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The Experiences of Teachers Successfully Teaching Reading to Black Students

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The Experiences of Teachers Successfully Teaching Reading to Black Students

by

Kevin Michael Walker

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership: Administration

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Portland State University
2020

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Abstract

Racist laws and subsequent educational policies and practices have resulted in schools in the United States failing to teach Black students reading. Historically, a racial achievement gap in elementary reading has existed throughout the history of the United States and has persisted to current times. As the population of students of color increases in the United States, we must investigate how teachers create equitable educational outcomes for students who have been historically underserved and oppressed by our education system. Teachers who are successful in ensuring our Black students have the opportunity to experience success in reading are actively disrupting the inequity that exists in our education system and society. We must adaptively grow in our ability to better serve the students who are perpetually left behind by our education system and close the persistent racial achievement gaps that exist throughout our nation. This multi-site qualitative study investigated the experiences of primary grade teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. This study used semi-structured interviews to investigate the primary research question: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? Related research questions are as follows: (a) What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (b) What is the role of principal leadership behavior in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (c) What is the role of professional development in the experiences of teachers

successfully teaching reading to Black students? The study concludes with recommendations for further investigation and practice in the field.

Dedication

*For the love of my life,
your encouragement, sacrifice, patience and love
inspire me to be a better person every day.*

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My parents who gave me strength, love and support throughout my life; to my brother who always inspired me to think outside of the box; to my wife, Ashley, who is the reason for so much of my success and the person whose advice guides me and pushes me every day to be my absolute best; to my son, Theo, believe in your ability to make the world be a better place; and to all the students who continue to remain underserved by our current education system. Your resilience inspires me and with every breath I take I will fight for your right to a high quality public education.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my committee members who have been incredibly generous in sharing their expertise and time. Thank you Dr. Burke, Dr. Reynolds and Dr. Labissiere for agreeing to be part of my committee.

I owe a debt of gratitude and special thanks to my committee chair Dr. Peterson for the countless hours she has spent reading, encouraging, offering feedback and most of all for your patience with me throughout the entire process. I am grateful she saw something in me and encouraged me to pursue an EdD. Her experience as a leader for equity and social justice have been a great benefit to my thinking and development. You are a warm demander and have pushed me in my thinking and in making progress on my dissertation.

I would also like to thank all my friends and colleagues for their support and pushing me to continue forward and not give up. You have given me the encouragement I needed even when I did not believe in myself.

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Preface

The EdD program at Portland State University is a member of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. There are six Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate working principles agreed upon by member organizations. These principles are woven throughout the Educational Leadership EdD experience. They are as follows:

The Educational Leadership Educational Doctorate experience

1. Is framed around the questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice
2. Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities
3. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships
4. Provides field-based opportunities to analyze complex problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions
5. Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry
6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice.

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Introduction

Black students in the United States are underserved by our education system with significant disparities among racial groups in elementary reading achievement. Hartney and Flavin (2014) declared, “More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board*, Black students continue to trail their White peers on a variety of important educational indicators” (p. 1). Moreover, Noguera (2008) emphasized that education is largely reproducing the historical and present inequities in our society. The racial education achievement gap is a persistent problem which is addressed in policy at all levels: federal, state, local, district and school. However, despite significant policy changes and financial investment, racial reading achievement gaps continue to plague our education system. While considerable research has been devoted to the existence of the achievement gap, this study is a multi-site qualitative investigation into the experiences of primary grade teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. In this chapter, I provide a rationale for selecting this problem, situating the problem in the context of historical and current and past policy, organizational behavior, and learning theory.

Background of the Problem

The United States began collecting data on student achievement, disaggregated by race, in 1969. The data indicate significant gaps in student performance that persist

among students of color. Ladson-Billings (2006) asserted, “the achievement gap is one of the most talked about issues in U.S. education” (p. 3). According to the National Governors’ Association (2005, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2006), the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S. a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their White and more privileged counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006; National Assessment for Educational Progress [NAEP], 2015). While the Coleman Report in the 1960s was the first to highlight the racial achievement gap, since the NAEP was first administered in the early 1970s, results have consistently documented racial achievement gaps of students of color (NAEP, 2015).

Beyond the moral imperative of this issue, addressing these gaps in achievement is vitally important to our nation’s prosperity and future economic success (National Education Association, 2005, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). Racial disparities exist in every measure of social success. The demographics of the U.S. are changing with estimates that by the year 2060, people of color will comprise 57% of the nation’s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This means that the U.S. population will increasingly be made up of citizens from racial groups that have traditionally experienced large disparities in academic achievement and income distribution, which is decreasing for families of color. As a nation, we are experiencing higher rates of poverty among children, which correlates to less schooling, lower wages and increased likelihood of poor health and nutrition (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012). This is disproportionately affecting

our communities of color (Children's Defense Fund 2012). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), the unemployment rate for someone who does not finish high school is 7.4%, while the unemployment rate for someone who graduates high school is 5.2%. That same individual who does not graduate high school has median usual weekly earnings of \$504, while the high school graduate's median usual weekly earnings are \$692. Each high school graduate also creates more than \$200,000 in economic advantage to our society through tax revenue and saving expenditures in crime, health care and a variety of programs (Levin, 2009). Still more advantages accrue for our economy and individuals who can continue their education at the college or university level. Thus, racial achievement gaps in K-12 contribute to lifelong income and wealth gaps among communities of color. This study began in 2019 and in the past 7 months, the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of Black citizens by police and armed community members has exacerbated the racial disparities described above, resulting in civil unrest not seen in 50 years. The U.S. unemployment peaked at 16% due to COVID-19, and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer has inspired protests in all 50 states, with calls for meaningful reform targeted at ending systemic racism within the United States.

