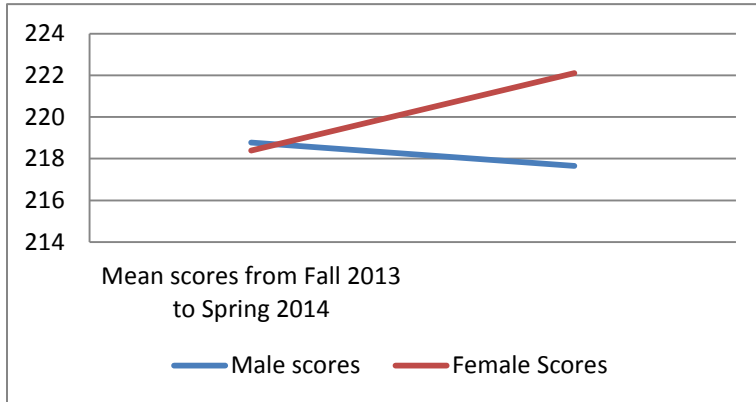
(SD)	Midterm attendance	Total attendance	Means
Change in Math MAP score	.11 (.29)	.10 (.36)	.48 (.50)
Change in Reading MAP score	-.03 (.78)	-.12 (.27)	.39 (.49)
Means (SD)	1.28 (1.18)	1.81 (1.37)	

Repeated Measures. A general linear model repeated measures test was also conducted to analyze the relationship between the math and reading MAP scores from fall 2013 to spring 2014 and gender. The hypothesis for running repeated measures ANOVA was that gender would have an impact on test scores. During Term 1 there were 48 male students and 44 female students who took the math MAP test and were in the *Learning Station*. The male students had a mean score (SD) of 218.77 (16.42) in the fall of 2013 and a mean score of 217.65 (18.32) for spring 2014 on the math MAP assessment. The female students had a mean score (SD) of 218.39 (12.26) in the fall of 2013 and a mean score of 222.11 (11.91) for spring 2014 on the math MAP assessment.

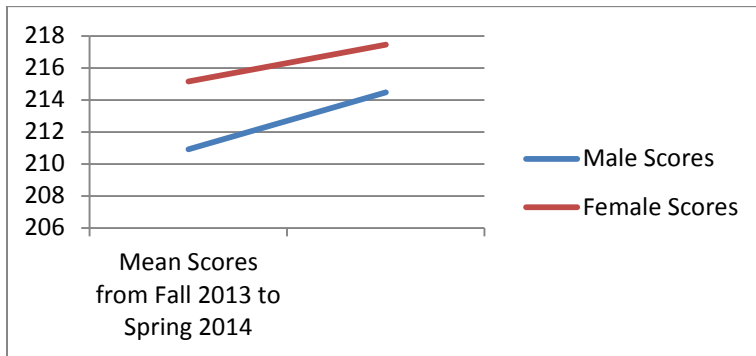
For the Term 1 reading MAP assessment, there were 48 males students and 40 female students who took the assessment and were part of the achievement gap. The male students had a mean score (SD) of 210.92 (16.65) in the fall of 2013 and 214.48 (15.14) in the spring of 2014. The female students had a mean score (SD) of 215.15 (13.17) in the fall of 2013 and 217.45 (13.57) in the spring of 2014.

Table 2.3 *Term 1 Mean Difference of Gender on Math and Reading MAP scores from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014*

Mean Difference of Gender on Math MAP



Mean Difference of Gender on Reading MAP



For Term 2, there was a similar pattern in the gender specific scores of the math MAP and reading MAP test results. There were 51 males and 41 females who took the math MAP assessment and were part of the achievement gap. The mean scores (SD) for the male students were 221.20 (15.69) in fall 2013 and 216.76 (33.08) in spring 2014 for the math MAP assessment. The mean scores (SD) for the female students were 214.51 (12.27) in fall 2013 and 217.98 (12.67) in spring 2014. These results show a decrease in male performance and an increase in female performance on the math MAP assessment.

The reading MAP assessment for Term 2 shows 49 males students and 39 female students took the test and were part of the achievement gap. The mean scores (SD) for the male students were 210.10 (18.23) in fall 2013 and 214.57 (16.83) in spring 2014 for the reading MAP assessment. The mean scores (SD) for the female students were 213.56 (10.53) in fall 2013 and 216.03 (11.21) in spring 2014.

During Term 3 there were 52 male students and 41 female students who took the math MAP test and were part of the achievement gap. The mean scores (SD) for the male students were 221.15 (15.63) in fall 2013 and 220.02 (18.29) in spring 2014 for the math MAP assessment. The mean scores (SD) for the female students were 209.17 (35.61) in fall 2013 and 219.15 (11.98) in spring 2014. The reading MAP assessment for Term 3 shows 51 males students and 38 female students took the test and were part of the achievement gap. The mean scores (SD) for the male students were 206.73 (34.90) in fall 2013 and 214.57 (16.54) in spring 2014 for the reading MAP assessment. The mean scores (SD) for the female students were 213.97 (10.46) in fall 2013 and 215.95 (11.30) in spring 2014.

Using Cohen's d calculation for a standardized effects size the mean scores and standard deviations yielded the following effects sizes:

Table 2.4 Cohen's d data

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Male fall Math MAP Means (SD) (15.63)	218.77 (16.42)	221.20 (15.69)	221.15
Male Spring Math MAP Means (SD) (18.29)	217.65 (18.32)	216.76 (33.08)	220.02
Male Math MAP Cohen's d (r)	.06 (.03)	.17 (.09)	.07 (.03)
Female fall Math MAP Means (SD) (35.61)	218.39 (12.26)	214.51 (12.27)	209.17
Female spring Math MAP Means (SD) (11.98)	222.11 (11.91)	217.98 (12.67)	219.15
Female Math MAP Cohen's d (r) .18)	-.31 (-.15)	-.25 (-.13)	-.38 (-
Male fall RDG MAP Means (SD) (34.90)	210.92 (16.65)	210.10 (18.23)	206.73
Male spring RDG MAP Means (SD) (16.54)	214.48 (15.14)	214.57 (16.83)	214.57
Male RDG MAP Cohen's d (r)	-.22 (-.11)	-.25 (-.13)	.07 (.03)
Female fall RDG MAP Means (SD) (10.46)	215.15 (13.17)	213.56 (10.53)	213.97
Female spring RDG MAP Means (SD) (11.30)	217.45 (13.57)	216.03 (11.21)	215.95
Female spring RDG MAP Cohen's d (r) .09)	-.17 (-.09)	-.23 (-.11)	-.18 (-

As a whole, calculating the means and standard deviations as Cohen's d indicated no significant impact of gender on test score performance. All three terms showed similar patterns for math and for reading. The trend in math scores showed male student scores in a decreasing trajectory while female student scores increases. The trend in reading

scores showed an increase in scores for both males and females. However, none of the directional changes were statistically significant.

Regression. The results of the ANOVA tests indicated that gender might be significant and so a regression test was run. An ordinary least squares regression analysis was run to attempt to determine if the number of times a student attended the *Learning Station* program had an impact on the Spring MAP scores while controlling for gender and prior achievement (indicated through the fall MAP score). The Spring Math MAP scores was set as my dependent variable with gender, fall Math MAP scores and total attendance as my independent variables. I repeated this test replacing the Spring Reading MAP scores as my dependent variable and exchanging the Fall Reading MAP score in lieu of the Fall Math MAP score as an independent variable. Therefore, my hypothesis was that the number of times students attended the *Learning Station* program would impact their performance on the Spring MAP assessment.

The attendance variable was coded a few different ways. One way attendance was coded was in its raw form. The raw number of times that each student attended the program was tested. Attendance was also dummy coded (Schroeder, Sjoquist and Stephan, 1986, 35) as 0=did not attend and 1=attended. The goal was to determine if any attendance had an impact of the MAP scores regardless of the number of times a student attended. The final way that the attendance variable was coded was in gradient groups. The purpose behind this coding was to see if a certain range of attendance numbers had an impact on MAP scores. In all of the findings, participation in the *Learning Station* program proved not to be significant. The regression results helped to confirm the findings through the correlation tests in that there was no significant relationship between

attendance and MAP scores. However, the regression results did contradict the gender findings from the ANOVA test which suggested that the differences in gender were not significant when controlling for prior achievement and attendance.

Discussion

All of the correlation tests for the math MAP scores showed a positive correlation between attendance in the *Learning Station* program and the change in MAP scores. Math was one of the designated content areas that had a math teacher and a math tutor present at every *Learning Station* session. Math students sat in the same area of the library and worked at content level tables. This allowed for the teacher and the tutor to focus on specific questions those students had while also providing instructional opportunities to reteach content in a small group setting.

The correlation tests around the reading MAP scores showed very different results than the math scores. Term 1 and Term 3 showed a negative correlation between attendance and reading scores while Term 2 showed a slight positive correlation. A reason for this lack of impact on reading scores could have been a result of the design of the program. The structure of the program does not allow for work on skills such as reading. It is designed to help students complete a task or master a skill that was learned recently in the classroom setting. To work on reading as a skill requires more planning and individual instruction that is intentionally focused on the student's particular ability level. The time and space of the program is focused more on task completion. Thus, an overall positive correlation between program attendance and math MAP scores was a very practical and realistic result. It is possible that there was a positive correlation in Term 2 for reading scores and attendance because students' had experience in the

program. Students had learned how to operate within the system in order to make the individuation work for them in that particular setting. Traditionally, it was recognized among faculty that students performed better academically during the second term of the year because, often, students were unprepared for finals so quickly into the start of the school year. By Term 3 finals, students were over-tested from the barrage of state and district mandated testing combined with the mid-term and final exams from all of the terms that students did not study as intently for finals in the third term.

Data from the repeated measures tests shows that for Term 1 math MAP scores the females were driving the total increase in mean scores. (See Appendix E) Term 1 reading scores indicate that both genders saw an increase in reading MAP scores, but the male students had a stronger increase than the female students. For Term 2, the math MAP score data indicates that during this term, the male students were driving the total mean decrease in the negative direction despite the increase by the female population. (See Appendix F) There were observed gains for both the male and female population on the reading MAP test during the second term. (See Appendix F) The data shows that despite the decrease in male student performance on the math MAP test, the observed increase by the female population on the math MAP assessment continued to drive the total increase in a positive direction. (See Appendix G) There were gains for both the male and female population on the reading MAP test during the third term, but the statistically significant increase by the male population had a stronger impact on the total mean score increase. (See Appendix G)

Across all three terms, the male student population showed a decrease in mean score on the math MAP assessment while the female population showed an increase.

Additionally, it is important to note that the male score for the fall 2013 testing session was always higher than the female score. It is interesting that male students started the year with stronger scores on the math MAP assessment but by the end of the year had lower scores. These lower scores were reflected in comparison with the female population but also in terms of their starting scores. For the reading MAP assessment, both the male and female student populations saw an increase in scores from fall 2013 to spring 2014. Here, the female score in the fall and spring were both always higher than the mean scores for the male populations. Despite some observed gains by the male students on the reading MAP assessment, the female students still scored higher than the male students.

While the quantitative data did not show a pattern of statistically significant changes, either positive or negative, there were several social and emotional benefits of the program. The design of the program and the inability to compare data across all three terms could be contributing factors to the lack of statistically significant data. If I had been able to compare data across all three terms then the observed trends, both positive and negative, could have become statistically significant differences. Based on the quantitative data alone, it could appear that the *Learning Station* program failed as there was no statistically significant data to indicate that attendance in the program had a correlation to student performance on the MAP test. However, the qualitative data indicates that the program was actually a success.

There were many observed benefits to attendance in the program as indicated by adult stakeholders in the program which will be discussed further in Part II. Through my informal observations of *Learning Station* participants in my classroom and at program

sessions, I noticed that students were happy during program sessions. They smiled at the teachers who helped them, were appreciative of support and were more open to engaging in conversation. Additionally, school administrators saw a decrease in discipline referrals, students talked excitedly with program coordinators about the program and students began to speak up more in class. In parts II and III, I discuss these qualitative benefits of the *Learning Station* in more detail.

Limitations. The strength of this quantitative data is descriptive. This single-case study attempted to address causality between participation (attendance) in the program and MAP scores but the data clearly shows that the change in score results from the fall to the spring is not directly attributed to participation. In addition to the inability to determine a causal relationship, demographic information such as race and class were not available. Because of this, data could not be extrapolated to determine a relationship between participation, change in test scores and race. Similarly, data could not be extrapolated to determine a relationship between participation, change in test scores and class as socioeconomic status was not provided. As a teacher for many years in the building, co-founder of the program and a regular attendee of the program, I know what the race and class make-up of the program was but I was not provided with any data to support this. I also know that the majority of students who participated in each term were the same but the school did not provide me with the necessary information to be able to run tests using all three terms. Therefore, data analyzing all three terms could not be extrapolated and each term had to be measured independently. When I left the high school in December of 2013 and was no longer an employee of the school district, I transferred the data tracking information to another teacher. This teacher was new and

very young and had little background knowledge of the type of data we were tracking and the purpose of the data. Unfortunately, despite my explanations to this teacher about the type of data that needed to be kept on record for the program, the teacher created their own system and as a result no tests across all three terms could be conducted. This teacher kept records of the terms as individual data sets and could not provide me with one large data set that could be used to analyze for causal relationships between participation and test scores.

Conclusion

As a whole, the quantitative data indicated that attendance in the Learning Station program did not have a significant impact on student performance on state mandated tests but there was a slight positive correlation. Given the inconsistency of the program and lack of program structure (discussed further in the second article), it is encouraging that the data indicated any positive coefficient. If the program is continued all year for multiple years the quantitative impact of the program may continue to increase due to the developed routine of attending the program. However, in order for there to be statistically significant quantitative gains as a result of the program, the structure of the program will have to be changed to focus on teaching necessary academic skills. The qualitative data that is discussed in the next article illustrates significantly more elements of impact than the quantitative data. Since this is a holistic single-case study, the qualitative data presented in the next part highlights multiple positive impacts that this program had for students. Many of these impacts were intangible benefits but still important for student development.

Although *The Learning Station* was designed to provide opportunities to increase course performance, it did not address important factors related to classroom instruction which some researchers (Peck and Reitzug 2013, Tyack and Cuban 1995) claim should be the focus of education reform. Some of these factors are discussed in the following sections, first in regard to the relationship between schools and community as factors for student performance and second, in relation to teacher-researchers who influenced instruction in the program. Overall, however, the grammar of schooling, as outlined by Tyack and Cuban (1995), has not changed: School report cards, testing and aiming reform at specific groups, as opposed to focusing reform on education as an institution, remained the primary focus of the institution of education.

Chapter 3

Coming Together: A qualitative perspective of a single-case study of the Learning Station

Synopsis

This is the second part of a three part manuscript on a holistic single-case study of the Learning Station, an after school tutoring program at a high school. A qualitative study was conducted situated within the research of the role of school, family and community partnerships in supporting the academic success of students. The role of school, family and community relationships has been identified as critical to help close the achievement gap². For many students in the achievement gap category, multiple obstacles make their pursuit of academic success more difficult than for their white or more affluent peers. This part analyzes the conceptualization of the Learning Station program from multiple perspectives of people responsible to establish and maintain it. The purpose was to understand how various vested members of the school and community spheres perceive the purpose of the program as a tool to address academic disparities. Interviews were conducted with the district Superintendent, head principal, school social worker, and a few parents while a focus group was conducted with the teachers involved in the program. The qualitative data indicates multiple intangible benefits for the students of the program such as a sense of belonging, decrease in discipline referrals and an increase in self-efficacy.

² While I disagree with the phrasing of the term achievement gap, for the purpose of this study I will continue to use this term since it is the official category listed on school assessment reports and used to label the particular students on whom this research is focused.

Introduction

After over ten years of education policy beginning with *No Child Left Behind*, preceded by over 100 years of education policy focused on school report cards, testing and reform through group identification (Tyack and Cuban 1995), and the attention to students perceived to be underachieving (achievement gap), it seems natural that a shift to focus on data to measure each student's academic performance is the next step as policy makers attempt to understand student performance. At present, educational policy makers at the state and national levels focus increasingly on tests to measure academic performance. Unfortunately, not all students have the necessary academic capital to excel on the state mandated tests (Coleman Report 1966, Johnson, Strange and Madden 2010, Rebell and Wolff 2012, and Young 2010). *The Learning Station* is SCHS's attempt at addressing the academic disparity between minority and low-income students and their white and wealthier peers. The program served as a way to support student performance without changing the infrastructure of schooling that creates and re-enforces the disparity between groups, thus keeping with the unfortunate tradition of school reform (Borman 2005, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Tyack and Cuban 1995).

During the 2013-2014 school year, the *Learning Station* was an after school tutoring program that met in Solo County High School's library two days per week. Students were provided with a snack and a positive learning environment where they could receive academic support from teachers, peer tutors and their classmates. A positive learning environment is one that focuses on the academic strengths of student, on what the student does well and the progress the student is making. Hope for further

academic improvement is fostered in a positive learning environment (Peck and Reitzug 2013, Stiggins and Chappuis 2005 and Young 2010). This program provides academically struggling students with the opportunity for more individualized or small group instruction to help them study or complete homework assignments. By providing students with what program coordinators considered a safe space in which they can receive help from teachers or peer mentors on homework assignments or tutoring on concepts previously taught in class, the goal was to create a positive learning atmosphere that might help close the achievement gap. Researchers (Behrent 2009, Coleman Report 1966, Goldstein 2014, Markley 1972, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Noguera 2009) argue that a positive learning environment should be developed within the classroom in order for students to learn instead of needing to create an after-school program that provides this opportunity. This is supported by researchers (Peck and Reitzug 2013, Tyack and Cuban 1995) as they further argue that interactions in the classrooms between teachers and students are a critical element to learning. Tyack and Cuban (1995) further assert that substantive reform would require changing the core of education rather than tinkering around the edges of school practices. But, all of these researchers agree that until reform is aimed at the core of education, short term reforms must still occur.

After analyzing the school report card and engaging in informal conversations with other teachers and students, several faculty members argued that minority and low-income students needed additional academic supports and proposed *The Learning Station* as the appropriate response. This study was designed to gain an understanding of the ways in which the adults involved in the program conceptualized the program. In order to gain a holistic perspective of the program, interviews were conducted with all of the

teachers involved in the program, school administrators, program coordinators, and parents who served on the committee to implement the program and also had students who participated in the program. In addition to the interviews, field work provided observational data for interpretive depth.

Purpose of the Study

This section of a holistic single-case study provides a discussion on the manner in which various vested members of the school, home and community spheres conceptualize an after school tutoring program as one high school's attempt at closing the achievement gap using qualitative data. The main premise for this study is to analyze the program from various perspectives in order to gain insight into its perceived outcomes as a method for addressing academic disparities. By conducting this qualitative research as part of the holistic case study, insights on the intangible benefits of the *Learning Station* program emerged.

Importance of the Study

In this study, I conducted participant observations as well as interviews with various representatives from the school and community to understand more deeply how different representatives contextualized the *Learning Station* program as a method for closing the achievement gap at Solo County High School. In order to design a successful program that met the unique and contextual needs of this school, it was imperative that stakeholders be engaged in the planning process (Comer 1991, Comer 1996, ETS Policy Notes 2005, ETS Policy Notes 2011, Achinstein, Athanases, Curry, Ogawa, and de Oliveira 2013, Hoffman, Dahlman and Zierdt 2009, Huberman, Hannan, Arellanes, and Shambaugh 2011 and Peck and Reitzug 2013). However, due to time constraints no

students were formally consulted in the design of the program. The school social worker and I informally asked many of the students that we worked with if the students thought they would benefit from an after school tutoring program, but no formal or structured conversations about the program were held with students. Program development meetings were often held during the school day and students could not miss class. Some meetings were held at the end of the work day in which most students had familial or work commitments. The irregularity of student attendance at meetings was the primary reason for not including them. Since the school social worker and I regularly saw many of the students who would be attending the program, we spoke with them informally about the program. Additionally, students were not interviewed as part of this research. Students that attended this program did not keep up with homework assignments or school papers and it seemed likely that the students would not return consent forms at a usable rate. Therefore, I focused intentionally on the adult stakeholders.

Through the planning meetings for the program, it became clear that the school administration, faculty and families each had an agenda for the program. Ultimately they all wanted students to be more successful, but what constituted success was different. Parents wanted their student to be treated and viewed equally as their white or middle to upper class. Parents of minority students wanted a program that would help their student receive academic awards at the all school program instead of having to host a separate awards program to recognize their students. Administrators and teachers wanted a program that would help the students be more academically successful in the classroom and on standardized assessments. Community members wanted to provide minority and low income students with social support through a meal or mentoring which they felt

would help them be more successful. All stakeholders wanted the same objective: for students in the achievement gap to be more academically successful. This exploratory approach to a holistic single-case study provides evidence of the impacts from the symbiotic relationship between the school and the community through the *Learning Station* program.

Research Questions

The main research question for this study was: How do different members of the school, family and community spheres contextualize the *Learning Station*? Supporting research questions included:

- (1) How does the *Learning Station* address the academic disparities in the school?
- (2) What is the achievement gap?
- (3) How does the phrase “opportunity gap” change the context in which students in the achievement gap are perceived?

Literature Review

Part II discusses the way members of the school, family and community spheres contextualize the *Learning Station*. Schools have commonly served as institutional pillars in communities. From as early as the one room schoolhouse, there are accounts about the close relationship between schools and the communities in which they are situated (Carey 2014, Johnson 2013, and Shumow 2009). Good schools engage members of the home, school and community in the education process (Comer 1991, Comer 1996, ETS Policy Notes 2011, Huberman et al., 2011, Peck and Reitzug 2011, and Shumow 2009).

Students have more opportunities to meet the academic expectations when they understand that all players in their environment expect them to be successful and will

help them meet those expectations (Carey 2014, ETS Policy Notes 2011 and Johnson 2013). Johnston (2011) argued that the root issue in the achievement gap is not that students are failing in their classrooms but the education institution and their communities are failing the students.

When educators, parents and community members seek additional methods of engagement to make valuable partnerships it will enhance student learning (Hoffman, Dahlman and Zierdt 2009 and Shumow 2009). “Family and community involvement have been linked to improve student achievement, higher attendance rates, better social skills, and higher rates of postsecondary education” (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2009). In other words, high school students who come from schools with strong family and community partnerships (Comer 1991, Comer 1996, Humberman et al., 2011, Peck and Reitzug 2013, and Shumow 2009) are more likely to be college and career ready. These academically successful students have been versed in citizenship and civic responsibilities; and have been prepared for life outside of the high school setting that provided them with extensive amounts of support. It has been important to the partnership process that all stakeholders were engaged in the formation and continuation of the partnerships; and that these partnerships were designed intentionally with the context of the home-school-community in mind.

In order for successful partnerships between the home and community to be developed, intentional consideration of the contexts and characteristics of the home, school and community will help foster strong relationships (Shumow 2009). The process in itself also had to be specifically planned. In terms of best practices, organic initial interactions are best, but in order for these interactions to become sustainable and long

lasting they need to be intentional (Shumow 2009). Each “process [acknowledges] the unique needs of the community” (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2009). Through the growth of stronger family and community partnerships reformers hope that sustainable and valued relationships might form.

A variety of obstacles may have to be overcome in order to create a learning environment for all students. These obstacles could include creating a positive and engaging learning environment for all students and creating a welcoming atmosphere for family and community members. An underlying goal for developing these partnerships is that students, parents and the community members feel safe and comfortable entering the school building and communicating with teachers and administrators regardless of their own educational experience, ethnicity or class. Teachers who are in the classrooms daily with students who are struggling academically understand that this is the ideal, but also that it is sadly not possible for the majority of students. This fact became a reality for me as a teacher in my second year during a phone call home to a parent when I was told that this parent wished her son would drop out of school and get a job because he was clearly wasting his time at school. During another interaction with a parent, the associate principal and I were accused of being racist when we asked her son to take his feet off of the table in the library. Bailey and Bradbury Bailey (2010) highlighted the historical and continued distrust between educational institutions and minority families, and that this distrust has caused some minority students to be disengaged from their education. Wilson (2011) presented research that indicated that in schools with high student-teacher trust, relationships resulted in over two full days of more attendance. Trust is earned. Researchers (Peck and Reitzug 2013, and Tyack and Cuban 1995) state

that teachers do their best work when in partnership with parents. Positive interactions over a period of time help to develop rapport with both the students and their families, and the community.

In many cases, families of minority and low-income students do not feel equally welcome as partners in children's education. A disconnect between families and a school can have serious effects on academic achievement (ETS Policy notes 2011). Bailey and Bradbury Bailey (2010) argued that minority students, their parents and minority community members may be hesitant to engage in the school community in any capacity because of perceived hostilities. Put simply, minority³ parents or community members may not feel welcomed or comfortable in the school environment. Minority parents and community members may have had a negative experience during their educational tenure and therefore not want to engage in the school community for their student, or even require or encourage their student to engage. A primary obstacle, from teachers' perspectives, then, is a lack of parental support for academic pursuits from parents'. Research supports that students learn at their utmost potential when their families and communities are involved and invested in their education (Addison and McGee 2010, Comer 1991, Comer 1996, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Rebell and Wolff 2012, and Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, and Gordon 2009). One of the most common barriers for teachers has been how to build relationships and create interactions with parents through a classroom curriculum and on a classroom budget. Addison and McGee (2010) argued that the cheapest way to build positive relationships and get parents invested in the classroom

³ For the purposes of this article, the term minority refers to African American and Hispanic racial/ethnic minorities who were the targets of this intervention.

learning process was to make them feel valued and welcomed into the school and into the classroom. Simply bringing parents in for class activities or sending interactive homework home serve as relatively inexpensive methods for engaging parents. Asking students to interview people with a similar background to the student in their neighborhood as part of an oral history project is another example as it encourages students to engage with community members who may have similar characteristics to the students while showing that the school values the community members as important to the education of the students. Ideally, then, the school and the community would work together to help the student by providing additional support, encouragement and educational focus (Peck and Reitzug 2013, and Ravitch, 2010). Diane Ravitch argues that students, of all ages need structure and support and benefit from families who encourage their academic interests and achievements. These students learn best, she claims, when challenged to succeed by their parents and their teachers. Recognizing that not all families can provide such support, there can also be community based interventions (Achinstein et al 2013, ETS Policy Notes 2005 and Ravitch 2010). Wood (2012) goes even further, claiming that only when students hear the same message of academic value from their parents, teachers and community will they embrace and understand the value of education.

Perseverance is essential for representatives from the school, community and home of each child. Stakeholders cannot wait to be contacted (Olguin and Keim 2012). In other words, parents and community members need to engage with the other players in the child's environment and become active participants in bringing the home, community and school spheres together. Schools have a responsibility to the community to educate

children (ETS Policy Notes 2011), personal contact with teachers by students and parents, as well as parent involvement in school activities (ETS Policy Notes 2005) encourage students to stay in school. It is important that the overlapping spheres respect the value and influence that each brings to the table in shaping the child's academic success. School staff and the community also need to recognize that no one will know the student as well as the parent. Researchers (Addison and McGee, 2010, Huberman et al., 2013, and Wood 2012) have stated that it is important to note that stakeholders consider the family the most essential aspect of the learning process. The family is then supported by the school and the larger community. This means that the groups need to work together to solidify a solid message of the value of learning. Structure and consistency are key elements of establishing a culture of academic success for students. The research discussed above bears out my personal experience that high school students benefit from hearing an encouraging message of positive academic success from their teachers, parents and the community. Students cognitively recognize expectations through routine and regularity. If any one group is not providing the same message, students may not internalize the necessity of establishing a focus on learning.

In contrast to these idyllic scenarios for student success, the realities of school-based approaches to academic achievement tend to be sporadic and often disjointed. As an example, for each year I taught, a new district initiative, sometimes multiple initiatives were introduced and expected to increase our test scores and improve the academic success of our students. Despite these efforts, the developers of the *Learning Station* perceived little progress. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) might have predicted, these initiatives made minor adjustments to the infrastructure already in place, adding “learning

check Wednesdays”, “Formative Fridays”, or adding a data element to the benchmark scoring machine. Again, these reforms made minor adjustments to the grammar of schooling but did little to create lasting change: meaningful interactions between teachers and students (Goldstein 2014, Markley 1972, Peck and Reitzug 2013, and Tyack and Cuban 1995). Researchers critique this historical tradition of school reform and contend that there had been little modern progress since the inception of the *No Child Left Behind* Act (Borman 2005, Grissmer et al., 1994, Hess 1999, Hess 2010, Jennings 2007, Peck and Reitzug 2013, Rowan 1990, Smith and O’Day 1991, and Tyack and Cuban 1995).

In Solo County, members of home, school and community spheres have not been working together and this was a factor for many struggling students to not reach their full potential. In my experience, this manifested in teachers passing judgment on students based on that teacher’s experience when that student’s parent was in the classroom, and parents predetermined how successful their student was going to be in a particular teacher’s class based on the parent’s personal experience with the teacher. Parents openly talked negatively about administrators, and sometimes encouraged their students to get in trouble. When teachers reached out to some community businesses or leaders for resources, many were hesitant and argued that high school students should be able to provide and advocate for themselves.

These are just a few broad examples of instances that I knew of that hindered students being academically successful. Using the research behind developing strong relationships between schools and families, Solo County worked to design a program that would help strengthen these relationships while providing academic supports for struggling students.

Solo County

In recent years, education policy has focused on teacher quality as implicated in the poor performance of students in the achievement gap into a reflection of the quality of teaching and learning that has been occurring in schools. The Kentucky Department of Education (2014) corroborates this through the development of the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System which uses a correlation between student scores on state assessments to determine the quality of teaching. Instead of the value of teachers and students being determined by performance on tests, students can be offered opportunities to succeed through support services and encouragement from members of the school and community spheres. As the school social worker and I began to outline the design for a program to address the needs of academically struggling minority and low income students, we tried to keep the roles of family and community at the forefront. Research contends that over half of the factors that contribute to student achievement stems from non-school factors (Borman 2005, Coleman Report 1966, Jennings 2007, ETS Policy Notes 2010, and Peck and Reitzug 2013). Thus it was important to recognize the role of race and socioeconomic status on student learning (Carey 2014, Collopy and Bowman 2012, Gorski 2008, Haefner and Fitchett 2013, and Lareau 1989).

This case study follows the implementation by Solo County High School of a program to help close the achievement gap by providing an opportunity for academic success for minority and low-income students. Researchers (ETS Policy Notes 2010 and Rebell and Wolff 2012), assert that students who participate in after school programs are more likely to continue their education after high school. The 2013-2014 school year was the first academic year in which the program had been run for the entire school year.

Two previous attempts at this program over the last three years were academically successful but not sustainable for a variety of reasons. Solo County High School serves as a symbol of the social and economic issues in Solo County. The students tended to divide themselves by race and class with little cross over. One of the primary reasons that issues of race are sensitive in this community is because it is a relatively homogenous county. Information from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) indicates that in a this county of under 25,000 people, 92% of the population identifies as White, 5% as Black, and 2.5% as Hispanic or Latino. Approximately 60% live in urban households and 40% in rural ones.

Based on an interview with the head principal on April 16, 2013, the demographic data shows that there are very few minority faculty members on staff. In fact, only 7.5% of the faculty identify as a minority. Additionally, of the five guidance counselors, there is only one female African American guidance counselor and no male guidance counselors. Similarly, of the five custodians, only one is female and African American as well; considering the teaching, administrative, guidance, and custodial staff, only 9% of the staff is of a minority race. This is slightly higher than the minority make-up of the community which registers at only 8%. Minority student enrollment at the school mirrors these county demographics. Due to the lack of minority representation in the community, and within the faculty and staff at Solo County High School, minority students often felt misunderstood. McDermott and Varenne (1995) argue that the abundance of miscommunication between the minority student population and the majority teaching populations causes many students to give up on school. On more than one occasion I had students tell me that they felt as though there was no one in the building to whom they

could relate. Or students would say, “Mrs. X is alright for a white teacher. She sort of understands.”

The lack of representation of adult minorities in the building, a long history of cultural issues within the community and a rapidly growing free and reduced lunch population despite its political recognition as the wealthiest county in the state has caused many students in the building to feel unsupported. Institutional memory in Solo County has played an integral role in the ability of the school and larger community to come together for the success of all students. Initially, the idea for the program developed through conversations between the school social worker and myself in which we observed that the minority and low-income students in the building needed help. Soon after these discussions a letter sent to the community by school administration was perceived by many parents as a racist attempt to call attention to minority students. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) argued, reform requires a catalyst. This letter served as the catalyst to make this program a priority for the school and to ensure funding for it every year. As a result of the letter, Solo County High School acknowledged the demand from the parents of minority students for a more intentional focus on ensuring that their children were given opportunities to be successful both in and out of the classroom.

As a classroom teacher, I worked closely with many families in an effort to help students be more academically successful. This often meant multiple phone calls and emails home and meetings with other classroom teachers and administrators. It was during one of these meetings with the school social worker that the concept of the *Learning Station* was formed. After many more meetings between myself and the social worker and informal conversations with teachers in the building, I took a proposal to the

head principal for an after- school tutoring program. The hope was that by offering minority and low-income students an after school tutoring program that provided additional academic support while engaging families and the community, students would be more academically successful.

The Learning Station was implemented a few times before it finally became a signature program for the high school. There were three previous attempts: two ran for the last two terms of the school year and one year the program was only conducted for one semester. The shell of the program was essentially the same in each manifestation of the program but some amenities changed: providing transportation for students home was dropped, providing a meal at each session was changed to a snack and community dinners every six weeks were added. There were also a variety of reasons for each attempt that the program did not continue: lack of funding, I was on maternity leave and no other teacher was willing to be in charge and one year it simply didn't start until midterm of the second semester.

For the re-formation of the *Learning Station*, and the purpose of this case study, it was important that all adult stakeholders were represented when discussing how best to support students who fall under the achievement gap category. School administrators or a staff could receive criticism from parents and community members if those stakeholders outside the school building were not engaged during the planning process. As a result, conversations about reinstating the *Learning Station* as an academic support opportunity began. Parents and community members were included in the planning process for the club. Selected parents and community members served on the committee

charged with determining and creating academic opportunities for minority and low-income students out of the classroom.

In addition to focusing on engaging parents and the community, the Superintendent of Solo County School District also charged teachers with intentionally evaluating their classroom practices to analyze their instruction for academically struggling students in the achievement gap. Teachers were asked to evaluate their curricular materials and become more intentional about engaging achievement gap students. As a result of these efforts, the school funded two⁴ after school tutoring programs specifically targeted at students who fell in the category of “achievement gap.” The achievement gap is a category of students consisting of primarily ethnic minority and low-income students who have typically underperformed on state mandated tests. Research shows that there is a direct correlation between race and socioeconomic status on student academic performance (Carey 2014, Collopy and Bowman 2012, Gorski 2008, Haefner and Fitchett 2013, and Rothstein 2004). An initial attempt at starting a partnership between teachers and minority and low-income students and families had to be the unification of the staff in the school building. The committee felt strongly that an understanding amongst the faculty in the school building was essential in order for these teachers to work together to provide additional supports for those in the achievement gap so that they may be more successful on school assessments. Our idea was that a unified staff would ensure activities and communication patterns that would encourage and inspire parents and community members to want to be more engaged. It was going to be

⁴ The program at the school is the focus of this dissertation. The other program is not discussed in detail as part of this dissertation because it was held at an off campus site and functioned independently of the program at the high school.

essential to build relationships with and for students (Achinstein et al 2013, Carey 2014, Milner 2010, Rebell and Wolff 2012, and Young 2012). *The Learning Station* would serve as the medium for relationship building.

In the 2013-2014 version of the *Learning Station*, it was conducted after school twice a week and met in the school's library. A church hosted the other tutoring program, Lift, on Thursday nights in their basement. These after school programs also provided opportunities for the families of struggling students who have been categorized as part of the achievement gap to be involved and engaged in their child's education through community dinners. The dinners were hosted at the high school with food provided by the community. A parent curriculum was designed and implemented as part of the dinners. This curriculum was a group effort including both of the program coordinators, a teacher who attended both weekly sessions and the guidance office. The purpose of the curriculum was to empower parents to feel more comfortable in the school during academic activities such as Open House nights and Parent Teacher Conferences. The parent curriculum also provided parents with vital information in regards to how to read test scores, academic progress (example: grade point average, class credits, etc) and graduation information. Parents were provided with a variety of avenues that allowed the parents the potential to be more engaged in their student's education, or to get pertinent information if due to work or familial constraints they could not be at the school regularly.

Research Design

This exploratory qualitative study used a holistic, single-case study of an after school tutoring program as one high school's attempt to close the achievement gap. The

goal of the study was to examine how members from the home, school and community spheres contextualize the after school tutoring program. The main research question for this was: How do different members of the school, family and community spheres contextualize the *Learning Station*? Supporting research questions include: (1) How does the *Learning Station* address the academic disparities in the school? (2) What is the achievement gap? (3) How does the phrase “opportunity gap” change the context in which students in the achievement gap are perceived?

To answer these research questions

I attended the *Learning Station* sessions once a week, during which field observations were conducted. Towards the end of the school year I conducted interviews with the school principal, teachers who chose to be involved in the program, the school social worker and the district superintendent. Individual interviews were conducted with the school Superintendent, the principal and the social worker while a group interview was conducted with the teachers. The primary motivation for the group interview with the teachers was to ensure that the interviews could be conducted in a timely manner and enough information gained. Classroom teachers tend to be extremely pressed for time, so there was concern that trying to schedule individual interviews with each teacher would be extremely difficult. The second series of interviews was with parents who currently serve on the School Based Decision Making Council’s Community Relations committee. These were conducted as individual, semi-structured interviews at various locations depending on what was the most convenient meeting place for the participant. In all, three parents, the Superintendent, school principal, and school social worker participated

in one-on-one interviews. Thirteen teachers participated in a focus group session. The majority of the interviews were conducted at Solo County High School. One interview was conducted at the Solo County Board of Education. These locations were chosen for convenience to research participants.

Each stakeholder group was asked a series of questions that would have been applicable to their level of knowledge and engagement with the program. There were four questions that were asked of all:

- In what ways does the *Learning Station* fit in to the mission of the Solo County Schools?
- Describe the achievement gap.
- Some people see this as an opportunity gap and not an achievement gap. What do you think?
- What were some of the challenges of *Learning Station*?

Observational data were collected during each *Learning Station* session that I attended. I attended 26 sessions total; 15 while I was a teacher in the building and 11 after I left the school. As part of the program design, it was decided that the school social worker and I would each attend one session a week as program coordinator. While conducting field observations I sat at the circulation desk in the library as it provided me with the best vantage point for the room as a whole. I would help students get checked in and get the session started. Then, I would remove myself from being an active participant by using the circulation desk as a physical barrier between myself and the students and faculty in the room so that I could take notes. Notes were dated and kept in a specific notebook. The week following the last session of the *Learning Station* that I attended, I began to code my notes by looking for commonalities (Yin 2011). After this, I attempted to sort the data into Level 1 coding (Yin 2011 pp. 187-188). These Level 1

groups were: student-initiated interactions with teachers, teacher-initiated interactions with students and non-academic activities. Once my interviews were completed, I reorganized the data so that questions served as headings. This is how the Level 1 codes were created from the interviews. I analyzed the examples in the Level 1 coding categories from my field data and the interviews and created Level 2 codes (Yin 2011 p. 189). From this data several themes emerged: Mission of the *Learning Station*, the definition of the achievement gap, conceptualizing as an opportunity gap, and the challenges of the program. I discuss my findings according to these themes.

Role of the Researcher

Four years before this study commenced, I was a co-founder with the school social worker of the first version of the *Learning Station* program. We were able to conduct the program for the last two terms of a trimester school schedule but lost funding and could not continue the program the next year. A few weeks before the end of the second trimester during the 2012-2013 school year the decision was made to revive the program. During the planning meetings for the implementation of the *Learning Station* for the next year, while there were a few differences (snacks at each session instead of a full meal, no transportation home, and monthly community dinners added), the perception by the administration and parents was that the program was not only successful, but also a necessity. The 2013-2014 academic year was the first year that the program had an intentional plan before the start of the school year and was able to run for a full year. Over the summer I met with school administrators and the school social worker to determine the budget for the teachers. I gave a presentation to the department chairs with the little quantitative data that we had gathered from previous attempts at this

program, in an effort to gain buy-in from the content area leaders. Then I emailed teachers individually who had helped with this program in the past in order to give them priority in choosing if they wanted to be a part of this program again. Once I received their answers, I emailed department chairs with the number of openings in each subject area that still needed to be filled and asked for them to decide as a department who would be helping with the program.

Once the school year started, my role was to send letters to all students who had been identified as part of the achievement gap⁵, reserve the library for the entire term and then travel with the school social worker to pick up snacks for the entire term. Students were specifically identified through a list that was generated from Infinite Campus⁶. Report parameters were set to include minority students and those who qualified for free and reduced lunch. At each session I printed a sign-in sheet with the names of the students who had signed up for the program and kept track of teacher attendance as well. I received weekly grade reports for the students in the program so that I could follow up with teachers in requesting work and assignments for students in the program. At the beginning and end of each session I would hand out the work that teachers sent for students to complete and collect it and redistribute it back to the teachers. During the sessions I would meet with individual students about their academic performance in their classes and work with students individually on assignments. I would send an email to the entire faculty at the end of each session with the attendance sheet for the day.

⁵ We used a very basic definition of the achievement gap which included minority and low income students.

⁶ Infinite Campus is the reporting and grading system used by schools in Kentucky.

I left Solo County High School at Christmas break 2013 for a new job. I continued to return each week for the *Learning Station* sessions but my role changed. My role was confined to that of researcher rather than as teacher participant. I no longer received grade reports concerning the students in the program, helped them with their assignments or met with them individually about their academic progress. I would set up the snacks before each session, hand out work to the students that teachers had sent for them to complete, collected the work at the end of the session, and I took attendance. My role as the researcher was to conduct one-on-one interviews with the school administration, a group interview with teachers involved in the program, and interviews with parents who were involved in reviving the program.⁷

Interviews

Teacher interview

Of all of the interviews that I conducted, the focus group with the teachers was the one I felt most confident walking into, with expectation of good participation and quality responses. These people knew me and had been my colleagues. However, I realized very quickly from the looks on their faces that this was going to be a challenge. In order to get all of the teachers to meet, I had to find a time during the school day. The school principal was more than willing to accommodate my request. Due to an extremely intense winter resulting in a number of unexpected make up days at the end of the year plus the state mandated windows for testing, the only day that we were able to find a time for all of the teachers to meet was during Spring Fling. Spring Fling was a time of celebration and relaxation for students who worked hard during the state assessments.

⁷ See Appendix B for the interview protocol

The ability to participate in Spring Fling was not correlated with student performance on the test but with their perceived effort on the test. Teachers, then, were responsible for supervising the halls and grounds, running games or chaperoning movie viewings in their classrooms. Instead of supervising a carnival game or activity, patrolling the halls of the school or serving as a referee for kickball, soccer or some other outdoor games, teachers involved in the Learning Station were assigned to the library conference room for an hour and a half for the focus group session. As teachers strolled in and assessed my set up of audio recording equipment, some chose their seats very strategically. A handful of the teachers whom I expected to provide great insights into the program looked as though they had been forced to participate. The body language, posture and other non-verbal cues spoke volumes about their willingness and desire to participate despite having voluntarily agreed. I was completely shocked by this and was very confused because I thought I was one of them. I had worked for years *with* them building this program and had worked for the last year *for* them gaining support from the administration and community to build the program that they had envisioned.

As we got started, I laid out the ground rules for the focus group and informed them that my questions were intentionally broad in order to allow for conversation direction based on their answers. I also reminded them that the focus of the discussion was to gain perspective on their conceptualization of the program and not on their teaching or tutoring abilities. Initially, conversation was very difficult and I had to intentionally target teachers in order to get conversation going. After the first few questions, the teachers realized that I was serious about the nature of the questions, the tension in the room relaxed and all of the teachers became more conversational. This was

interrupted briefly about half way through the interview when one of the teachers walked in late, but conversation quickly resumed to its previous flow.

There was extended conversation about the structure of the program. Teachers discussed a need for a systematic structure for the program. “An organizational piece needs to be added.” “There needs to be structured support through the whole term.” “There needs to be a systemized approach for getting work...and grade checks.” “We should require teacher recommendations for students to be in the program.” “We need to be more clear if this is about building community or about getting academic work done.” The teachers were frequently frustrated by the lack of focus and work that students brought to the program. Other concerns raised by the teachers included the change in the academic schedule for the next school year which would include the addition of three extra classes and a rotating schedule. “Students can barely keep up now. What about next year when three classes are added.” If students who were struggling academically could barely stay organized and in good academic standing with the same five classes every day then their struggles would increase exponentially with the addition of more classes and a rotating schedule. Teachers also argued for more consistency in the structure of the program. The teachers were very honest that the personalities in the teachers on Tuesday and the teachers on Wednesday were very different. Tuesday teachers were commented to be more structured and rigorous in their demands of the students during the *Learning Station* sessions. While the Wednesday teachers were more relaxed and allowed the students’ to direct when they would start and where they would sit. Teachers argued that there needed to be a consistent set of rules concerning the exact start time of the program after the students were given their snack, how many students

were allowed to sit at each table, mandating content area study session, and clarifying that certain subjects will not have help available.

I was appreciative of the majority of their recommendations but frustrated by some of the recommendations. Some of those teachers knew of my efforts to get other teachers in the building to submit work for students to do, and to work within various organizational systems to make the process easy for teachers. But, none of them mentioned these efforts. I was frustrated because I was working hard to make participating in the program easier for them and yet none of them seemed to even notice.

Principal Interview

Due to my personal connection to the high school, I felt extremely relaxed walking in to my interview with the head principal. I assumed that I knew what his answers would be to the questions. I knew he would be positive, encouraging and supportive of the work the program had done. I knew he would laud the efforts of the program coordinators and its teachers. And, I knew he would say that we had a long way to go and that this was a good first step. However, I was quickly, and pleasantly, surprised by the level of insightful comments he was making in regards to the social and emotional impacts of the program.

As the questions continued, I mentally distance myself from his comments. He was talking about aspects of the program that I had never considered before as having true value. This was the first time I could see the program through a different lens. Instead of thinking about the program in terms of faculty and parent support or the level of student focus, I finally saw the program from a holistic perspective. It was not just about academic improvement and test scores. Yes, that was going to be a deciding factor

in keeping the program but it was about the community that was created for these students. As the principal noted, “It is one giant dinner table.” It was a place where they felt accepted, valued and supported. “It helps kids see their potential and their accomplishments. They build self-esteem.” As I reflected on my observations each week of the *Learning Station* program, I realized that the community element may have been more evident than I thought but because I was so focused on the academic data I was paying particular attention to the important social data. Students came in jovial. They were excited to see their peers and the teachers. Students instantly engaged in conversations, they had seats that they preferred to sit in but were always inclusive of others. They never hesitated to ask a question or for help. They helped each other with assignments, sometimes to the detriment of getting their own work done. I regularly reminded students that while I appreciated their willingness to help a friend, they also had to get some of their own work done. This was a place where they could work in a positive environment that provided them with a safe space to ask questions, get help and be themselves. Students found a sense of ownership and belonging in the club. For the principal, this was more valuable than the academic data that were being produced.

“*Learning Station* is an important and integral part of school culture. I am pleased, and so are the students, with the opportunity...its an affiliation and provides accountability.”

I was most surprised by this. I assumed he would be focused on the data. I assumed he would use numbers to justify the program at present and in the future. I assumed that test scores would be the only valued source that mattered. This assumption was incorrect. While I have never questioned his commitment to the students in our

building or his desire to help each one of them, I did assume that the student as a data point would override the student as an individual.

Instead he talked about the social and emotional changes he had seen in the students. In general, the students who attended this program were often in trouble in classrooms for being defiant or disruptive. The principal stated that he noticed that the defense and avoidance mechanisms that this particular demographic of student usually used in self-defense were disappearing. “We have seen a decrease in discipline among students in *Learning Station*. This was unexpected but it makes sense...their defense and avoidance mechanisms are down.” *Learning Station* had created a sense of community in the school for these students. These students valued the opportunity to participate in the club. This was proven to the principal because he stated that more than once he threatened to remove a student from the program as a source of punishment and the student responded negatively and assertively. “They don’t want to not be allowed to go.” The principal was proud that the family nature of the community dinners caused the students to be proud of their work and allowed parents, teachers and students to interact in an informal and casual manner that built strong relationships fostering trust and community. Of all other previous program attempts, the principal argued that this was the most successful in terms of improving academic and behavioral performance. “It is the best program we have had to meet needs and it is just a part of what we do.”

Superintendent Interview

The interview with the Superintendent had to be scheduled three different times. When we were finally able to meet, the Superintendent was late for our meeting. Somehow, this made me more nervous than the meeting itself. I assumed he would rush

the interview given his busy schedule and the fact that we were already behind. I assumed he would sit at his expansive desk and I would be across from him. I was afraid it would be a very stoic discussion with quick responses and the semi-structured interview that was planned to take an hour would be over in less than half that time.

I was never rushed. The Superintendent was candid and very open. We sat next to each other at the conference table in his office with the chairs adjusted so that we were facing each other. He was easy to have conversation with given a topic that had been very sensitive in the district. If I were to classify the principal's responses as very personal, then the Superintendent's responses were very political. The most telling indicator to his engagement, involvement and knowledge with the *Learning Station* was that he never mentioned the program at the high school. All of his answers specifically referred to the elements of the program and the efforts of the teachers and community at the off site location at the local church that was only held once a week. "It provides an environment...for students to get help...in a neutral setting." "They bring people in to speak to the kids." I was dismayed that the on-site program was never mentioned during the interview, particularly since the program held at the high school was run for double the amount of time with double the amount of participants, and was the one that I was most invested in. Maybe his seeming disregard for the on-site program was because he saw the off-site location as that much more valuable. It never occurred to me, before my interview with him, that these were seen as separate entities and that they could in fact stand alone or that one was better than the other. I therefore failed to stay objective as the researcher and allowed my personal connection to the program to intercede. As a result, I never asked him about his lack of attention to the on-site program during the interview.

However, regardless of his disregard for the on-site program, his focus on the benefit of the relationships between the school, families and community that the tutoring program was building was genuine. “It helps to create ties.” He did value and respect the relationship-building that had occurred. My other point of contention with the Superintendent’s answers in the interview was his lack of focus on the tutoring program itself and his focus on classroom instruction. The Superintendent managed to turn each answer away from addressing the tutoring program itself and continued to discuss the need for every day instruction to improve and change based on the MAP scores that teachers had received. “We try to focus on core instruction...improve what happens every day in every room...teachers should be using MAP scores to determine classroom level work.” At the end of the interview, he spent quite a bit of time talking about the role and value of opportunity and experience. He recognized that the opportunities and experiences that each student has or doesn’t have shape their academic abilities. “Any time you help a student it is an opportunity. We have work to do. The achievement gap didn’t happen overnight. It’s a process. How do we make progress each year? How do we deal with it over time? You can’t underestimate the value of opportunity and experience.”

While I was inspired and reassured by the Superintendent’s recognition of this fact, I also knew that, given the implications of testing and test scores, nothing would be done to improve access to opportunities and experiences. Researchers (Phillips, Crouse and Ralph 1998 and Yeung and Conley 2007) assert that there is evidence of an achievement gap before students enter kindergarten. Given the financial difficulties encountered in finding and ensuring funding for this program, I knew that money would

not be invested into other educational opportunities for any age level without a polarizing event (such as the letter that was released from the high school). The focus was on test scores. Opportunities would be provided if the assumption was that there would be a direct effect on test scores.

School Social Worker Interview

The biggest concern leading up to this interview was that the school social worker would not be able to block off an hour of time in order to conduct the full interview. Her office constantly has a line of students outside of it and she is frequently called in to last minute meetings with administrators and members of the police department. The school social worker and I had worked very closely over the last six years through a variety of experiences and issues so I was confident in her commitment to the program and the students.

After a very late start, we were finally able to sit down in a guidance counselor's office and shut the door so that we could have some privacy for the interview. This was the longest interview of all of them. Her answers were insightful, in depth and very detailed. It was obvious that she, too, held a personal attachment to the program. The school social worker was able to provide valuable insight into the community aspect of the program.

She noted that the family court judge for the county was a strong supporter of the program and would often order students to attend the program. In addition to the family court judge, she emphasized that the court designated worker, district social worker, local mental health center, and several of the local churches were all very supportive of the program. "This is a community effort and there was community support in starting the

Learning Station. The family court judge supports academic success and mandates students attend, but also the court designated worker supports it, the district social worker, local mental health center, churches donate time and food for snacks and dinners...” These individuals and groups provided support in a variety of ways. They mandated that students attend the program, volunteered to help with community dinners, and donated food for snacks and dinners.

In addition to her focus and insight on the various community groups who were involved in supporting the program, the school social worker also had valuable insight into the successes of the program. Success manifests differently for each student. The school social worker saw excitement in students when they received good grades or positive re-enforcement from their teachers. “I see excitement in kids even if they are just asking about the food...they are excited about belonging...there is a community piece.” With the excitement increasing in learning and academic performance, the school social worker saw an increase in self- esteem in the students in the program. “Students raise their scores and their grades. They take pride in completing work or understanding a problem.” Given the more casual instructional setting of the program, the social worker noticed students became more trusting and invested in the teachers who were helping with the program. “Students are empowered to ask for help. We see their confidence grow...there is an increase in GPA but self-esteem, confidence and belonging can’t be measured.” Relationships were developing which helped hold students accountable for their actions and performance because they valued the opinions of the adults in the program.

The social worker recognized that this was just one level of intervention that was necessary for students in the achievement gap to be successful. She argued that when intervention grows, it leads to success. As success increases then children grow. The end goal for education is to create an environment that encourages students to grow.

Parent Interviews

The high school principal identified three parents to be contacted for a one on one interview. The parents were all African American women who had served on various school and district committees that were responsible for getting the program started initially and revived for the full 2013-2014 academic year. All of the parents agreed to participate. It was extremely difficult to find a meeting time to interview these parents.

One of the parent interviews conducted was held off campus at a neutral meeting site. This particular interview had a more conversational tone and flow to it than any of the other interviews. Her student was getting ready to graduate and while she stated repeatedly that she would stay involved with the school, the pressure of needing the program to continue was slowly being lifted. "I like to help with transportation, help parents, help teachers by making copies...my work was very supportive...like snacks and donations. My role was to convince administration. I still need and want to get the parents more involved. I want to create a commitment."

I know her to be a dynamic and outspoken woman. I expected her comments to be pointed and vibrant. I expected an almost revolutionary tone. I was surprised by the village type approach in which she framed her answers and the need for all students to be included more intentionally. I expected her to sing praises of how far the program had come since she was part of its initial inception and had seen the struggles every year.

Instead, she spoke of the long way that intentional academic support still had to go in the schools and in the community. “There needs to be a consistency to commit. The school needs to commit and parents need to commit.” By the end of the conversation, I felt more defeated than uplifted. I wondered if she would seriously stay connected to the program, the school and the community since her student was leaving. Or, if these were good intentions that would quickly go to the wayside once she was no longer personally as invested in the success of the program.

The second parent interview was brief and to the point. This interview was conducted via phone because there was not a convenient time that could be agreed upon for a meeting. By the time the interview was conducted the student had graduated and the parent was preparing to get married. While I appreciated that life had moved on for her, and her student, I was disappointed with the detached manner in which she approached the interview. “It was a good program. It helped my child, but he has graduated now.” Instead of a message of hope for the future or thankfulness for improvement, there was an air of impatience and disconnect.

The last parent interviewed was positive, encouraging and hopeful for the future. She was also the only parent to still have a child in the school system. Her answers were professional and articulate. Similar to the two interviews before her, she spoke of the desire for the program to eventually be open to all students who needed help. “I don’t understand why there is a sense that advanced kids can’t come too. Can’t they all help each other?”

Findings and Discussion

From data analysis, four main themes emerged as significant: the mission of the *Learning Station*, the definition of the achievement gap, impressions surrounding the opportunity gap, and the challenges within the *Learning Station* program. The following discussion is organized around these four themes.

Mission

The question in regards to the mission of the *Learning Station* was to gain insight into whether or not the study participants had the same perspective and understanding for the purpose of the program. Holistically, all stakeholders felt that ultimately, the *Learning Station* fulfilled the mission of the Solo County Schools by meeting the needs of each student. The Superintendent described the mission of the Solo County Schools as “to provide, promote, prepare: provide an opportunity, promote student achievement, and prepare for life after college.” He stated that he felt strongly that the *Learning Station* fit into this mantra for success. All stakeholders answered this question quickly and consistently with phrases of: education for all, meets the needs of all students and be invested in each student. The message was clear. This program was about each student as an individual and attempting to primarily meet their academic needs by providing tutoring and a space for support, food to give them energy to think and access to the school social worker and myself (as the school interventionist) if they needed emotional support. The school social worker and I felt that all of these components were necessary for success. Teachers involved in the program and the school administration were focused primarily on the academic supports and saw the food and emotional support as positive additions but not necessary. While many parents informally told me that they

appreciated the food and the emotional support we were providing for their student which allowed the student to focus more on his or her academics. Ultimately, the mission was to meet the needs of students who were struggling to be academically successful.

Academic performance was clearly identified as the primary goal for this program. The principal stated, “A need was recognized. We needed to provide support and advocacy.” The Superintendent stated, “I hope this creates an opportunity for all types of students for help.” Teachers participating in the focus group stated a variety of answers: “meet needs,” “pass classes to graduate,” “need adult support,” “provide adults who care,” and “one-on-one support.” But I think one parent summarized the mission of the program best when she said, “*Learning Station* is a place where they can learn on their level.” In addition to these comments about the mission of the *Learning Station*, all who were interviewed discussed why the focus on the students was brought back into light. The reason the *Learning Station* was re-established was not because of a need to fulfill the mission statement of the school. It was revitalized after a letter was sent to the community marginalizing students who qualified as part of the gap.

The parents who were interviewed were the only group to not mention the letter as part of why the *Learning Station* was formed. Both the principal and Superintendent referred to the letter in their interviews as “an unfortunate event” and the teachers simply mentioned “the letter”. This letter offered separate gatherings to recognize ethnic minority students who were achieving academically since they were often not recognized during whole school assemblies for academic success. A date and time was offered for African American families to come and recognize their students who were academically achieving despite being labeled as part of the achievement gap and implied that other

assemblies were being offered to Hispanic families as well. The community was outraged by this marginalization of their children. Being a teacher in the building at the time, I heard from many parents and students who were angry. There were also several parents who were complacent stating, “We have come to expect this kind of racism.” While it was unfortunate that this letter was sent, it forced many important conversations in the school and in the community.

Several meetings were held at the Board Office with the Superintendent, parents and representatives from the Office of Civil Rights. Community meetings were held co-sponsored by the high school and the Office of Civil Rights with speakers to help educate parents on the importance of being involved in their children’s education. The committee that was formed which revitalized the *Learning Station* program stemmed from these initiatives by the school and the district to engage the community. The Superintendent, Principal, teachers, and parents were all very open about the role this letter played in mobilizing the school to provide more opportunities for their students to learn. While each group mentioned that the *Learning Station* was started because of “the letter” (as referred to by the principal, teachers and parents) or the “unfortunate event” (as referred to by the Superintendent) none of the groups discussed what this letter said. I found it interesting that all groups mentioned it but no one talked about what it said or why it was the catalyst for the revival of the program. The effects of this letter helped break down some of the perceived barriers between the school and the community. Quickly, people had to make a choice to unite in the best interest of the children or continue to maintain a relationship of distance.

In the search for a solution to provide achievement gap students with more opportunities to learn, a committee of parents, teachers and administrators was formed to assess the options. It was out of this committee that the suggestion was made to re-invent the *Learning Station* in order to help these students, but also to provide avenues to engage families and build relationships. The mission of the *Learning Station* fit the district's mission to provide opportunities for all students to learn in an environment that promoted student achievement while preparing them with the skills necessary for life after college.

The Achievement Gap

Given the common use of the phrase “achievement gap” in education circles, I felt it was important to establish how participants understood this term. Did those participating in the study refer to the same population of students and the ways in which this program in particular could help address this gap? The majority of those interviewed identified the same general population of students as part of the achievement gap. Two of the parents discussed the concept of the gap versus identifying specific groups of students in this category, “The concept of the gap hasn’t changed...it has always been an issue for all schools,” and “The achievement gap is just another way to label students who aren’t doing well.” The principal stated simply, “NCLB defines the achievement gap.” The school social worker had the most expansive description of the group, “We looked at grades, data, test scores and saw that there was a discrepancy from top to bottom. We needed to find a way to bring the bottom up to learn more and be successful.” One parent identified this group as, “Kids below level or with an F to be able to have a chance to learn.” The teachers used identifying phrases, “students who are underperforming...not meeting benchmark...not making progress...students are divided

into thirds and the bottom is ‘the gap’.” The Superintendent did not identify students in this category, nor did he discuss the gap conceptually. He spoke to the ways in which schools in the district had improved scores for the students in the gap. “We have made strides. We have had good increase [in scores] with Hispanics and an increase [in scores] on the ACT with our minority populations.” Despite the terminology or approach used to identify which students were part of this category, the same type of student was being described. I was conflicted over whether it was a positive indicator or not that all groups knew which students were included in this category. Or, was this evidence indicative that the rhetoric around the achievement gap was so engrained in daily culture that allowed all of the groups interviewed to provide the same answer?

There was significant difference in the language and tone that was used to describe these students. The Principal was quick to comment on the holistic nature and benefit of the program for students who were classified as the achievement gap. He spoke to “the sense of community it provided for students in the building while providing parents with support and an atmosphere of community through the dinners.” He also claimed that by using the label to define who students are and using that to identify academic and social supports that schools are profiling instead of meeting individual needs. The point the principal was making was that a program had been implemented that was broad and provided a space for students to receive academic support but this was not going to be the solution for every student. The purpose of the program was never meant to alleviate all academic struggles but to provide support and build relationships between students, their families and the school. This was further supported by the Superintendent, “There is no silver bullet. What works [in terms of academic support]

for a Hispanic student may not work for an African-American student.” The Superintendent further stated, “We try to focus on core instruction...improve what happens every day in every room.” While the Superintendent seemed supportive of this program, he was clear that this was not a solution and that his focus was on changing classroom instruction to increase academic performance.

The Opportunity Gap

The question concerning the opportunity gap was raised because some researchers, me included, prefer this term over the term achievement gap⁸. I heard the term opportunity gap for the first time at a conference. I asked research participants about the term, in part due to my own curiosity if others were aware of the term and, to get a perspective and understanding of the term from a variety of voices. The answer to this question from the stakeholders was very telling. The Superintendent was quick to comment that he did not care for this terminology. He stated that it didn’t carry the necessary rhetorical clout to facilitate change. By using the term “achievement gap”, a sense of urgency was created. He further stated that teachers could challenge students through opportunities but achievement measures how they are valued. The principal stated that it comes down to socioeconomic status. He preferred the term opportunity gap because it placed some of the onus to be successful on the student and families. achievement gap, the principal argued, was accusatory of teachers. The school social worker summed the difference in the two terms up in a compelling statement. She said “When given opportunity we will rise; when labelled we fall or do not move.” One of the teachers most poignantly stated, “The opportunity gap goes back to what the gap truly is.

⁸ The variety of reasons for this will be discussed in further detail in the next article.

Achievement gap applies more to the way in which students are valued.” Another teacher commented, “Changing the label doesn’t change the issue.” My initial reaction to this statement was frustration. The label changes the direction of focus. I wanted to remind this teacher that a colleague had just stated that the term achievement gap places a numerical value on the student; therefore, the label does matter. However, the longer I have reflected on these interviews, the more I wonder: If the label matters, who does it matter to? I do not have the answer for this but the principal, school social worker and the teachers all recognized that opportunity carried an aura of awareness that not all students entered schools on the same playing field and that regardless of the terminology used the root of the issue has not changed. The last teacher to comment on this question stated, “The opportunities for students in school is the same but out of school it is not. Not all students can afford to take their iPads⁹ home. Some of those who can take it home do not have internet at home.” The district is providing all students with the opportunity to have access to technology, but this effort has also created stratification and academic issues for students who cannot afford to take it home or do not have the resources at home to use the technology.

Two parents stated that they were unsure of what the term meant but one parent responded excitedly to this question. “See! That’s what I think. It is a way to show students that they can meet higher expectations. Some students just need to be told they are smart and be given the opportunity to see that they are smart. Put them in an environment where they can be challenged and give them a chance to have an opportunity to make [their grades] all better.” She believed that students needed to be

⁹ All students at Solo County High School have a district issued iPad.

lifted up through opportunities in order to be successful. Having been involved in the *Learning Station* program from its earliest inception, I know that this parent is speaking to the true nature of the program. The program was supposed to give students the opportunity to rise. We lifted up these students through positive interactions at each session, by asking teachers to write positive notes to the students which we gave to their parents at each community dinner, by giving their parents the tools to be more involved in their education if they wanted, and by continuing conversations with parents throughout the week on the academic progress of their student.

Regardless of the terms for classifying academically struggling students, whether through achievement or opportunity, there will be inherent challenges to any program that attempts to address the issue. The elements, such as race and socioeconomic status, which have helped to form gaps in students' achievement, are complex in nature (Corcoran 1995, Goldstein 2014, Jennings 2007, and Markley 1972). There is not a magic solution that can fix all issues for every student. Tyack and Cuban (1995) state clearly that labeling students and identifying them by group, focusing on these groups for reform and making slight adjustments to the system of education without actually making changes at the heart of education keeps meaningful, sustained change from occurring. From their perspective, *The Learning Station* had little chance of success at eradicating the achievement gap. That said, as the Superintendent had stated, the program was “not a silver bullet.” *The Learning Station* was never meant to solve all of the academic issues. Rather, the developers hoped to provide students with opportunities to complete homework assignments, receive additional tutoring, develop relationships with teachers that might lead to more active academic participation in classrooms, and have to other

academic resources that they might not have known how to access. These opportunities would not solve all of the academic issues or every problem. It was an attempt to address some of the obstacles that hindered academic success while building relationships with the student and their families. Despite these efforts, the Learning Station faced many challenges.

Challenges

The interview question about “challenges” specifically asked about challenges of the Learning Station program. There will never be a universal solution for all students who are classified within the achievement gap. The only comment about this by the Superintendent was, “Each group has a specific need and what works for African Americans may not work for Hispanics or for free and reduced lunch students.” Some of the students in this group were very academically successful already. After the letter was sent home to the community, I found one African American student outside my door crying. He confided to his science teacher and I that until he read that letter he did not know he was considered so different. This particular student was an extremely capable student in advanced classes, a member of the band, a participant in several school clubs, and his parents were on the Site Based Decision Making council. The Learning Station program was not designed with this student in mind. In Solo County High School, this student was the exception: a minority student who was doing exceptionally well academically. He would have been able to serve as a tutor for the program, but he probably would not have received much, in the way of benefits, from the program as teachers would have been too busy with higher needs students to provide him with any tutoring he could have used.

As the principal identified, by using a label to drive policy nothing was meeting the needs of all of the students. The school social worker and the teachers involved in the program were quick to comment that the program was not helpful to all students. They identified a variety of reasons for this. One of the issues was that some of the teachers were more engaged with and invested in the students attending the program. Those teachers who were not as interested tended to hover near the periphery of the library, group together with other teachers and talked amongst themselves, while others sat with students but did not engage with them about the material they were working on. This division amongst the teachers served as a strong point of contention between them. While the teachers involved in the program were being compensated, those who were working frantically to make sure the students in their areas were on task, had support and were re-teaching content were frustrated by those who were not as actively engaged. The ramifications of this exceeded just the disgruntled teachers and had a direct impact on the success of the students who were attending. Since the students attending the program were already struggling academically because they did not understand the material, were not doing the work or were not paying attention in class, simply being in the setting was not enough. These students were easily distracted or quickly off task.

Another issue was that advanced students who did not meet achievement gap qualifications but who chose to attend the program did not feel welcome. The committee members involved in the program were divided over this issue. Some felt as though these sessions were not a place for advanced students, while others felt as though any student ought to be welcome and be able to get the much needed assistance. Those who were against these academically gifted students attending were frustrated because teachers

tended to migrate towards these students to either help them or have casual conversation and the achievement gap students were left ignored. When teachers were re-teaching content material in small groups, these students dominated the conversation which caused the low performing students to stop listening as the session was moving at the advanced students pace. The advanced students tended to make the achievement gap students uncomfortable as these advanced students ignored them, talked over them and monopolized the time with the teachers. Those who supported the attendance of the advanced students thought that they could serve as peer mentors and help the achievement gap students to complete assignments. These teachers also felt that the program ought to be inclusive and open to all. The parents were especially strong advocates for this. Parents thought that it would help bring students together from all backgrounds and foster a sense of camaraderie amongst the different student groups. Parents argued that it would continue to break down social barriers within the school and enhance the sense of community that was developing in the program even further.

Being able to ensure that all students had help at each session was also a challenge. *The Learning Station* tutors and teachers struggled to keep everyone on task and with work to complete. The Tuesday session averaged more than 80 students in attendance at each session while the Wednesday session averaged more than 50 students. Only six teachers attended each session and three consistent peer tutors. Given the overwhelming number of students in each session and the range of academic support they needed, it was near impossible for teachers to ensure that all students were on task at all times. In former manifestations of this program, the school social worker and I worked harder to take responsibility for ensuring that all students had classroom assignments to

work on. However, in an effort to teach these students to be responsible and accountable for their school work, we did very little during the 2013-2014 academic year to make sure they had enough work to keep them busy for the entire session. Too often, students attended claiming they had nothing to do. Or, upon completion of one five minute assignment they were done with everything they could work on. Students were only interested in completing assignments if it would have an immediate impact on their grade. They did not want to review material or study for a class unless there was an impending assessment. Attempting to force students to work on something (review material, study, master homework, extension assignments, etc) required too much attention, and eventually teachers and program coordinators gave up on this aspect.

From my own perspective, a key challenge is in student ownership. As the principal mentioned during his interview, the difference between phrasing such as achievement gap versus opportunity gap is the nature of onus. I had conflicting feelings concerning the fact that none of the adults interviewed placed any responsibility on students for their role in being successful during *Learning Station* sessions. At first I was surprised by the self-sacrificing nature of the teachers who were pushing for more programmatic infrastructure to ensure that students were working. I was disappointed with parents and administrators who did not even recognize the role of the student in being academically successful other than to praise them for attendance. The longer I have reflected on this, the more I am saddened. As an educator it is disheartening that under the pressure to close the achievement gap teachers feel that the responsibility is in their hands. The true challenge, as education moves forward, lies in the words of the Principal in that by changing the phrasing to opportunity gap, the onus shifts to the

student. Students need to recognize and take responsibility for their role in their own academic success.

As a program coordinator, I also know that maintaining the community dinners is a challenge for the program. For the 2013-2014 school year, we were fortunate enough to have a former teacher in the community who was willing to advocate to various community groups on our behalf and coordinate the food for each community dinner. Like us, she recognized the undeniable benefit that these dinners had on engaging parents, building strong relationships with families and the community members providing the food and the positive feedback that students received and were able to share with their parents from their teachers. These dinners were equally important for the students and their families in terms of building relationships with teachers, guidance counselors and administrators in the building. I had numerous conversations with parents at these dinners about how thankful they were for the food, the chance to speak with teachers and guidance counselors in a relaxed setting and how surprised many of them were to find that the teachers had positive information to share about their student. These parents were thankful for the leftover food that we sent home; they were impressed by the presence of the administrators and were glad to receive information on upcoming academic and extra-curricular activities at the school that they could be involved in. These community dinners were imperative in helping strengthen the relationships between the school, the families and the community.

Moving forward it is imperative that program coordinators at least attempt to make these adjustments to the program. If these suggestions provided by the teachers are ignored then program coordinators and administrators risk teachers becoming frustrated

and withdrawing from the program. Even though the teachers are being compensated for their participation in the program, becoming involved in the program was still voluntary and, unfortunately, there was not an extensive amount of teacher interest. In the planning committee meetings, parents and teachers made it abundantly clear to the school and district administration that a surface level solution was not going to be sufficient. The call was for a district supported sustainable program. Identifying the *Learning Station* as a method to provide learning opportunities to students in the achievement gap was an attempt to mollify angry parents over the discriminatory letter that was sent out. Because of the heightened use of the rhetoric, it was important to establish if all vested groups understood who constituted the “achievement gap”.

These findings, as well as additional qualitative data from the interview sessions, shaped my discussion on the *Learning Station* to support school, family and community relationships. The nature of the *Learning Station* program as a unifying element for the different spheres of influence led to clear implications for the student, school and the community. The discussion is organized through these three categories: student, school and community and is infused with additional data from the interviews.

Discussion

The qualitative data shows the holistic benefits of the *Learning Station* program for students in the achievement gap. Participants in this study identified many benefits for students from this program. These benefits, as discussed previously, include personal and academic growth as well as a sense of community development. The program had direct impacts for students, the school and the community.

Students

All study participants discussed the positive personal and academic benefits that this program had for the students who participated. The principal stated that it “help(ed) kids see their potential and their accomplishments. It help(ed) them build self-esteem.” In other words, as students saw their grades increase with each session of attendance at the program, students became more confident in their classroom academic abilities. I noticed that as the year progressed, students became more outspoken in these sessions and took the initiative to ask questions and seek help from a teacher.

The social worker stated that the importance of *Learning Station* is that it is an “opportunity for each student to get help that isn’t offered at home for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the parent is absent, parent(s) have to work more than one job, or parents simply do not understand how to help their student because the education and learning system is so very different from when the parent was in school.” For a variety of reasons, many parents of students in the achievement gap struggle to help their student succeed academically. *The Learning Station* provided an opportunity for these students to get academic support from an adult. For many of the parents of students who struggle, it isn’t always a matter of caring. In my experience, the vast majority of parents did care about their child’s academic success but they simply could not help. Some could not provide tutoring help for their student because the teaching and learning system is so different. When teaching a Geography class, I had many parents call, email or set up appointments to discuss why students were learning about environmental interactions when Geography was supposed to be about naming and placing states and countries. The education system had changed since they were in school.

The social worker went on to say that through *Learning Station*, students became “excited about learning. Their overall grades (were) better so there (was) an increase in their self-esteem. It is a safe environment for them which also (meant) (the students) were not out making bad choices.” When students are in “need” it affects their ability to learn. By providing a space where each student can be fed while getting emotional and academic support, the *Learning Station* is meeting many needs of each student. As she and I sat in early conversations about developing the *Learning Station* program, it was important that the program be an environment that encouraged learning through personal growth. Every positive interaction a student has with an adult in the school building could lead to a better decision on the part of the student. It is common knowledge amongst teachers that if a student respects you, the student is more likely to attempt academic activities or at least not be disruptive. The more rapport a teacher has with the students in the room, the more productive the room.

From the parent perspective, “*Learning Station* is a place where (students) can learn on their level” (interview March 2014). The small group work areas with teacher and peer support provided numerous opportunities for students to learn. Students did not only learn from teachers or assigned peer mentors, students also learned from each other. Another parent said that her student, “appreciated the support and being able to get work done. It made him more aware of the value in good grades.” Students were in a positive work environment where they were lauded for their efforts by teachers, while seeing immediate results from their work in these sessions as teachers entered grades on the spot. *Learning Station* was changing the culture of learning and academic success for this marginalized group of students. The goal of every session was to meet each student

at their level; whether that was through meeting an academic, social or personal need. These findings are supported by other research as well (National Institute on Out-of-School Time 2009, Takanishi 2004). By focusing on each student as an individual, versus as a demographic or an assessment score, they felt empowered to do better academically and were choosing to participate in that process.

As documented by this qualitative data, as well as other research, after school programs decrease behavior referrals, increase academic performance and decrease social and emotional issues. When multiple students benefit from these types of outcomes it seems fair to assume that there will be benefits to the school community.

School

Early in my interview with the principal, he noted that, “We have seen a decrease in discipline [referrals] among students who participate in the *Learning Station*. This was an unexpected benefit but it (made) sense because their defense and avoidance mechanisms (were) down.” Overall, as one of the program designers for the *Learning Station* this was the most surprising data to receive. As a teacher, and program coordinator, I was so focused on the academic and attendance data that I missed the human development data. I assumed that in order to keep administrative support for the program, academic data would be the driving force. This decrease in disciplinary issues also brought camaraderie in the school building amongst the students who participated. The principal stated that *Learning Station* was “one giant dinner table. It (was) a choice that students (made) to attend and the attendance numbers at each session speaks volumes to the sense of belonging the students feel.” In other words, *Learning Station* brought students and teachers together for a shared purpose. It created a sense of belonging that

united students and teachers throughout the building. According to the social worker, “All members of the school building are recognizing that this is the first level of intervention and are coming together to make it work.” I noticed custodians talking with students who were participating in the *Learning Station* and encouraging them to stay focused on their grades. Non-participating students waited outside the doors of the library and asked participants how much they got done after each session. Teachers reported to me on a regular basis that students were talking about the program in their classrooms and encouraging other students to come.

The Superintendent also commented on the role the *Learning Station* has played in influencing instruction in the building. He noted that, “...the *Learning Station* program has been a great support for overall instructional improvement throughout the building.” *The Learning Station* program was calling attention to a much needed instructional gap. Since students, teachers, parents, program coordinators, and administrators were all talking to non-participating students and teachers about the program, it was raising awareness about the learning gap for the students in the achievement gap. *The Learning Station* was encouraging teachers to be more intentionally focused on the students in their classrooms and how they were providing instruction and learning opportunities. Informal conversations with teachers, observations at *Learning Station* sessions and experience while I was a teacher in the building provided me with evidence that teachers were revising lessons and activities to enable all students in the room to learn.

The administrators, teachers and students were united through the Learning Station program. From my perspective, this unified approach to helping students succeed

was a key component in many of our community partners wanting to engage and support the *Learning Station* program via the community dinners. Families, teachers and guidance counselors were encouraged and affirmed in the good work that Learning Station was doing by the community members at this dinner.

Community

As the literature shows, the community plays a key role in the development of its youth. In designing the *Learning Station*, the community was an integral piece of the plan. The social worker made a point to demonstrate the breadth of community involvement that is necessary in making a *Learning Station* type program successful. “The community was the lead voice in starting the *Learning Station*. But in addition to parents in the community, the family court judge is extremely invested in the academic success of our students and is supportive of the program. The court designated worker, district social worker, local mental health center, and several of the churches in the community are also all equally invested in making this program successful so that our students can be successful.” (Interview 2014) The level and type of support for the program varies depending on the person but that does not negate, or minimize, the support by these community members.

The community dinners represented the clearest representation of community growth. Parents, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators all shared a meal together that was provided by different church groups in the community. One parent stated that the “community dinners have really been instrumental in getting the community involved. Some provide the food while others receive much needed food for their families. Parent-Teacher conferences are fine but people are more relaxed at these

dinner so parents are less intimidated and feel more comfortable. It is an informal setting that allows parents to see teachers interact with each other, with other parents and with their students which has helped to overcome barriers.” (Interview March 2014)

These community dinners were a learning space. You could find students and teachers still working together on assignments on the stage, while parents sat with teachers and guidance counselors learning about their child’s improvement and graduation requirements. The structured parent curriculum helped parents get connected and feel empowered in their child’s learning process. I had several conversations with many parents about their fears in speaking with their child’s teacher, or attending an open house or parent-teacher conference. The parent curriculum gave them the tools these parents needed to feel confident to participate in these school activities. Parents were provided with questioning guides for open houses and conferences, newsletters from the guidance office about credits and graduation and community resources for support.

Limitations

The student voice is missing from this study. Given the restrictions concerning children as participants in research studies, the type of student that this program is designed to help, and my own personal knowledge of these students I felt confident that I would not get signed consent forms returned. Additionally, given that the underlying goal of this study was to gain insight about how school, family and community members conceptualized the *Learning Station* program, students would not have been privy to that information.

Another limitation is my involvement and subsequent decreased involvement in the program. I noticed through my field observations that there was a notable decrease in

productivity at these sessions between when I was a teacher in the building and when I was observing as the researcher. Several students and teachers seemed less engaged in making each session an intentional and productive use of their time. These students ate their snacks more slowly and spent more time talking about non-academic topics. Teachers spent more time in pairs or with students talking about non-school related topics. There were a few times when teachers simply did not show up. This led to anger and resentment amongst teachers. After several sessions some teachers would pull me aside to talk about how unfair it was that they were working so hard to help these students while other teachers were lounging around. The focus group session with the teachers was conducted at the end of the school year and I noticed several non-verbal cues from teachers (including sighing, rolling of the eyes, looks to other teachers, and smirking) that showed their frustration towards their peers.

The last notable limitation that was an issue not just for the program but the entire academic year was the number of snow days that this school year suffered. For several weeks in a row *Learning Station* sessions were cancelled because school was not in session. This lack of consistency and the loss of routine was damaging to attendance and focus. I noticed that it took several weeks in the Spring for students to readjust back to the expectations of the program. This inconsistency caused frustration among administrators and community members especially as they noticed the decrease in weekly attendance and had several dinners with little to no attendance since reminders weren't going home with students because the students were not at school.

Next Steps

In order for the program to continue successfully there are several elements that need to be considered. One of the biggest issues for the *Learning Station* has always been sustainability. We tried transporting students home after the program was over but that was not a sustainable cost. One goal in the beginning was to provide them with an extra meal during the day but purchasing pizzas, chips and drinks for over 100 students every week was not a sustainable cost. We had to be able to compensate the teachers because asking them to continue to volunteer was not an option. But, in funding staff to be at each session we sacrificed transportation and traded a meal for a snack.

Human capital is another major concern that needs to be addressed. The program coordinators worked exhaustively to keep the program going. They checked in with students, teachers, parents, and community members on a regular basis. When I left the school, finding a replacement for me in order to keep the program going became a serious concern. I had invested a significant amount of time in the program and using my community connections to fund the community dinners. So, the program lost a coordinator and the community connection at the same time.

In addition to these concerns, each of the previously mentioned challenges needs to be addressed by the program stakeholders. It is my opinion that the school's administration needs to be more involved in the selection of teachers participating in the program and set a clear expectation for what is expected of the teachers in order to receive compensation. This responsibility cannot fall on the program coordinators as it ought to be an edict from the administration in order to signal the importance of consistency amongst the teachers. Additionally, it would be helpful if the administration

conducted walk through visits during the sessions in order to monitor student and teacher activity.

The school administration and the program coordinators need to determine the purpose of the program. The program was created specifically for students in the achievement gap. If the program is going to be extended to students outside of the gap then program logistics need to be reconsidered. If the *Learning Station* is going to remain a place specifically for these students then it would be beneficial if all teachers understood the focus, were supportive and made accommodations to keep this a safe learning space for achievement gap students. If the *Learning Station* is going to be open to all students then the administration ought to consider investing in more teachers for each session, program coordinators and teachers need to help recruit more peer tutors to help and students ought to be encouraged to make a commitment to come more prepared to each session in order to maximize the learning opportunity.

The school administration and program coordinators should strongly consider addressing the issue of student work. In an ideal situation, students would follow up with each of their teachers and request work that they could complete at each session, or students would be able to articulate content material that they need to review in lieu of homework completion. However, if all of the students in the program would do this then there probably would not be a need for the program. The typical student in the program struggles to keep track of their school work, focus during class to complete their school work, lacks the home support structure to complete their school work, or lacks the motivation to complete their school work on their own. The vast majority of the students show up to an after school program like this because they enjoy, and in many cases need,

the snack. During the interview with the teachers, one of the teachers suggested that an “administrative instructor” be appointed at each session. This person would have access to all of the students’ academic information in the computer data base in order to check grades and look up missing assignments. This person would also be responsible for checking students in and out of the program in order to allow for students to leave the program early and not have to stay for the full hour. This seemed to be a compromise suggestion to try and assist students in determining assignments that they could work on if they did not ask their teachers in advance since the teachers interviewed recognized that not all teachers in the building are supportive of the program. The principal was very open that other teachers who were not supportive of the program felt this way because these teachers noticed that students were often off task and teachers were not engaged. The teachers who were not supportive of the program determined that it was a waste of their time to provide students with work to complete at the program if they were not going to do and the teachers present were not going to keep the students on task.

Conclusion

The interviews and observations provided insight into the value and benefits of the *Learning Station* program. The Superintendent and teachers spoke extensively to the benefits that the program had on increasing test scores. Program adjustments and modifications were suggested in order to continue to improve scores. Parents, the social worker and Principal all spoke to the value the program had in improving the self-esteem of the students while creating a sense of community and belonging. This is an interesting dichotomy in the perceptions of the purpose of the program. I’m not suggesting that the teachers and the Superintendent do not care about the social and emotional impacts of the

program for each student, but it is evidence of the lens in which they are viewing each student. As indicated in Part I, teachers are being re-calibrated to look at students as test scores and data points given the intense focus on performance on state mandated tests. The Superintendent clearly stated that student performance on MAP scores ought to direct instruction in the classrooms. Parents, the social worker and the principal are, in a sense, allowed to be focused more on the development of the whole child. The era of testing has removed that luxury from teachers and district level administrators.

I am a firm believer that the term achievement gap does not properly capture all of the conditions that have created the academic disparity between generally whites and middle and upper class students and minority and low-income students. The next part will discuss in more detail my perspective on the achievement gap versus the opportunity gap, but considering the nature of the program and the intent to provide academic opportunities for academically struggling students, it was important to gain multiple perspectives on the opportunity gap.

Chapter 4

Achievement or Opportunity Gap: A teacher's perspective

Synopsis

This is the final part in a single-case exploratory study comprised of a three part series that analyzes one high school's after school tutoring program initiated in an effort to close the achievement gap. This part is a teacher written memoir on the impact of the achievement gap in a specific classroom that led to the formation of the after school program. The district-instigated shift in instructional pedagogy from one modeled after educational philosophers such as Jonathan Kozol, Nel Noddings, bell hooks and Gloria Ladson-Billings to a data driven approach to teaching challenged me as a classroom teacher to develop a program that would provide academic support to minority and low-income students. This part reflects on the development of the need for an after school tutoring program.

Achievement or Opportunity Gap: A teacher's perspective

I walked in to the library of Solo County High School and was terrified. I didn't know anyone. Clearly, teachers were sitting in certain social groupings. At 22 and 5'1" tall I was trying hard to project myself as poised, confident and more like six feet tall. My principal called us to order to start our summer professional development. He opened with a quote from John Steinbeck who wrote, "It is the nature of man to rise to greatness when greatness is expected of him." He challenged each of us to make that our pledge for each one of our students during the upcoming school year. He wanted us to raise our expectations for every student and push each student to meet those expectations. Never was the term achievement gap mentioned; never were specific demographics of

students discussed; never was the use of data overemphasized in defining who the high expectations were for. The standard was clear: “challenge all students.” My teaching philosophy was structured around this quote. I truly believed that students would meet any expectation laid before them provided the teacher provided a structure for the student to meet the expectation. This structure included a clear understanding of the expectation, consistent direction and feedback towards the expectation and a positive and engaging learning environment that enhanced the classroom experience for all learners. After nearly a decade of teaching I have realized that this was just the outline for a productive classroom. After dedicating over a year to reflection on my teaching career, these pillars for academic success that I held so dear seem more like a bullet point in my teaching philosophy than the structural system that I always thought it was.

A professor in my Master’s degree program constantly referred to teaching as being “in the trenches.” During the program and my first few years of teaching I found this metaphor funny but applicable. Teaching was like being in the trenches of World War I with no clear enemy; or for some, all aspects of the job would have been the enemy. It was dirty, exhausting, not many survived, and all young teachers were working round the clock to fulfill internship and job requirements. Each day we threw ourselves over the hill and into “no man’s land”. There it is impossible to predict how the day is going to go, what you are going to encounter or how you will respond, and the overwhelming sense of relief when you make it to the end of the day, or the next trench. By the middle years of my teaching I had forgotten all about this metaphor. It didn’t matter. It wasn’t relevant. I had found my stride and my classroom was working. In the last few years of my tenure as a teacher, I was frustrated by this analogy. It didn’t

accurately represent my teaching experience and I found the phrase dismissive of the true battle that was being waged in classrooms. I still felt like I was fighting a war every day. But the historical reference and mental image that the phrase “in the trenches” called to mind did not fit my war. I felt more like Sisyphus. Regardless of the phrase, the bottom line is the same: Teaching is not for the faint of heart.

My first semester of teaching, a student did not return from lunch. She was a light skinned African-American sophomore who qualified for free lunch and was notorious for getting in trouble. Although up to this point I had never had any issues from her, I just assumed that when she did not come back from lunch on time something had happened resulting in a trip to the principal’s office. After several minutes had gone by she came bursting through the door sobbing and threw herself into my arms. I didn’t know what to do. She nearly knocked us both over. The class was silent and staring. Neither one of us was known to be overtly emotional. After what felt like an eternity, I was able to get her into the hall where she explained that she had been called out of lunch to go to the office. Upon entering the main office she was told her mom was on the phone and needed to speak with her and it was an emergency. Her step-father had been shot during a drug deal. There was no one to come get her. What was I supposed to say? She was staring at me. Her eyes were pleading for an answer, a solution, a response of any kind. “I’m sorry” was all I could come up with. Where was the section in the classroom management class on how to deal with this?

A few years later I had a student who, despite all of my efforts, could not stay awake in class. Finally, in anger, I demanded that he stay after class to talk with me. Before I could get any words out, he apologized and shared that he couldn’t stay awake

in class because he was exhausted from working. He was waking up before 4am to work in the tobacco fields, and going back to the fields after school to help his family pay the bills. His father had left his family when he was young and his mother was already working two jobs to try and support them. This student was doing all he could to help his family. Where were my notes on how to help this young man be academically successful?

During the last few years of my teaching career, teen pregnancy was rampant in the high school. Some girls were very honest that once the baby arrived they were just going to drop out. Others attempted to stay on track while on homebound from school but eventually dropped out. The resilient few were able to return to school and maintain their academic standing and graduate. How was I supposed to talk to these girls about the importance of their social studies vocab words for the week, or to study for their learning check, or to work hard on their next state mandated assessment? Ultimately, who held value in any of those assessments?

Sometimes it doesn't matter how much you believe in a student and want them to succeed, or how clear the expectations are for the students to be successful. Sometimes there are circumstances beyond a teacher's control that have a direct impact on a student's ability to learn. This was a painful fact for me to learn and it wasn't until I had actually left teaching that I was willing to accept that I couldn't fix all of the problems of every student in an effort to help them learn. But I was killing myself trying, and ruining my family in the process.

Prior to my departure from secondary education, I believed that students in the Achievement Gap were failed by teachers who didn't believe in them and by tests that

these students did not have the cultural capital to pass. Nel Noddings (2005) argued that many students felt “alienated from their schoolwork, separated from the adults who (tried) to teach them, and adrift in a world perceived as baffling and hostile” (2). It was my belief that because of the intense and ever increasing focus on test scores and data, teachers had not been given the opportunity to provide the appropriate structures for their classroom and thus the students who were not meeting the expectation tended to be those who lacked opportunities and structures both at home and in school for academic success. While the intense focus on testing was part of the issue, it was not the only hurdle hindering some students from fulfilling their academic potential.

Another hurdle for many students in predominantly white schools, the lack of a culturally relevant classroom is difficult to overcome. On a basic level, a non-culturally relevant classroom manifests as a clash of cultures between the teacher and the student(s) (Goldenberg 2015 and Paley 1989). Often the root of these issues in in school policy itself (Wilson 2007), teachers feel powerless to create change or underestimate student abilities (Hoffman et al 2009 and Neuman and Celano 2012) and, in some cases, black students act out as a show of defiance towards conforming to white behavior (Goldenberg 2015). It is important that teachers attempt to get to know their students personally and academically (ETS Policy Notes 2005, Hoffman, et al 2009 and Young 2012). Teachers in a culturally relevant classroom provide students with the opportunity to engage in purposeful activities and experiences (ETS Policy Notes 2011) both in and out of the classroom while taking students to the “edge of their capabilities and encouraging growth” (Siggins and Chappuis, 2005, p13)

This article addresses the issues of the achievement gap from the classroom teacher's perspective. For me, this phrase does not accurately depict all of the issues that students in this category face. This article frames the gap in the context of the teacher experience using other key education researchers to establish the framework for the issues I struggled with in my classroom that led to the formation of the Learning Station. In the first section I discuss the term achievement gap juxtaposed with my preferred phrase, opportunity gap. I present the argument for using opportunity gap as the more appropriate metaphor for the issues faced by many students. The second section delves more in depth to some of the broad issues and family situations that students face which can manifest as difficulties in the classroom setting. The final section discusses broadly the nature of the teacher-student relationship.

Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap

The achievement gap is the term used to categorize minority and low-income students. This designated category is an intentional focus by educators at all levels to ensure that these students are performing at levels comparable to their white or more affluent counterparts. According to the Education Testing Service (ETS) (2011), some researchers argue that the term achievement gap is an inaccurate reference to the problem. This gap commonly connotes minority and low socioeconomic class students who typically struggle academically. By using the word "achievement," it implies that students are struggling to or are incapable of meeting academic standards set before them. This has been only part of the problem and doesn't represent the complexity of the issue. For example, Wilson (2009) highlights the institutional elements of covert racism that have remained in place in school. These include institutional instructional practices of

tracking and ability grouping. Further, Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) call attention to the issue of the quality of education difference that has continued to persist between blacks and whites. Therefore, between the institutional practices of covert racism and the gap in quality of education, minority students in particular continue to achieve academically at a lower level than their white counterparts. The Education Testing Service (2012) re-described this gap as the opportunity gap. Researchers (Boykin and Noguera 2011, Carey 2014, Goldenberg 2015 and Milner 2010) posit that by framing the discussion around opportunities outside factors that are not in the control of educators or schools are considered in determining why some students are not as academically successful as others. These institutionalized elements of education that have placed minority and low income students at a disadvantage in terms of access to resources have created a gap in the opportunities that are subsequently afforded to them as opposed to their white or upper class counterparts. A gap in educational opportunities creates a gap in development opportunities (ETS Policy Notes 2010). Referring to the minority and low income demographic as the opportunity gap provides the audience with a different perspective of the situation. This debate caused me to consider a variety of questions: How can schools create opportunities for minority and low SES students to be more academically successful? More socially successful? How can schools provide opportunities for families to be more engaged in their student's education? How can schools provide opportunities for parents to interact with the school community? It is these questions that drove me to start conversations in my building about developing the *Learning Station*.

The Education Testing Service (ETS 2012) produced a 2012 report that offered the term “opportunity gap” in place of achievement gap. “Achievement gaps do not occur in a vacuum; they follow from the gaps in opportunity that many low-income and minority children face.” In other words, while the students who have been considered part of this group have not been academically successful, this has been a result of missed opportunities from a lack of resources and from structural and cultural inequalities in society. Achievement as marked by assessments is only one facet of the opportunity gap that could affect education for low-income and minority children. All students bring a set of tools for learning with them to the classroom. These tools include social, cultural and academic capital through which students interact with one another, with teachers, with the curriculum. Research shows that students from non-white backgrounds enter education with a different set of tools for learning than their white counterparts (Coates 2011, Delpit 1995, Kozol 2005) and that these differences have educational consequences in schools. Diane Ravitch (2012), in an interview, stated, “Kids who are homeless, who don’t speak English, who have preventable illnesses, and who live in communities where there is a lot of violence, have challenges. These challenges come with poverty and get in the way of high achievement. Even before the very first day that children arrive in school, there is an Achievement Gap.” Ravitch lists a number of obstacles that students face who are categorized as “gap”. Children cannot learn, and therefore can not achieve, if they are worried about where their next meal will come from, or if they will be safe at night. Ravitch also stated in 2011 that “the problem is poverty not our schools” (Carey 14). The lack of financial resources that are available for many students who have been categorized as falling in the achievement gap hinders their ability to learn.

The issue, then, for me is not whether or not low-income and minority students succeed but whether or not they are able to access the resources and opportunities necessary that would have allowed them to be successful. Gaps have been identified in graduation rates, college and career readiness, presence in advanced courses, and access to educational resources. In California, The Education Trust-West (2010) reported that for every 100 ninth grade African American students only 65 graduate; but only 23 of the 65 were “eligible” to attend a four-year public institution. The lack of preparedness and the ability to be successful in the college setting has been a direct effect of several opportunities lost to them prior to leaving high school. Minority and low-income students have: Received poor instruction in middle and high school, been tracked into lower math courses, and lacked access to highly qualified teachers and resources (Wilson 2009, Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011). “Despite all the evidence that teachers matter most in student achievement, the most damaging practice in all of U.S. education persists: giving poor and minority students the least access to high-quality teaching” (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011, Haycock 2006). Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) further argue that the implications of the lack of these academic opportunities impacts minority and low income students in terms of lower test scores and college preparation. If it has been proven that certain students struggle academically to succeed in the classroom, and yet historically these students have not been provided with good teachers and in supportive instructional environments, then were they not doomed to fail? Should school leaders be surprised that there is a gap in achievement?

Academic success is about more than just knowing and accessing educational resources and tools. As my interview with the social worker at Solo County High School

indicated, basic needs of the students must be met in order for them to be academically successful. Students can focus better on the learning material when they feel safe, be fed (Young 2012), and be healthy. Ravitch (2010) argued that by simply placing better teachers with stronger curricula in classrooms that predominantly enroll low-income and minority students, does not necessarily mean learning will occur. Ravitch further argues that only when students are “healthy [will they be] ready to learn.” The argument then becomes that even if these students had been provided with good teachers, a solid curriculum and well-rounded schools, many low-income and minority students would still not be academically successful. Students who have been classified as in the achievement gap lack too many early opportunities that shape educational potential to be successful. Ultimately, it is a lack of opportunities that has hindered them the most. Students need the opportunity to be healthy, to be happy and to be worry free of the basic human needs for survival. Researchers such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006), Caldas and Bankston III (2001) and Diane Ravitch (2010) have criticized reformers who have disregarded the direct and immediate correlation between academic achievement and the disadvantages created by poverty. Ravitch (2010) argued that such reformers were ignoring the correlations that have been found in every social science survey. This disregard for the correlation between the effects of poverty and academic achievement only furthers the opportunity gap. Schools and teachers who have attempted to ignore the role that class and culture have played on students’ academic performance have enhanced the plight for academic success by not intentionally creating opportunities to help meet academic expectations.

The Education Trust West (2010) continued to argue that early lost opportunities have caused low-income and minority students to become disconnected with their education and feel as though graduation were not in their future. As a result, students in this demographic have become disengaged and disconnected from their education. Some students may choose not to challenge themselves academically or not to invest in their education as the sense of hopelessness for a successful academic future becomes too daunting to overcome. The College Board (2006) documented a large disparity in the number of African American students versus the number of white students who were taking and successfully passing (with a score of a 3 or higher) Advance Placement (AP) courses for early college credit. Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2008) cited a number of reasons for this:

- African American students are not nominated by their white teachers for AP courses
- Teachers have lower expectations for African Americans and do not challenge them to take advantage of the opportunity
- Due to the low number of African American students in AP courses, they feel ostracized and feel a sense of not belonging in the rigorous academic setting.
- Parents are generally unaware of opportunities available to students and are uninformed about waivers and academic opportunities for their children and therefore do not know how to ask for assistance
- African Americans were not exposed to college campuses

This evidence contextualized some of the lost opportunities for African Americans that have directly impacted the pursuit of post-secondary education. Some of these students do not know how to get academic help, advice and support that will allow them to be challenged while enhancing their ability to be successful. Often minority and low income students who are not using the opportunities afforded to them do not even realize that they are missing out. This highlights one of the main issues for minority and low-income

students that places them at a disadvantage. The Opportunity Gap brings to light other areas of inequity for these students. Using the reasons as cited by Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby as examples of lost opportunities, surface solutions seem readily available. Teachers can encourage minority and low-income (not just African American) students to take AP courses and incorporate minority and low income students into the classroom. Another example is to educate the parents of minority and low income students on the benefits of taking AP courses while exposing minority and low income students to the benefits and advantages that colleges offer through field trips to college campuses or informational sessions with admissions counselors. Unfortunately, these solutions do not address the root problems of the lack of opportunities leading up to high school for minority and low income students.

In practice, because of previous lost opportunities often minority students and low income students cannot be successful in an advanced academic setting despite the best intentions of the teacher. For example, encouraging and challenging minority or low income students to enroll in an AP class does not ensure success. These students may not have sufficient time after school to commit to studying, may not know about, have access to or be able to afford study aides or other support materials and their parents may not be able to provide them with academic support through tutoring, attending parent sessions or even with transportation before or after school for help. I have seen many minority and low income students who have the potential to be academically successful in an advanced class but because of lost opportunities and less access to resources, they did not succeed despite their best intentions. These opportunities really were lost. Students could not take advantage of them because they did not know they were available or how to

capitalize on an opportunity. I, like many students, learned this lesson the hard way. I had challenged, nearly forced, a female low income student to take an AP History and an AP Literature class her junior year. I was unaware of her work commitments and lack of familial support for the more academically challenging class. By Thanksgiving she was already seriously struggling academically in the class to maintain a passing grade. I insisted that she stay in the class and continue to try. I promised her that I would work with her before and after school on study skills, critical reading skills and her writing. I was frustrated when she rarely showed up for the support sessions that I offered her and, since she never offered an explanation, I assumed she was choosing not to receive the help. By Valentine's Day she had suffered a complete panic attack and missed several days of school. She was transferred out of the advanced classes and then struggled socially as her schedule was completely changed. It was during the meeting with her guidance counselor to drop the classes that she shared about having to work several hours after school every day and her unsupportive family for her academics.

Mindset to Succeed

This section provides insights from teacher memoirs into some of the ways in which high stakes tests have been affecting teachers' ability to teach their students. I use noted field practitioners in conversation with the issues that I struggled with and against as a classroom teacher. These struggles ultimately led to the formation of the *Learning Station*. This section is titled, "Mindset to Succeed" because I feel it is important to discuss the mindset of both teachers and students in being successful in school. I believe that in order for students to be successful in school, and for any classroom to be a positive and constructive learning environment, students have to succeed academically and

socially. This aspect of my teaching philosophy was shaped by researchers such as Nel Noddings, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Jonathan Kozol, and Lisa Delpit.

I was an undergraduate the first time I read the works of Jonathan Kozol. I was participating in a book club hosted by one of my education professors, and was just starting to hear my calling as an educator. Kozol's books changed my life. Having been raised in a developing country, the lack of resources (in terms of materials and good teachers), the discrimination and the overall struggle that Kozol discusses in his books resonated deep within me. I knew situations like this occurred in schools all over the world, but I was internalizing this for the first time. Kozol writes of the persistence he witnessed in schools that were sub-par at best, of the struggle of teachers to do what is right in the face of reprimand and of the gross overt and covert levels of racism in the school.

In graduate school, we were assigned texts by Nel Noddings, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Lisa Delpit among others. I entered graduate school an education fighter; advocate is not strong enough of a word. I was ready to carry the torch of Jonathan Kozol and save all of the children in schools. These women provided me with perspective, understanding and insight into why I felt the need to fight. I learned through their works to use my energy to care for my students by teaching to their strengths, meeting their academic needs and recognizing the cultural capital that they would bring to my classroom. Noddings helped me understand that I needed to keep the strengths of each student in mind, respect what they were good at and use these strengths and skills to find ways to engage them in the content. I needed to see them as individuals. Ladson-Billings taught me the value in using the culture students brought with them to the

classroom. Her argument was similar to Kozol's but told through a softer story, paired with research. This version did not make me want to stand and fight; it made me sad. Delpit helped me learn to frame my emotions academically. She helped me see the stances of Noddings and Ladson-Billings in the classroom, allowing me to self-reflect on my own practices. Their works helped me contextualize the elements of racism from Kozol's works, and think intentionally about what it means to teach other people's children. Their approaches to exposing the injustices in schools seemed softer and more pedagogic to me than Kozol's. Over a decade later, reflecting back on those powerful feelings and revisiting my notes in the margins of these books, it was the different writing styles of the teacher-memoir approach of Kozol and the teacher-researcher approach of Noddings, Ladson-Billings and Delpit that shaped me as an educator and my drive to make all children successful.

Academic Success

In *Covert Racism*, Rodney Coates (2011) discussed some of the more discreet institutional policies that encourage racism in the educational system. Covert racism is the concept that while racial slurs and other more public and overt forms of discrimination may not be part of the educational structure, there are many elements of covert racism that are embedded in institutional practices. Coates identified some of these elements of covert racism in education as ability grouping, tracking, gifted and talented programs, under achieving programs, AP courses, etc. Theodore Sizer (2004) contributes to this discussion by discussing them as voices of education that are silenced. Each of these elements of covert racism contributes to the opportunity gap. bell hooks (1994) stated that one of the problems in addressing issues related to the opportunity gap

is that classroom teachers prefer to maintain instructional status quo. While it is easier for teachers to teach as they have always taught, this can be detrimental for student learning and success. Lisa Delpit (1995) took bell hooks' statement further by arguing that society as we know it nurtures and maintains stereotypes. Stereotypes that are manifested in society, in communities, play out in classrooms. Whether teachers do this consciously or subconsciously, it encourages elements of covert racism, which in turn create gaps in opportunities for students. In order to combat elements of covert racism in institutional structures it is important to: engage all stakeholders, start with open conversations (create a dialogue) and learn to recognize the value in respecting difference. It is impossible to ignore the institutional memory and the historical context that shape a school when dealing with issues concerning race. These elements cannot be dwelled upon, but used to recognize the stories of peoplehood and to create stories of cosmopolitanism. If race is commonly spoken of as a socially constructed concept, then it is the responsibility and obligation of a society to choose to deconstruct that racism. This starts with dialogue.

It is my belief that the implementation of NCLB removed the opportunity for dialogue in many ways. Amidst the push for better test scores and more data on the academic performance of students, teachers were charged with finding innovative ways to get students invested in the content knowledge in order to improve test scores. During my last four years at Solo County High School, initiatives from annual district directives each year were: prescriptive instruction to improve test scores, teaching to your strengths to improve test scores, using benchmark data to drive instruction which will improve test scores, and curriculum alignment to improve test scores. These directives did not

encourage that teachers develop a relationship with students to understand each student's learning style. They were focused on making any instructional adjustments necessary to improve test scores. Noddings (2005) argued that while teachers were adjusting their curriculums to fit the testing systems, teachers could do nothing that "might result in lower test scores" (12). Most teachers still had the freedom to deliver classroom instruction according to their own styles as long as these teachers were seeing high, or at least improving, test scores. For many teachers, if their scores went down or stayed the same, they were strongly encouraged by the administrators in the building to adopt teaching methods of other, more testing successful teachers. Hersch (1998) discussed the rampant evidence of cheating in schools by students. Under NCLB, teachers and students alike became cheaters. Students were willing to do anything to get a classroom grade, while many teachers were willing to do anything to get the standardized assessment grade.

I do not believe that any person enters education with the intent to be a bad teacher. I do believe that policies like NCLB that promote labels like the achievement gap have serious implications for teachers to survive in their schools. Not all teachers have the Nel Noddings, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Jonathan Kozol, or Lisa Delpit approach to teaching their students. Some teachers are very intentional about maintaining a completely professional line between themselves as the adult in the room and their students. Many students perceived this professional distance as their teachers not caring about them because these teachers did not ask about students' feelings or what students did for fun. In my experience, these teachers are good instructors but because they are not interested in the social or emotional development of their students they tend to be

labelled as bad teachers. In some cases, despite their ability to teach, these teachers had lower test scores which administrators and other faculty members related to their instructional abilities rather than a correlation to the rapport between teacher and student. Later, I discuss further why students will not perform on mandated assessments for teachers whom the students do not personally feel invest in them. There are several elements of a good teacher: providing culturally relevant instruction and not seeing students as a benchmark score (ETS Policy Notes 2005, Hoffman et al 2009, Noddings 2005, Stiggins and Chappuis 2005, and Young 2012); keeps all students engaged in the class and in the curriculum (ETS Policy Notes 2011 and Delpit 1995); and sets high standards and provides the structures for students to meet those standards (Delpit 1995).

When teachers provide culturally relevant instruction and are able to keep students engaged in the class and the curriculum, as posited by Noddings and Delpit, students will be more interested and engaged in the material they are learning. When students learn about historical figures, literary authors and leaders in the Arts with whom they share the same ethnic and cultural cues, students are more likely to be invested in the material. This is common sense. It is human nature to be more invested in learning when you can relate to the information. bell hooks argued that students will feel mutually responsible for the “development of a learning community (and) offer constructive input” (206) when teachers use culturally relevant teaching practices or other instructional pedagogy that engages students of all backgrounds. In other words, students need to be in a learning environment with a curriculum that is inclusive of all students in the room. When students are engaged with the curriculum, they will be more willing to participate in class and be engaged with learning activities. In addition to providing an engaging and

inclusive curriculum, administrators, students and parents have a minimum expectation for all teachers. This minimum standard is to treat all students equally and to provide all students with an opportunity to learn. “They want teachers to have high expectations for all their students and not to decide on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, or economic status that some groups of children simply cannot learn the subject at hand” (Noddings 19). Again, social stereotypes play out in the classroom setting. A good teacher recognizes the lens through which they view their students and works to adjust their narrow gaze on specific students. A bad teacher cannot acknowledge that the gaze in which they view particular students in their classroom is passing judgment or bears any impact on their teaching. Similarly, by creating a label for a good student, consequently that necessitates that other students are bad (Carey 2014 and Kumashiro 2012).

For students who policy makers have labelled as part of the achievement gap, overcoming stereotypes is significantly more difficult. Often labels define not who we are, but who we become. Students who are labelled as the “achievement gap” internalize that there is an assumption that they are not going to perform well on assessments (ETS Policy notes 2011). This process of labeling students can have lifelong impacts (Carey 2014, Stiggins and Chappuis 2005, and Young 2012). Some students choose to rise above the label. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of students, they consciously or unconsciously meet the parameters of the label. Since these students have been intentionally marginalized and placed in the educational spotlight, teachers are being forced to notice these students. Unfortunately, noticing that a minority or low-income student is in your classroom does not mean the teacher can provide these students with a

positive learning environment. All it means is that the teacher knows the students are a minority, low income or both and to pay attention to their test scores.

In my own experience, I worked with two white male colleagues who would force all African American students to take the AP World Civilizations class. These teachers lauded themselves for providing these minority students with an educational opportunity that no other teacher was providing for them. They were challenging the students to meet their academic potential. These white men failed to take in to consideration that not all of these students had the academic skills necessary to be successful in an AP course and thus many of them failed their first semester. Of course there were white students who struggled as well, but it seemed that the academic struggle of white students was discounted unless they were low-income white students. Typically, more attention was paid to the academic struggles of minority and low-income students. This failure had a direct impact on the students' cumulative grade point average (GPA), their class schedules, but more importantly on their self-esteem. Failing the first semester in the AP course meant that students were removed from the AP section and placed in a general section. Many of these students ended up acting out in their general classes out of frustration. Often times these students were also embarrassed because a change in class mid-year required an explanation to old and new class-mates about why they weren't in the AP class anymore. I tried on multiple occasions during my first few years of teaching to have a conversation with these men about this practice only to be accused of being racist and unsupportive of providing minority students with a chance to be successful.

Jonathan Kozol has written multiple books that document various elements of covert racism. His books discuss the lack of resources in many inner city schools, lack of

empathy and understanding for the black and poor students in the schools he has visited and taught in as well as the blatant disregard for students by teachers and administrators. For example, in *The Shame of the Nation*, Kozol (2005) documents the strife and agony of teachers in inner city schools who battle against the demands of high stakes testing. This was documented through the lens of apartheid schooling. Kozol argues that black students were treated differently than white students by school faculty and administration. Black students in the hall during class were interrogated for their reasons for being out of class under the assumption that the black students were up to no good; and consequently punished physically in many instances. Black students were physically punished more regularly and intensely than their white counterparts, and when behaving in culturally appropriate ways black students were classified as loud and obnoxious. The covert racism that Coates' and others warn of in education is historically supported by the works of Kozol.

Wilson (2009) states that “racism is an ideology of racial domination that features two things: (1) beliefs that one race is either biologically or culturally inferior to another and (2) the use of such beliefs to rationalize or prescribe the way that the ‘inferior’ race should be treated in this society as well as to explain their social position as a group” (19). This definition by Wilson captures the way in which minority students have been treated in the education system in many covert and overt ways. Whether it has been through tracking, ability grouping, separate schools, less funding, or poor quality teachers, race has been used to justify these aspects of educational racism. Coates (2011) stated that “covert racism is often excused or confused with mechanisms of exclusion or inclusion...” (121). In the case of educational racism, both covert and overt racism,

students were excluded while technically being included. For example, black and white students may be in the same physical school building but through tracking and academies these students often never even cross paths. Within classrooms, often with ability grouping the minority and low income students are grouped together while the white or middle to upper class students are grouped together. Often, teachers and administrators do not even realize that these are elements of racism. In fact, typically teachers and administrators tend to be strong proponents of these examples of covert racism because it allows for students to get more intentional instructional support. According to Dovidio and Gaertner (2011), this perspective on elements of covert racism is aversive racism. Aversive racism is the conviction that there is no personal prejudice towards a particular group of people and the inability to recognize underlying negative feelings. In other words, it is the inability to recognize the lens in which teachers and administrators view the students in the room.

Another white male colleague once stated openly in a department meeting that he felt like teaching students with disabilities was a waste of his time and that “they should all be locked up in a white padded cell somewhere.” I will never forget that statement. I was shocked and appalled that anyone could feel that way, and feel so confident in their perspective that they state it publicly. He went on to say that having them in the classroom removed any chance of the rest of the students in the room being able to learn. There are many issues here, most of which cannot be addressed here. Students with documented learning disabilities enter classrooms with legal documentation that is meant to help the teacher be better prepared to meet their academic needs. Minority and low income students do not come with such documentation and yet often require additional

academic needs and supports. It is then up to the classroom teacher to discover what these needs are and then make accommodations to help them. When teachers are already exhausted and over-worked, what are the odds of a teacher, especially one who feels that a regular classroom is not open for all, working harder to uncover these academic needs and make instructional adjustments? What chance do these students have to be successful in that classroom? Ladson-Billings argued that “different children have different needs and addressing those differences is the only way to deal with them equitably” (33). These needs have a direct impact on the academic performance of students. These needs can manifest in a variety of ways. If teachers are blind to these needs, and schools are not providing for these needs then it becomes very difficult for students to reach their utmost potential.

By starting and engaging in conversations in the Solo County community, and in the high school with teachers, students and administrators, the idea for a program to provide additional academic opportunities through tutoring or help on homework assignments for students who have been labelled as part of the achievement gap was identified. These students needed more academic help in a structured environment in addition to what they were getting in the classrooms during the day.

At the end of the 2012-2013 academic year, I took on a new position at the high school as the Academic and Behavior Interventionist. This position would give me the time, opportunity and clout to work more intentionally with students and teachers to help address the academic disparity. This position was created from the retirement of a teacher who used to serve as the instructor over what many schools refer to as a SAFE room. In many schools, SAFE serves as an in school “timeout” when students are

misbehaving. The goal was to change the culture around the SAFE room and turn it in to a space where students who are struggling academically or behaviorally can come and still be productive in a quiet environment where individual or small group tutoring was provided by peer tutors or myself. As I transitioned from classroom teacher to interventionist, I struggled to deal with the aversive racism of my colleagues.

At first I justified their behavior as stereotyping. Most people do this and often do not even realize that they have passed judgment on a student. This judgment usually stemmed from a preconceived notion of what the student's characteristics would be given the way the student looked, dressed, acted, or sounds. As I advocated for students to have additional time on assignments, tutoring, extra attention in class, be allowed to participate in small group breakout session I was constantly surprised by the teachers who would argue that the student did not need these additional academic measures. Some teachers would further indicate that the teacher felt strongly that the students was not capable of doing the work, the teacher did not have the time to make these accommodations for the student or that in some way the extra attention would be a waste of the teacher's time. The very first time we attempted to run the Learning Station program, there were several males students in the group who would have been labelled as "country boys." They wore Carhart gear daily with giant belt buckles, worked on farms or on cars and attended technical school during the day. All five of these students were in the same math class. It was a male teacher who was notorious for his ability to lash out at students and call them names. None of the students wanted to go see him for tutoring or even ask him for work that they could do while at *Learning Station*. After a few weeks, I became frustrated and escorted them to his room myself to ask for work. After

explaining to this teacher that these students had been attending Learning Station every week and were hoping to be able to work on some math concepts, I learned first-hand why these boys did not want to speak with this teacher. After several minutes of an angry rant about how these boys didn't pay attention in class and what a nuisance they were, he ended with, "their type can't be taught. It is impossible for them to learn." I'll never forget it. And, he clearly felt that there was nothing wrong with what he had said. This is aversive racism. These teachers could not recognize that their own personal beliefs and prejudices were keeping them from meeting the needs of all students. In the case of the math teacher, he had his own preconceived notions about the abilities of these young men based on the characteristics that they presented. According to Dovidio and Gaertner (2011), these instances of judgment were beyond stereotyping and qualified as aversive racism because the personal negative feelings towards a student because of certain characteristics led to a feeling of discomfort rather than antagonism.

As intentional conversations began about developing an after school tutoring program, we quickly identified a lack of resources, in a variety of capacities, as our primary obstacle. The conversation around access to resources is not new. Tyack and Cuban (1995) state that in the mid-1930s there was debate over the use of radios as a resource in the classroom. So whether it is books, chalk, radios, televisions, computers, wireless internet access, or the use of smart phones as a classroom resource the battle over access to resources is not new.

As the school social worker and I developed a program design plan for the *Learning Station*, the inaugural program design included transportation home for students, providing students with a meal at each session and a stipend for participating

teachers. We believed so passionately in the impact this program would have that we felt confident we would be overwhelmed with teachers who wanted to help. As it turned out, our first resource issue was finding teachers who were going to be willing to participate. Teachers cited being over-worked, no time due to their own personal family obligations or because they provided their own tutoring already, and several other teachers were very open about needing assurance that they would be compensated for their time. I assured the teachers who eventually agreed to help that we had been promised money to pay them. After the first week of the program, I learned that there wasn't as much money in the budget as the principal initially thought and therefore we were either going to have to not pay the teachers or not provide transportation for the students. One of the main arguments we had heard from students concerning why they were not attending the tutoring that was already offered after school was because they could not find transportation home if they missed the bus. So, after some very uncomfortable conversations with the teachers who had committed to helping with the program, the teachers agree to be a free resource for the program in order to provide transportation home for the students.

In week two we learned that we were going to need class and project materials in order for students to be able to complete their assignments. The assumption upon starting the program was that students would already have the materials that they would need for each of their classes given that we were already half way through the trimester. Given the work that the school social worker and I did in the building, we should have known better. It became immediately apparent that students were going to be unable to complete assignments without basic classroom supplies. These included paper, writing utensils,

calculators for math and science, and other math equipment such as a protractor and compass just to mention the most common needs. Other supplies that were also needed every week were poster board, markers, scissors, glue, construction paper, and rulers. The school social worker and I made several trips to local stores to buy school supplies with our own money for every student in the program.

By week three of the inaugural attempt at the *Learning Station*, we learned that there was even less money than expected so we were not going to be able to provide students with pizza after school. The program intentionally targeted minority and low income students. Many of the students in the program received their only meals of the day when they were at school. We knew that having food was a primary incentive for students to come and that without it, not only would students not attend but they wouldn't be able to think. We begged faculty who were not participating in the tutoring to donate any amount of money to help, we listed the need for financial donations in the school electronic newsletter, we begged local businesses and churches to sponsor a week of food, and many weeks used our own money to buy the pizzas.

In week four we were begging teachers of AP core content area classes and the faculty sponsor of the National Honor Society to encourage their students to be peer tutors because we needed help. At this time there were only approximately 15 students for every one teacher but these students needed so much academic help that we needed help. By offering community service hours and food for the peer tutors, we were able to provide the most academically weak students with a peer tutor to ensure that they were getting one on one instruction and support. These tutors committed to coming to every session allowing a relationship to grow between them, the student they were assigned to

and all students in the group. Once this was established we saw the most growth and improvement in academic performance.

It took several weeks just to get all of the basic resources necessary to run the program successfully. By the time we got these logistics figured out, it was time for finals and the trimester was over. However, we were entering the third, and final, trimester of the year feeling confident that we had an organized program in place to provide academic support for our minority and low income students. The new trimester brought more resource issues that we had not accounted for and didn't arise in the previous trimester since we started the program half way through the trimester.

The two biggest additional resource issues were replacing faculty when a teacher could not attend and scheduling changes by the administration. The first time a teacher had a scheduling conflict and could not attend *Learning Station*, I did not think it would be an issue. We had four other teachers and several peer tutors so I felt confident that there was enough staff for students to get work done. I was wrong. Nothing happened in the math room that day. The whole system completely unraveled. Students were invested and had developed a relationship with that particular math teacher and without her in the room, the students acted out. The next time she couldn't attend, I was prepared. I had found another math teacher who said that she would fill in for the afternoon. While the situation was a little better, very little was accomplished. The students did not like the replacement teacher and she was not accustomed to having a room full of minority and low income students who needed extensive academic assistance. This was one resource that I could not buy in order to fix the issue.

When the program was first started in January of that year, a letter was sent home to all of the parents that listed the dates for the entire school year. This was necessary so that parents could sign up their child to ride the bus home every week, select certain weeks or no transportation home necessary. Due to days of missed school for inclement weather, and other district news and information that had to be shared there were a few weeks when faculty meetings were rescheduled. The first time this happened, the Principal approved for the teachers involved in the program to miss the faculty meeting understanding that the school had made a commitment to these students and promised them that there would be help. He also understood that food had already been ordered and many of these students were expecting to stay after school and be transported home later. The second time it happened we had a little more notice about the change but not enough to be able to switch weeks completely. Unfortunately, the only thing we could do was cancel a session. As a result, students missed two weeks of tutoring and by the time the *Learning Station* reconvened students were extremely behind and out of routine.

James Herndon (1971), Jonathan Kozol (1967, 1995, 2000, 2005) and Jesse Stuart (1949), are just a few examples of authors who have documented the struggle of teachers and schools to provide resources for students to be successful. These resources manifest as physical needs (books and supplies) and human capital (high quality teachers who care). *The Learning Station* program was designed, in part, to address some of the academic needs of minority and low income students at Solo County High School. Given the context of our school and the community, the *Learning Station* was a productive solution. It did not solve all of the academic needs of every student. *The Learning Station* was never meant to be the solution. It was meant to be an opportunity. *The*

Learning Station was an opportunity that was specifically designed to intentionally address the needs of minority and low income students in Solo County High School.

Social Success

“...Class was more than just a question of money, that it shaped values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received” (hooks 178).

In order for minority and low income students to be academically successful, their entire lives must be considered. As the quote from bell hooks suggests, socioeconomic class does not just impact whether or not students have access to resources such as basic classroom materials or the internet at home. The socioeconomic status of each student in every classroom shapes the way in which the student views relationships with their peers, teachers and administrators.

In Article two, I collected qualitative data through interviews with several stakeholders for the Learning Station program. The in-school stakeholders (administrators and teachers) could serve as a representative sample for the opinions of the larger in-school community in terms of their perceptions on social issues that impact student learning. The principal noted that using peer mentors provided students with a positive peer role model in a safe space. It provided students who tended to be marginalized by the larger school population with a sense of affiliation. He argued that the Learning Station created a social group for minority and low income students. Learning Station provided them with a physical and social place where they belonged. Remembering the quote by bell hooks, the principal also argued that these students could be receiving a different message from home in terms of the value and process of

education. Some parents who did not attend college do not see the value in a good education and therefore do not set high academic standards. Other parents who did not attend college have high academic expectations for their student but do not have the educational background to help the student be academically successful. Some parents had their own negative interactions in school with teachers and therefore these parents continue to push their own negative perceptions onto their students. The principal further noted that it is human nature to migrate towards opportunities. Opportunities for success can be defined in a variety of ways. I have had students who believed that success was making large amounts of money through selling drugs. More than once I have called home to discuss a student's academic performance with their parent only to be told that the parent wished the student would just drop out. It was costing the family money to have the student in school. If the student dropped out then the student could be working and helping to pay the bills. Success, then, was helping the family pay the bills. Often, these students and parents saw these less than favorable life choices as options because they were struggling to be academically successful. *The Learning Station* provided students with the opportunity to choose academic success.

When I asked the social worker to define the *Learning Station*, she opened with a statement summarizing the broad social issues that students who attend the *Learning Station* struggle to have met, "*Learning Station* allows all students to get any assistance with education...for them to have a place together, a safe environment. They get fed and are provided with guided assistance in homework and other educational needs through support from invested teachers and peers." Being academically successful is about more than making the grade. Before students can perform academically, considering Maslow's

hierarchy of needs is important to determine how to help students improve. These needs include food, a safe place and caring adults. At our first community dinner, a 14 year old student was left by her father with her two elementary age brothers to walk home at night. It was late February. It was dark and snowing with below freezing temperatures. The walk was several miles before they got to their house and none of them had coats. I could barely contain my shock, anger and disgust while she tried to explain that there had been an "emergency" in another county and he had to leave them behind. Thankfully, we were able to find them a ride home with another parent. The next day she brought me a barely legible letter from one of her siblings that said, "Thank you for caring for me too and feeding me." We had multiple students in the program who were homeless. Others had run away from home and were literally hiding from their parents to avoid abuse. Many did not eat again once they left our building. Food at each of these meetings and the community dinners to feed their families as well was important. The majority of the students in this program were in the court system for a variety of reasons.

The longer the *Learning Station* program ran, the more we realized that these social and emotional needs of students had to be met before their academic needs could be met. The only way to meet these other social and emotional needs was if all stakeholders were invested in these students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) discussed four teacher behaviors used when teaching minority and low income students. These behavior patterns align with the way in which teachers view the role that teachers play in the classroom in assuring student learning. "Coaches believe their students are capable of

excellence, but they are comfortable sharing the responsibility to help them achieve it with parents, community members, and the students themselves” (24). The teachers who chose to participate in the *Learning Station* practiced this coaching model. These teachers understood that it would take all stakeholders to ensure each student’s academic and social success. During the teacher focus group interview that was conducted, one teacher stated, “I like being there because I support them.” Another teacher noted that “being there added positive relationships not just in my classroom but throughout the building.” Towards the end of the interview, one teacher said, “we have to show them why (education) is important. We need to match them with a successful community member so they realize more than just their teachers who care. The church groups who provide food show them that they care. We need to get other community leaders invested as well.”

Many minority and low income students struggle with complex lives that have created challenges and even hindered their academic success. One teacher summarized the situation appropriately when she said that the “opportunities for these students (versus the white student population and the middle to upper class student population) in school is the same, but the out of school opportunities creates a gross unfairness in the ability to succeed.” *The Learning Station* program proved that in many cases social success lead to academic success and that academic success lead to social success. These two components went hand in hand in terms of measuring student achievement. There was not one without the other. As a teacher, I felt as though NCLB and the Race to the Top initiatives were forcing teachers to forget the social success and drive students to perform by hammering the need for academic success.

Are They Children or are They Numbers?

When I started teaching, one initiative was “name and claim.” Under this school policy, each teacher was asked to identify 10 students that they had in class who were considered struggling or at risk students. This meant identifying students who would fail a class (not necessarily the one they were in with me), drop out, were behavior issues, or struggled in any other way. The purpose was that each teacher would develop a relationship with the students on their list and serve as an informal mentor for these students. We were supposed to get to know them, learn about them and see how we could help them be more successful. The charge was not to get them to meet a benchmark score, or increase by a certain number of points or even for the student to pass all of their classes. The purpose was to provide the student with an adult mentor who cared about them and would help them. It was assumed that the rest would take care of itself.

Other times, faculty members were instructed to bring rosters to faculty meetings. As an activity we were told to write down something personal we knew about each student in our classes. I generally prided myself on this particular task. I knew their favorite movies, their hobbies, special talents and skills. Generally, I ended this activity feeling proud of myself but ashamed of the many colleagues around me who could only identify something personal about one or two students in their classes. As the focus on standardized tests and benchmark scores has increased, the ability and care of teachers to see past their students as numbers has decreased. Lisa Delpit (1995), Patricia Hersch (1998) and Nel Noddings (2005) argued that students do not want to be treated like numbers. Further, these researchers argued that students need to be heard. It is only

when students are heard that they will feel valued. In order to really hear our students in an age of teaching when a score is the only thing that matters, teachers have to care about each individual student. Noddings argued that when teachers care they “really hear, see, or feel what the (student) tries to convey.” (16) More than once I have served as a parent by proxy for a student who felt like they were not being heard by a teacher.

This desire to be heard crosses racial and socioeconomic class lines. When students share with me that they are struggling in a particular class or with a particular teacher, I always encourage them to go and talk with the teacher. The vast majority of the time the student refused to go and talk with the teacher out of fear of being yelled at, criticized, blown off, or ignored. Unfortunately, after accompanying the student to the teacher’s room, convinced that the student was exaggerating, many times I was proven wrong. I have spent a lot of time in my career apologizing for my peers over the way in which they have treated students. Researchers (Achinstein et al 2013, Carey 2014, Hersch 1998, Milner 2010, Rebell and Wolff 2012, and Young 2012) posit that the relationship between the teacher and the student is paramount towards student performance in the classroom. Hersch (1998) was specifically referring to content material. However, I would argue that this statement extends beyond the curriculum, and is about more than whether or not a student “likes” a teacher. It is about trust and care. If a student perceived that the teacher only cared about test scores and saw the student as a benchmark number for assessment then the student is not going to perform for that teacher, in any way. The student is not going to do well in the class and is certainly not going to do well on a state mandated assessment in that content area.

It is important that teachers provide students with opportunities to be heard and to feel valued. These positive emotional opportunities will lead to positive academic performances. As a teacher, I learned that what I am willing to invest in my students will be returned to me in academic dividends. Teachers who only see students as numbers, as benchmark scores, will see little results. Teachers who take the time and invest in the students, providing them with opportunities to learn, to be heard, to be trusted, and to be cared for will receive the most return.

The Learning Station was a place for students to come and be heard by teachers who cared about them. The teachers in this program provided students with a learning environment that maybe their classroom teachers did not provide for them. *Learning Station* was about more than just completing tasks and turning in assignments. Students completed tasks and turned in assignments because they were working in a place with teachers whom they respected, cared for and students wanted to work hard for these teachers. Often the social worker and I, as the school Academic and Behavior Interventionist, would meet with students who needed social or emotional support during this time as well. *The Learning Station* program was a holistic program for students to improve at all levels.

Rapport, Respect, Care

“Adolescence is a journey, a search for self in every dimension of being. It is about dreams, fears, and hopes, as much as about hormones, SAT scores, and fashion. It is about endless possibilities as well as dead ends. It is searching, testing, experimentation. It is growth: it is undeniable that the young person at any one point in time will be different one year later- different physically, intellectually, emotionally, and experientially.” (Hersch 17)

It is common knowledge in the teaching profession that academically gifted students are going to learn and achieve regardless of the teacher in the room. Low achieving students have a stronger potential to under achieve. As previously discussed research has shown, low achieving students require a highly qualified teacher to help these students be more academically successful. Noddings argued that “students will do things for people they love and trust” (36). This includes completing assignments, turning in homework, studying for tests, etc. Let me be clear that I fully recognize that for some students it does not matter whether they love or hate a teacher, they either are, or are not, going to do the work. It is that simple. In my career, those students were the most frustrating. I liked these students. I knew they had potential. These students generally liked me and trusted me. But nothing that I said convinced them to do work. Allow me also to clarify what I mean by “work harder”. This does not mean that these students will get straight A’s or suddenly start studying for hours a day when they previously never even owned a pencil. I mean that they will work harder than they were before. For some students this means going from a 15% in a class to a 45%. The student still didn’t pass the class but they worked harder. For other students it means going from all F’s to a few C’s. They still didn’t pass every class, but they worked harder. By applying more effort to their academic tasks, the outcome was a higher grade. Learning,

or not learning, about the value of education is all part of the journey. The role of educators is to help students navigate, not direct, their journey.

In helping students along their journey, teachers need to be aware of the issues and challenges that students face. This awareness starts with professional development on drug abuse, domestic abuse, eating disorders, and suicide. Teachers cannot forget, or negate, the reasons why before each school year teachers log hours in workshops and sessions on these topics. We cannot control their lives, nor can we change their home environments. By understanding the challenges and issues we face, teachers can better support students.

While adults seem obsessed with controlling what adolescents see, hear, learn, and do, adolescents have to cope day-to-day in a mixed up world. They live with and are sometimes involved in drugs, fights, cheating, and pregnancy right along with the usual sporting events, trips to the local library, and snacks after school at Taco Bell. They recycle without thinking, automatically tossing their cans into special bins- some even scout trash cans in classrooms to make sure they get them all. They worry about their earth, they parent each other, yet simultaneously don't value property or themselves. They are full of paradox, confusion, and a lack of integration. They talk mean, they defend turf, yet they also keep in their rooms old toys that comfort them, and in their hearts old memories of more innocent days. (Hersch, 1998, 118)

Hersch attempted to summarize the challenges that students face. Noddings (2005) reiterated Hersch's sentiments by noting the damage and disruption that instability in the home and in the community has caused for adolescents. Noddings (2005), Delpit (1995) and Hersch (1998) all argued that a community of respect between all members of the classroom is important in order for students to be invested in their own learning. Teachers need to respect the individuality of each student; their learning style, cultural framework, academic skill level, etc. Students need to respect the teacher, not just as an

authority, but as an engaged learner; but they also need to respect each other. In my opinion, if teachers and students applied a team approach to the classroom with the teacher as the team captain, learning with and alongside the students while helping to provide direction, and the students as teammates then more learning would take place as a strong sense of rapport would be developed between teacher and students, and among the students themselves.

I used to joke with the principal and social worker that there must have been a sign on my head that said: therapist. Only I didn't know it was there. Developing rapport with students was a strength of mine. I believed in tough love. It took some students longer than others to realize this but my expectations were clear and I was consistent. As a result, students shared more with me than I often wanted to know. We talked about drugs, abuse, suicide, eating disorders, dreams, goals...all of the things that Hersch outlined above. It took me years to master the ability to keep a straight face. By the time I left teaching, the social worker and I spoke our own language so that we could communicate quickly about students we were working with or who needed help. In the beginning of my career, I assumed many teachers in the building were unaware about the issues students struggled with on a daily basis. The longer I taught, the more I realized that some teachers simply did not care. Considering all of the heartbreaking stories that I heard over my nine year career in teaching, hearing teachers tell me "it wasn't their problem" or that "the student was expected to leave all of that at the door" was the most devastating.

The Learning Station provided an environment for positive relationships to grow. This was a space where teachers and students had the opportunity to develop

relationships with each other. These relationships contributed to student performance in all of their classes as students found teachers who cared about them. A sense of rapport had been established. Respect had been gained. Care was understood.

Conclusion

Many times in my teaching career I have felt like a parent. This pseudo-parental role was never a bother but a role I embraced and valued. As a “parent” I was also an advocate. In the fall of 2013, despite the financial and philosophical commitment to the Learning Station on the part of school administration I still felt that students were not being heard. One teacher told me that when she asked to leave her after school duty station early in order to be at a *Learning Station* session the principal denied her request because “they were all going to fail anyway.” I was livid. I began emailing the district state representative, the Office of Civil Rights, the minority parent representative on the Site Based Decision Making council, and several parents highlighting the inequities in the building. By Thanksgiving I was called into a meeting with the principal and one of the more involved parents with the *Learning Station* program. I think it was meant to be a berating for me but I stood my ground. The principal expressed his disdain for my having conversations behind his back. I told him I harbored the same feelings as I had heard he was questioning teachers trying to uncover what I was doing. His face registered shock at my returned aggression. For a brief period I wondered if I was going to lose my job.

As I walked out of his office, after mutual agreement for more open lines of communication which were symbolic in nature at best, I imagined fellow educators like

Herndon, Hersch, hooks, Kozol, Ladson-Billings, and Noddings, lining the corridor in support. I do not think he was surprised a few weeks later to find me in his office offering my letter of resignation. I was not surprised that the district was going to release me from my contract and accept my resignation. As I relayed the details of my departure from Solo County High School to my family, I found myself almost bragging about the fact that the school seemed more than willing to let me go. It was no longer about the students. I had made this decision for me. As I said goodbye to students and colleagues I held back tears, but I was also excited for my new job. As I turned the lights out in my room for the last time, I felt relief. I knew it was time for me to go. As I handed my keys over to the principal, I cried. I was scared for what the future would hold for my students and myself. But, deep down, I knew I had grown too close. I had become too involved.

My work as *Learning Station* founder opened my eyes to the deeply rooted issues that created a gap in opportunities for students long before I had ever even heard the term. My role as an educator exposed me to the inequities that persisted in education because of elements of education like the achievement gap and test based education. As I struggled watching my students fight an uphill educational race of which they would never win but constantly be trying to catch up, developing the *Learning Station* was an attempt to help. It was an effort at providing minority and low income students with a chance to get closer to a level playing field.

Chapter 5 Coda

I recently received a letter from a former student, Amber¹⁰. She had sent the letter to my work address after having read a post on social media about my job change. When I pulled the letter out of my mail box and saw the return address on the envelope I paused. I had a brief moment of, what I will call, blankness. There were no feelings, thoughts or opinions. I just stared at the letter. I stared at the envelope as I walked in a trance-like state all the way back to my office. Several times I flipped it over to open the letter but didn't. I left it lying on my desk for some time. I was nervous. I didn't know if I would find hate, anger or encouragement in the letter.

I remembered Amber. I remembered her well. I had worked exhaustively for three years to help her socially and academically. There were meetings with the school social worker, with her mom, her sister, with other teachers about her and with her. Additionally, she sat in my room often before school and during my lunch. She worked for two summers for me supervising our community gardens, taking some of the produce home for her family as payment. In the beginning, we had lots of conversations about her academic anxiety and her feelings of isolation from her peers and her family. I don't remember what happened, but something made her very angry at me and in the fall of her senior year she quit speaking to me altogether. Around Christmas time she asked me for a letter of recommendation for college. I remember speaking with the principal and school social worker about how uncomfortable I felt writing a letter that spoke to her character when I hadn't spoken with Amber for an extended period of time. When I declined her request for a letter of recommendation it only made her angrier. At the end

¹⁰ This is a pseudonym

of the year I had heard that she had gotten in to college somewhere but that was all I knew.

As I continued to stare at the unopened letter on my desk throughout the day, I wished the *Learning Station* program had been in place while she was a student. She and I would have both had the supports we needed for her to be successful. There would have been more continuous communication among the school social worker, her teachers and me. Her parents would have been invited to attend the community dinners which would have provided opportunities for conversation concerning this student's academic and social anxieties; as well as providing the family with much needed food.

The letter was symbolic of the imbalance that I remembered of Amber. I am convinced we (the school) would have helped her be more academically successful had an infrastructure been in place. *The Learning Station* would have provided an avenue of support for her from multiple perspectives. The quantitative data in this case study is inconclusive in regards to the academic benefits of the program. However, Amber is the embodiment of the qualitative data. *The Learning Station* would have provided her a peer group where she would have felt included, maybe even empowered. Based on my observational data, I feel confident that Amber would have experienced a decrease in her academic anxiety and felt her academic self-efficacy rise. She would have felt validated and supported by her teachers and guidance counselor in conversations with her mom at the community dinners. Amber would have felt supported. Maybe her high school career would have ended differently, less panicked and unsure.

I worked with Amber before the intense focus on minority and low-income students at Solo County High School. As a low-income student she recognized she was

not being as successful as she could be and did not have the skills or capital to make adjustments. So, in my opinion, her feelings of abandonment by the educational process manifested in intense anxiety.

At the end of the work day I opened the letter. The several pages of hand-written text made me uncomfortable. As I started to read I felt relief (she had found her way), sadness (she alluded to the extreme difficulty that her journey had been), and hesitation (she was once again seeking guidance). *The Learning Station* would have provided Amber with access to some of the opportunities that would have helped her be more academically successful. She would have had access to extra scholastic supports, a snack at every session and food for her whole family through the community dinners. In addition to these supports, all of her teachers would have been in regular communication about her academic performance, the school social worker would have been involved in those conversations as well as in attendance at *Learning Station* sessions and she might have found mentorship in other teachers as well. Amber, like so many other students, could have used more opportunities that would have helped her be academically successful.

Given the historical evidence on school reform presented in other sections of this manuscript, it would seem as though the grammar of schooling is not going to change any time soon, and teachers continue to become frustrated by the exhaustive “tinkering toward utopia” (Tyack and Cuban 1995). Solace, rejuvenation and sustenance has to be found in programs like the Learning Station and the students it serves. Despite the lack of statistically significant improvements found in testing outcomes, the observance of positive trends in test scores plus the abundance of positive qualitative data (such as sense

of belonging, decrease in discipline, and social/emotional support) is, in my opinion, substantive enough to justify the continuance of the program. That the nature of reform means slow and minor changes to the grammar of schooling with little to no change at the heart of education generally despite an emotionally charged catalyst does not mean that all is lost. There are still children to educate and care for, and there are still benefits to programs that supplement instruction (Borman 2005). The purpose of the Learning Station program was to provide students with access to an opportunity for additional support in their education. It was designed to address short term academic issues. A hope was that data would show positive long term impacts of the program through an improvement in MAP scores because this change would have satisfied administrators. While there were no statistically significant correlations in attendance in the program and performance on the MAP assessment, ample data from the qualitative interviews indicated benefits of this program. The social and emotional support these students received through the Learning Station were recognized benefits by adults who participated in the research study. The program is valuable from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, and represents a holistic approach to educating students.

Appendix A
Assessment Rubric

Unbridled Learning: College- And/ Or Career-Ready for All¹¹				
Component	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Next Generation Learners <i>(Achievement Tests, Growth, Gap, College/ Career Readiness, and Graduation Rate)</i>	100% <u>Tests Included:</u> -US History EOC -Biology EOC -Algebra II EOC -English II EOC -On-Demand -ACT PLAN Language - Mechanics -ACT -Alternate CCR Assessments- Compass, KYOTE, KOSSA, Workeys	77%	77% <i>*Science scheduled to be included but KY has applied for an extension to delay testing until 2016. Implementation with new science standards will continue to move forward.</i>	70%
Next Generation Instructional Programs and Support <i>(Program Review)</i>	0%	23% <u>Program Reviews</u> -Arts and Humanities -Practical Living -Writing	23%	20%
Next Generation Professionals <i>(PGES)</i>	0% Districts pilot	0% <i>KY was recently given a waiver to delay PGES into accountability system until 2015-2016</i>		10%

¹¹ www.kde.com

Breakdown of Next General Learners		
Component	% of Total Score	How is it Calculated
Achievement	20%	-US History EOC -Biology EOC -Algebra II EOC -English II EOC -10 th and 11 th grade On-Demand -10 th grade Language Mechanics scores from PLAN test
Gap	20%	This area looks at performance of students who meet one of the five state identified criteria: African American, Hispanic, ELL, Free or Reduced Lunch, or currently receiving Special Education services. In this area, schools are given one point for each student who scores a proficient or better on the Achievement Tests. Each student is only counted once even though they may belong to multiple criteria areas (ex. free and reduced lunch and ELL).
Growth	20%	This is the trickiest area of the new system. The state measures growth from the 10 th grade PLAN Reading and Math scores to the 11 th grade ACT reading and math scores. All 10 th grade students take the PLAN and are then placed in a norm group with students with similar scoring students. So for example, I get a composite scale score of 18 on the PLAN math and reading sections and then I am put in the norm group with all other students in the state who scored an 18 in those areas. I am then given the ACT my junior year and my scale score is again compared to my norm group of students who scored an 18 on the PLAN. For schools to get a point, I must score within the 40 percentile or higher as my norm group on those areas of the ACT. We only get a point if students fall into the 40 percentile or higher with their norm group.
College/ Career Readiness	20%	We are given one point for each student who meets the College Ready Benchmarks on ACT which are 18 in English, 19 in Math, and 20 in Reading. For students who do not meet benchmark we have the option to administer two alternative college assessments, the ACT Compass Test and the KYOTE test. We can only administer those to students twice and they have to be enrolled in a Math or English course to be eligible to take the tests. We can also earn one point for students who are Career Ready. To earn this designation student must take at least 3 courses in a career pathway, pass the KY KOSSA test, and earn a qualifying score on the ACT Workkeys test or ASVAB. We can earn 1.5 points (or bonus points) for students who are both College and Career Ready.
Graduation Rate	20%	The Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate takes the number students in a high school freshman class and then accounting for those students who move in and out of the system, looks at how many students get their diploma four years later.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol:

I will arrange to meet with identified administrative stakeholders in their offices and the teacher and parent stakeholders for the program in a conference room at the high school at the outset of the study. In order to respect the valuable time of those involved it is important to meet with them at a convenient location and to keep the interviews short.

Interview Questions:

Superintendent and Principal:

- Describe the Learning Station program.
 - How was staffing decided?
 - How are students chosen to participate?
 - What procedures are in place to track the success of the program?
- What programs in the past were developed and implemented specifically for students in the achievement gap at WCHS? These could be during the school day or in after-school times.
 - What is the current situation of these initiatives?
- What were the primary motivations for the development of this particular after school program?
- What mechanisms are in place to use the Learning Station to connect the community to the goals of WCHS?
- Please describe the achievement gap in WCHS and WCPS in general.
 - How would you define that gap?
 - Has it changed in recent years?
- Some people call this the opportunity gap instead of the achievement gap. What do you think of that?

Social Worker:

- Describe the Learning Station program.
- How did you design it?
- What do you see as the primary goals and objectives for the program?
- What is your role in it?
- Who else is involved in the program?
- What is the nature of parental involvement in the program
- What have the challenges been?
- What have been signs of its successes?
- How might you suggest revising the program?
- Please describe the achievement gap in WCHS and WCPS in general.
 - How would you define that gap?
 - Has it changed in recent years?

- Some people call this the opportunity gap instead of the achievement gap. What do you think of that?

Teachers:

- Describe the Learning Station program.
- What are specific goals and outcomes you want for this program?
- What is your role in supporting this program? Who else is involved and in what capacity?
- What's the formal conduit between the Learning Station and school classrooms?
 - What about informal?
 - What other programs is Learning Station linked too?
- What have the challenges been?
- Please describe the achievement gap in WCHS in general.
 - How would you define that gap?
 - Has it changed in recent years?
- Some people call this the opportunity gap instead of the achievement gap. What do you think of that?

Parents:

- Describe the Learning Station program.
- What are the specific goals and outcomes you want for this program?
- What is your role in supporting this program?
- Describe the ways in which you think the program has been successful. Have you seen a change in your student's focus on grades, school or homework?
- Describe the ways in which you think the program needs to improve.
- Please describe the achievement gap in WCHS and WCPS in general.
 - How would you define that gap?
 - Has it changed in recent years?
- Some people call this the opportunity gap instead of the achievement gap. What do you think of that?

Appendix C

List of Career and Technical Majors

Career & Technical Majors (CTE)

- Animal Science Systems
- Horticulture and Plant Science Systems
- Marketing/Sports Marketing
- Business Management
- Engineering
- Consumer & Family Management
- Culinary & Food Service
- Fundamentals of Education
- Medicaid Nurse Aide (MNA)
- Pharmacy Technician
- EKG Technician
- Phlebotomy Technician
- Television Technology
- Advanced Gaming Technology
- Internet, Network, and Computer Security
- Homeland Security
- Automotive Technology
- Collision Repair Technology
- Diesel Technology
- Agricultural Power
- Structure and Technical Systems
- Environmental Science and Biotechnology Carpentry
- Electricity Technology Masonry
- Electronics Technology Welding

Solo County High School Program of Studies 2014-2015

Appendix D

Career Clusters

Kentucky Career Clusters



Career Clusters provide a way for schools to organize instruction and student experiences around 16 broad categories that encompass virtually all occupations from entry through professional levels.

Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources
The production, processing, marketing, distribution, financing, and development of agricultural commodities and resources including food, fiber, wood products, natural resources, horticulture, and other plant and animal products/resources.

Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
Designing, producing, exhibiting, performing, writing, and publishing multimedia content including visual and performing arts and design, journalism, and entertainment services.

Architecture & Construction
Careers in designing, planning, managing, building and maintaining the built environment.

Business Management & Administration
Careers in planning, organizing, directing and evaluating business functions essential to efficient and productive business operations.

Education & Training
Planning, managing and providing education and training services, and related learning support services such as administration, teaching/training, administrative support, and professional support services.

Finance
Planning and related services for financial and investment planning, banking, insurance, and business financial management.

Government & Public Administration
Planning and executing government functions at the local, state and federal levels, including governance, national security, foreign service, planning, revenue and taxation, and regulations.

Health Science
Planning, managing, and providing therapeutic services, diagnostic services, health informatics, support services, and biotechnology research and development.

Hospitality & Tourism
Preparing individuals for employment in career pathways that relate to families and human needs such as restaurant and food/beverage services, lodging, travel and tourism, recreation, amusement and attractions.

Human Services
Preparing individuals for employment in career pathways that relate to families and human needs such as counseling and mental health services, family and community services, personal care, and consumer services.

Information Technology
Building linkages in IT occupations for entry-level, technical, and professional careers related to the design, development, support and management of hardware, software, multimedia and systems integration services.

Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security
Planning, managing, and providing legal, public safety, protective services and homeland security, including professional and technical support services.

Manufacturing
Planning, managing and performing the processing of materials into intermediate or final products and related professional and technical support activities such as production planning and control, maintenance and manufacturing/process engineering.

Marketing
Planning, managing, and performing marketing activities to reach organizational objectives such as brand management, professional sales, merchandising, marketing communications and market research.

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
Planning, managing, and providing scientific research and professional and technical services (e.g., physical science, social science, engineering) including laboratory and testing services, and research and development services.

Transportation, Distribution & Logistics
The planning, management, and movement of people, materials, and goods by road, pipeline, air, rail and water and related professional and technical support services such as transportation infrastructure planning and management, logistics services, mobile equipment and facility maintenance.

EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS
Kentucky Department of Education

Kentucky Department of Education

<http://education.ky.gov/CTE/Documents/Kentucky%20Career%20Clusters%20Poster.jpg>

September 26, 2014

Appendix E

Terms 2 and 3: Correlations between changes in MAP scores and attendance

Term 2 correlations between change in MAP scores and attendance

Change in Math and Reading MAP Scores Correlation (p-value) with Attendance

	Midterm attendance	Total attendance	Means
(SD)			
<hr/>			
Change in Math MAP score (.50)	.02 (.89)	.04 (.79)	.46
Change in Reading MAP score	-.10 (.35)	-.05(.68)	.39 (.49)
Means (SD)	.93 (1.04)	1.31 (1.28)	

Term 3 correlations between change in MAP scores and attendance

Change in Math and Reading MAP Scores Correlation (p-value) with Attendance

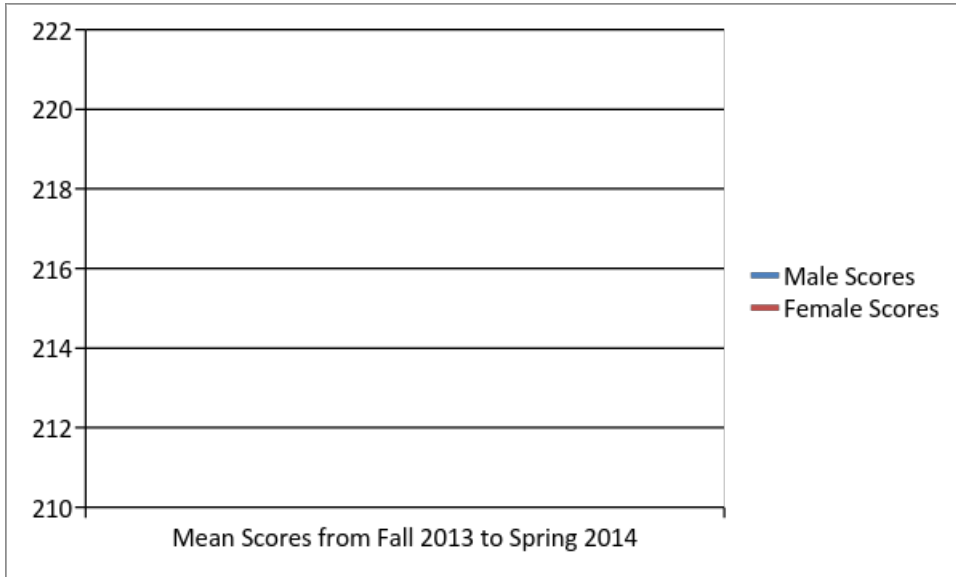
	Midterm attendance	Total attendance	Means (SD)
<hr/>			
Change in Math MAP score (.50)	.05 (.59)	.06 (.55)	.41
Change in Reading MAP score (.47)	.06 (.55)	.10(.31)	.32
Means (SD)	.90 (1.15)	1.05 (1.32)	

Appendix F

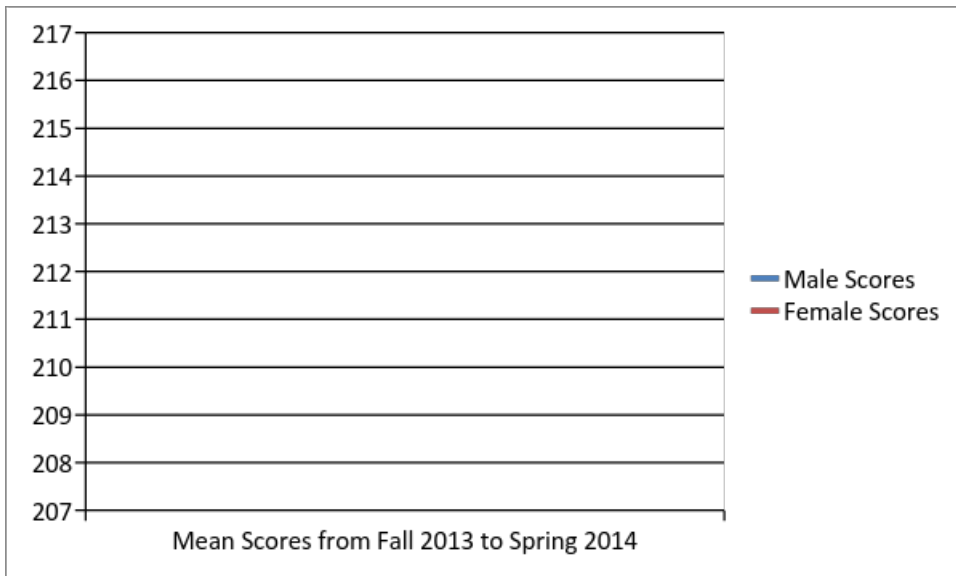
Terms 2: Mean difference of gender on math and reading MAP scores

Term 2 Mean Difference of Gender on Math and Reading MAP scores from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014

Mean Difference of Gender on Math MAP



Mean Difference of Gender on Reading MAP

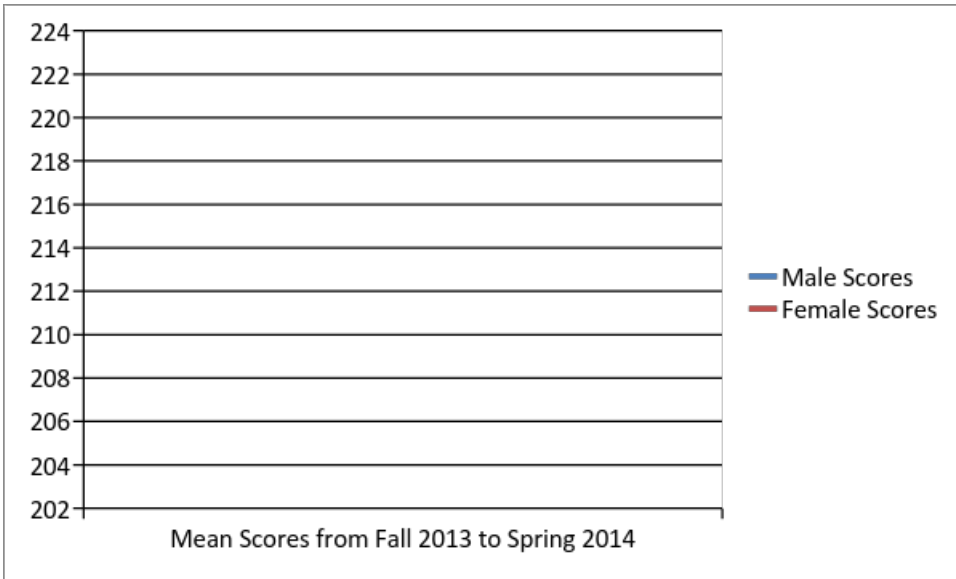


Appendix G:

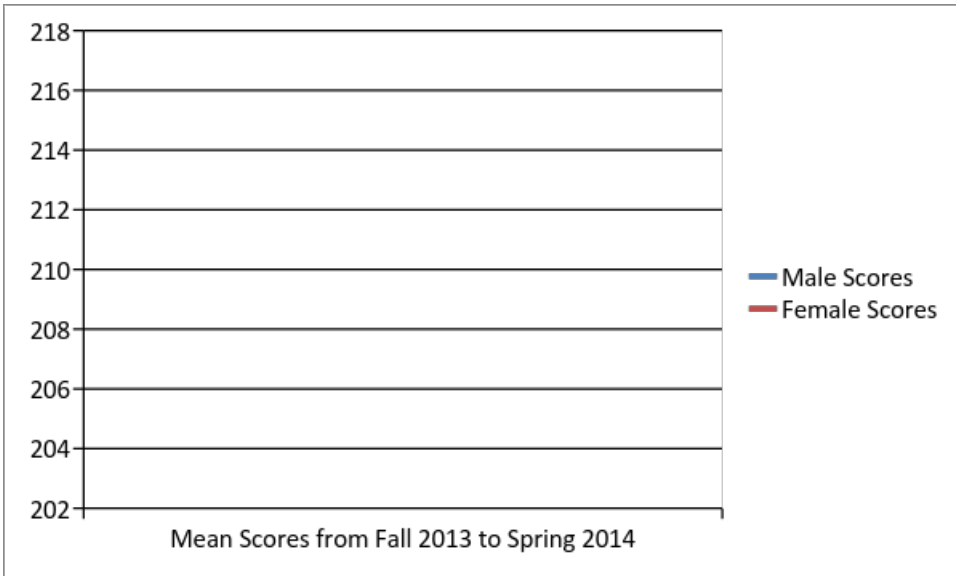
Term 3: Mean difference of gender on math and reading scores

Term 3 Mean Difference of Gender on Math and Reading MAP scores from Fall 2013 to Spring 2014

Mean Difference of Gender on Math MAP



Mean Difference of Gender on Reading MAP



Bibliography

- Achievement Gap. (2011). *Education Week*.
- Achinstein, B., Athanases, S. Z., Curry, M. W., Ogawa, R. T., & de Oliveira, L. C. (2013). These Doors are Open! *Leadership*, 42(5), 30-34.
- ACT National Career Readiness Certificate. (2014). Retrieved March 2, 2015.
- ACT Newsroom. (2014). Retrieved February 27, 2015, from <http://www.act.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/act-national-career-readiness-certificate-act-ncrc/>
- Addison, Falanda R. and Antonio McGee. (2010). "Helping to Create and Nurture Strong Relationships among Families, Schools and Communities."
- Advancing does not Equal Equity: Removing Roadblocks to Achieving High Academic Standards. (2012). *Policy Evaluations and Research Center*, 20(2), 1-12.
- Akers, R. (2013, April 16). Developing Community [Personal interview].
- Bailey, Deryl F. and Mary E. Bradbury-Bailey. (2010). "Empowered Youth Programs: Partnerships for Enhancing Postsecondary Outcomes of African American Adolescents." *Professional School Counseling*.
- Beshear, S (2014) State Budget Address. Retrieved February 27 2015, from http://governor.ky.gov/Speeches/20140121_BudgetAddress.pdf
- Boon, H. (2008). Risk or Resilience? What Makes a Difference? *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 35(1), 81-102.
- Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap. *Ascd*.
- Caldas, Stephen J. & Bankston III, Carl. (2001). Effect of School Population

- Socioeconomic Status on Individual Academic Achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90(5), 269-277.
- Camera, L. (2014). Latest Waiver Move Could Weaken Key Obama Priority. *Education Week*, 34(2), 18.
- Carey, R. L. (2014). A Cultural Analysis of the Achievement Gap Discourse: Challenging the Language and Labels Used in the Work of School Reform. *Urban Education*, 49(4), 440-468
- Cawelti, G. (2006). The Side Effects. *Educational Leadership*, 64-68.
- Coates, R. D. (2011). *Covert racism: theories, institutions, and experiences*. Leiden: Brill.
- Collopy, R., Bowman, C., & Taylor, D. A. (2012). The Educational Achievement Gap as a Social Justice Issue for Teacher Educators. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 16(1), 4-25.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. Teachers College Press.
- Delpit, L. (1996). *Other people's children*. New York: NewP.
- Desimone, L. M. (2013). Reform before NCLB: Standards-Based Reform before NCLB Was More Successful Because It Sought Teacher Buy-In and Was Less Punitive. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 94(8), 59.
- Diamond, J., & Spillane, J. (2004). High-stakes accountability in urban elementary schools: Challenging or reproducing inequality?. *The Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1145-1176.
- Dodge, A. (2012). *Changing the poisonous narrative: A conversation with Diane Ravitch*.

Educational Leadership, Dec 2011-Jan 2012, 54-59.

Donnor, J. K., & Shockley, K. G. (2010). Leaving Us behind: A Political Economic Interpretation of NCLB and the Miseducation of African American Males. *Educational Foundations*, 24, 43-54.

Dugger, K. (1988). Social location and gender-role attitudes: A comparison of Black and White women. *Gender & Society*, 2(4), 425-448.

Education Week (2011). Quality Counts

Fitchett, P. G., & Heafner, T. L. (2013a). An Opportunity to Learn U.S. History: What NAEP Data Suggest Regarding the Opportunity Gap.

Fitchett, P. G., & Heafner, T. L. (2013b). Making Critical Connections Between Social Studies Teaching and Student Achievement Using NAEP Data Explorer. *The Teacher Educator*, 48(4), 296-310.

Fitzpatrick, J., Sanders, James and Worthen, Blaine. (2011). *Program Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guides* (J.W. Johnston Ed. 4 ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Goldenberg, B. M. (2014). White Teachers in Urban Classrooms: Embracing Non-White Students' Cultural Capital For Better Teaching and Learning. *Urban Education*, 49(1), 111-144. doi:10.1177/0042085912472510

Goldstein, D. (2014). *The teacher wars: A history of America's most embattled profession*. New York City: Random House LLC.

Gorski, P. (2008). The Myth of the "Culture of Poverty". *Educational Leadership*, 65(7), 32.

Guisbond, Lisa, Neill, Monty, & Schaffer, Bob. (2012). NCLB's Lost Decade for

Educational Progress: What Can We Learn from This Policy Failure? FairTest, 1-22.

Haimson, L., & Ravitch, D. (2013). Unequal Schools. *Nation*, 296(18), 41-43

Haycock, K. (2006). No More Invisible Kids. *Educational Leadership*, 38-42.

Herczog, M. It's up to us: Bridging the Civic Opportunity Gap. *Association of California School Administrators*, 20-26.

Hersch, P. (1999). A tribe apart: A journey into the heart of American adolescence. Random House LLC.

Hess, Frederick M. & Peterilli, Michael J. (2009). Wrong Turn on School Reform. *Policy Review*, 55-68.

Hoffman, Patricia, Anne Dahlman and Ginger Zierdt. (2009). "Professional learning Communities in Partnership: A 3-Year Journey of Action and Advocacy to Bridge the Achievement Gap." *School-University Partnerships*. Vol. 3 No.1.

Hogan, David. (2011). Whither a city on a hill? Globalization, quality, and equity in US schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(3), 457-474.

hooks, b. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

Hunter, R. C., & Bartee, R. (2003). The achievement gap issues of competition, class, and race. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(2), 151-160.

Hynes, K; Sanders, F. Diverging Experiences during Out-of-School Time: The Race Gap in Exposure to After-School Programs. *Journal of Negro Education*. 80, 4, 464-476, 2011. ISSN: 00222984.

Improving college and career readiness and success for everyone. (n.d.). Retrieved February 27, 2015, from <http://www.act.org>

- Jenkins, A. (2009). Bridging the Racial Opportunity Gap. *National Civic Review*, 9-12.
- Jennings, J. (2012). What has President Obama done?. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 94(2), 50-54.
- Johnson, A. W. (2013). "Turnaround" as Shock Therapy Race, Neoliberalism, and School Reform. *Urban Education*, 48(2), 232-256.
- Johnson, J., Strange, M., & Madden, K. (2010). The Rural Dropout Problem: An Invisible Achievement Gap. Rural School and Community Trust.
- Johnson, L. (n.d.). Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Retrieved February 27, 2015, from <http://www.ed.gov/esea>
- Johnston, Howard. (2011). " Closing the Gaps." Education Partnerships, Inc. University of South florida.
- Kahne, J. a. M., E (2008). Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School. *Circle Working Paper*, 59.
- Kao, G., & Thompson, J. S. (2003). Racial and ethnic stratification in educational achievement and attainment. *Annual review of sociology*, 417-442.
- Kentucky Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved November 13, 2014.
- Kentucky Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2015
- Kober N, McMurrer J, Silva MR. State Test Score Trends Through 2008–09, Part 4: Is Achievement Improving and are Gaps Narrowing for Title I Students? Washington, D.C: Center on Education Policy; 2011. [Accessed August 31, 2011]. Available from: http://www.cep-dc.org/cfcontent_file.cfm?Attachment=KoberMcMurrerSilva%5FFullReport%5FTitleI%5F080111%2Epdf.
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: the restoration of apartheid schooling in*

- America*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2012). *Bad teacher!: How blaming teachers distorts the bigger picture*. Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Ladson-Billings. (2006). From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- Lareau, A. (1989). *Home advantage: Social class and parental involvement in elementary education*. London: Falmer.
- Larry D. Schroeder, David L. Sjoquist, & Paula E. Stephan. (1986). *Understanding regression analysis: An introductory guide (Vol. 57)*. Sage.
- Lashaw, Amanda. (2010). The Radical Promise of Reformist Zeal: What Makes “Inquiry for Equity” Plausible? *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 41(4), 323-340.
- Lee, Jaekyung, Shin, Hyejin, & Amo, Laura C. (2013). Evaluating the impact of NCLB School interventions in New York State: Does One Size Fit All? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21(67). 1-39.
- Lewis, L. S. (2003). Will education reform create more opportunity?. *Society*, 40(5), 57-61.
- Markley, O. (1972). *The National institute of Education: Working Papers on problems, Goals, and Program initiatives for NIE*.
- McKeon, D. (2005). *Research Talking Points on High School Reform*. *National Education Association*.

- McNeil, M., Klein, A., & Cavanagh, S. (2011). Obama Outlines NCLB Flexibility. (Cover story). *Education Week*, 31(5), 1-21.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2010). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Moore, D. F. (2004). No Child Left Behind: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. *American Annals of the Deaf* 148(5), 347-348. Gallaudet University Press. Retrieved February 25, 2015, from Project MUSE database.
- Mumford, Vincent E. & Scott, Kimberly A. (2007). Critical Thoughts: Reexamining Teacher Training, Cultural Awareness, and School Reform. *The Official Journal of the National Association for Multicultural Education*, 9(4), 54-58.
- National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2009). Making the case: A 2009 fact sheet on children and youth in out-of-school time. Retrieved from <http://www.niost.org/pdf/factsheet2009.pdf>
- NEPC. (2015). Open Letter to the Congress and the Obama Administration from Educational Researchers Nationwide.
- Neuman, S., & Celano, D. (2012). Don't Level the Playing Field: Tip It toward the Underdogs. *American Educator*, 36(3), 20-21. Retrieved April 1, 2015, from ERIC.
- Nichols, S. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2007). *Collateral damage: How high-stakes testing corrupts America's schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Niemuth, S. D. a. J. (1999). *The Global Classroom: A Study in Appreciation, Awareness, and Acceptance of Different Cultures and People in Our Ever Changing World*.

- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: an alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Noguera, P. A. (2009). THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: Public Education in Crisis. *New Labor Forum* (Sage Publications Inc.), 18(2), 60-69
- Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of “acting White” in Black history, community, and education. *The Urban Review*, 36(1), 1-35.
- Olguim, David L. and Jeanmarie Keim. (2012) "Using Stakeholders as Career Bridges to Advance Students' Academic Performance: How Would You Like Your Stake?" University of New Mexico.
- Optimizing Talent: Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide. (2011). *Policy Evaluations and Research Center*, 19(2).
- Orfield, G. (2008). Race and Schools: The Need for Action. *National Education Association*, 1b(Spring).
- Orlofsky, G. F. (2002). The Funding Gap: Low-Income and Minority Students Receive Fewer Dollars.
- Paley, V. G., & Paley, V. G. (2009). *White Teacher*, With a New Preface. Harvard University Press.
- Phillips, M., Crouse, J., & Ralph, J. (1998). Does the Black-White test score gap widen after children enter school. *The Black-White test score gap*, 229-272.
- Prager, K. (2011). Positioning Young Black Boys for Educational Success. *ETS Policy Notes*, 19(3), 1-16.
- Ravitch, D. (2010)a. Stop the Madness. *Education Review*, 23(1), 27-34
- Ravitch, D. (2009). Time to Kill 'No Child Left Behind'. *Education Digest*, 75(1), 4-6.

- Ravitch, D. (2010)b. *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. Basic Books.
- Ravitch, D., & Cortese, A. (2009). *Why We're Behind: What Top Nations Teach Their Students But We Don't*. *Education Digest*, 75(1), 35-38.
- Reaching Out to families and the Community: how some High-Performing Schools are Engaging Families and Citizens to support Student Achievement. Issue brief: The Center for Comprehensive reform and Improvement. April 2009.
- Rebell, M. A., & Wolff, J. R. (2012). Educational opportunity is achievable and affordable. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93(6), 62-65.
- Reynolds, J. R., & Ross, C. E. (1998). Social stratification and health: Education's benefit beyond economic status and social origins. *Social Problems*, 45(2), 221-247.
- Rios, F., Trent, A., & Castañeda, L. V. (2003). Social perspective taking: Advancing empathy and advocating justice. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 36(1), 5-14.
- Rose, L. & Gallup, A. (2006). The 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Available: www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0609pol.htm#curriculum50
- Rothstein, R. (2004). A wider lens on the black-white achievement gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(2), 104-110.
- Scatton, L. H., Coley, R. J., & McBride, A. (2005). *Addressing Achievement Gaps: Progress and Prospects for Minority and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students and English-Language Learners*. *ETS Policy Notes*, 13(1), 1-12.
- Shumow, L. (Ed.). (2009). *Promising practices for family and community involvement during high school*. IAP.

- Sizer, T. (2004). *The red pencil: Convictions from experience in education*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Southern Regional Education, B. Giving Students Extra Support to Meet Standards in Challenging Academic and Career Courses. High Schools That Work. *Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)*. Jan. 1, 2010.
- Stiggins, R., & Chappuis, J. (2005). Using student-involved classroom assessment to close achievement gaps. *Theory into practice*, 44(1), 11-18.
- Stoneberg, B. D. (2009). A Quick Review of NCLB (State) and NAEP Achievement Levels, and How They Match. Online Submission.
- Takanishi, R. (2004) Leveling the playing field: Supporting immigrant children from birth to either. *Future of Children*, 14, 61-69.
- Taliaferro, Jocelyn and DeCuir-Gunby, Jessica. (2008). "African American Educators' Perspectives on the Advanced Placement Opportunity Gap." *The Urban Review*. Vol. 40, No. 2.
- Taylor, R. (2014, February 18). State Mandated Testing [Personal interview].
- Taylor, R. (2014, December 24). State Mandated Testing [Personal interview].
- Templeton, Nathan R. (2011). Understanding Social Justice: Improving the Academic Achievement of African American Students. *The Connexions Project*, 1(2), 1-8.
- The Funding Gap: Low Income and Minority Students Receive Fewer Dollars. (2002). Education Trust.
- Toch, T. (2006). Turmoil in the testing industry. *Educational Leadership*, 64(3), 53.
- Today's Military. (n.d.). Retrieved February 27, 2015, from <http://todaysmilitary.com>
- UNICEF, Innocenti Research Center (2005). *Child Poverty in Rich Countries, 2005*,

Innocenti Report Card No. 6. Florence, Italy: Innocenti Research Center.

Weissman, J. (2012, October 17, 2013). Almost Half of Public School Students are now Low Income, *The Atlantic*.

West, E. T. (2010). Access Denied: 2009 API Rankings Reveal Unequal Access to California's Best Schools.

White, M. (2012). Poverty and Education: A Teacher's Perspective--Summary of the Findings of the Focus Group Research. BCTF Research Report. Section V. 2012-EI-01. BCTF Information Handbook.

Whitenack, D. A., & Swanson, P. E. (2013). The transformative potential of boundary spanners: a narrative inquiry into preservice teacher education and professional development in an NCLB-impacted context. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21, 57.

Wilson, W. J. (2011). Being Poor, Black, and American. *American Educator*, 11.

Wood, Randy M. (2012) "Collaboration: A Key to Successful Professional Development Engagement with Students and Parents." *School-University Partnerships*. Vol. 4, No. 1.

www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PIC-PNV19n3.pdf

www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPN131.pdf

www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPN181.pdf

www.kde.com.

Yaffe, D., Coley, R. J., & Kerrigan, E. (2010). After the Bell Rings: Learning Outside of the Classroom and Its Relationship to Student Academic Achievement. *ETS Policy Notes*, 18(1), 1-12.

Yeung, W. J., & Conley, D. (2008). Black–white achievement gap and family wealth.

Child Development, 79(2), 303-324.

Yin, R. (2003). Case study research: Design and methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks,

Calif.: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2010). Qualitative research from start to finish. Guilford Press.

Zavadsky, Heather. (2006). How NCLB Drives Success in Urban Schools. Association

For Supervision and Curriculum Development, 69-73.

VITA

Serenity The Wright

Completed Education

MA, Secondary Social Studies Education, May 2006

University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky

Anthropology Minor, Post-Baccalaureate Studies, May 2006

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

BA, History; Minor, Educational Studies, May 2005

Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky

Professional Experience

Nov 2014-present	Director of Diversity and International Students; Transylvania University, Lexington, KY
Jan 2014-Nov 2014	International Student Services Coordinator; Transylvania University, Lexington, KY
2013-2014	Academic and Behavior Interventionist, Woodford County High School, Versailles, KY
2006-2013	Social Studies Teacher, Woodford County High School, Versailles, KY

Scholastic and Professional Honors

- Conservation Teacher of the Year 2010
- Teachers Who Made A Difference Award 2009