As the nation's schools become increasingly more ethnically and racially diverse, and given the current unrest due to anti-Black practices that persist throughout our society, examining and understanding the racial complexities in the United States is

imperative now more than ever in the nation's history (Howard & Navarro, 2016). In a study commissioned by the student advocacy group Chalkboard Project and metro-wide Portland Business Alliance, economists at ECONorthwest (2015) estimated that Oregon's economy would be nearly 2 billion dollars bigger if all working-age Oregonians educated in public schools achieved at the same level as their White counterparts. With these factors in mind, it is vitally important to our cities, states and nation's continued prosperity to address and rectify the racial academic achievement gap that has plagued our society for far too long.

When addressing the achievement gap for our students who are Black, one must also consider other contributing factors in why an achievement gap exists at all, and what historical inequalities have contributed to disparities in student achievement. The education of people who are Black was initially forbidden during the period of slavery. The historical context of the achievement gap was described by Ladson-Billings (2006) who stated

After emancipation, we saw the development of the freedmen's school whose purpose was the maintenance of the servant class. During the long period of legal apartheid, Black students attended schools where they received cast-off text books and materials from white schools. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that the typical school year for rural Black students was about 4 months long. Indeed, Black students in the south did not experience universal secondary schooling until 1968. Why, then, would we not expect there to be an achievement gap? (p. 5)

Historically, the state of Oregon was known in the late 19th century as one of the most formidable and dangerous places outside of the south for a Black person to call home (Johnson & Williams, 2010). According to the Oregon Racial Equity Report

Oregon has a long history of racism rooted in its public policy (Facing Race: Oregon, 2015). Prior to statehood in 1859, Oregon included in its territorial and public laws what are referred to as “Black Exclusion Laws,” one of which made it illegal for any Black person to live in the state of Oregon and was enforced by laws that required fines, arrest and physical violence for Black people who did live in Oregon (McLagan, 1980). Oregon was the only state admitted to the Union with a Black exclusion clause in its constitution, and the exclusionary laws were not removed from the state constitution or public law until 1927 (Facing Race: Oregon, 2015; Johnson & Williams, 2010). In 1867 Portland Public Schools (PPS) instituted its first and only experiment with officially segregated schools. This experiment only lasted 5 years due to funding concerns brought up by the White community at the time (Johnson & Williams, 2010). After that, schools were officially desegregated, though segregation still existed based on where one could purchase land, buy a house or reside and attend the neighborhood school. Neighborhoods were “redlined” by banks and real estate agents (Johnson & Williams, 2010), resulting in segregated neighborhoods and schools. In the 140 years since the closure of the first segregated school in Portland, public schools have failed to provide a high-quality education for Black children. In 1962 the NAACP recognized and publicly accused PPS of passively allowing patterns of segregation to persist and commissioned a study of PPS. PPS responded by commissioning its own report, more commonly known as the Schwab

Report, named after the chair of the taskforce that produced it. The Schwab Report¹ recognized that institutional racism was a major factor in Portland and had shaped the educational opportunities for Black students. The report also placed blame for the underperformance of academic achievement by Black students on the perceived cultural deficiencies of Black students and their families (Johnson & Williams, 2010).

Over the past 150 years these policies and practices are root causes of many of the disparities present in the state today (Facing Race: Oregon, 2015). The courts have termed this “vestiges of segregation” or the continuation of the impact of segregation through multiple generations, even though the legal control at its core has been removed (Williams, 1987). This is apparent in how the Black community has been impacted by unfair and racist housing patterns and practices historically. The concerns of the Black community have not been adequately addressed by the state and municipalities as many of the issues described above continue to echo throughout our education system and contribute to the reading achievement gap.

There are three historical schools of thought on the concept of achievement gap and the varying degrees of the effects of social and school-based factors on student outcomes. The first was introduced by the Coleman Report (1966) attributed the home, neighborhood and school characteristics experienced by Black children as the cause of

¹ Race and Equal Educational Opportunity in PPS Report, also known as the Schwab Report. After 18 months of study, the extensive 1964 Schwab Report concluded that racial disparity in education did exist in PPS and made more than 40 recommendations.

low achievement. Coleman contended that the gap can be mostly explained by socio-economic circumstances of the child, and the school has little to no impact on that. The second school of thought contradicted Coleman's notions. Literature produced by Edmonds (1979) titled *Effective Schools for the Urban Poor*² put greater emphasis on school-based factors. Edmonds challenged Coleman's approach, arguing that school characteristics and focused instruction could, indeed, produce academically successful students. Both of these competing points of view were later challenged in research and were impacted by the publication of *A Nation at Risk*³ and the shift to the third school of thought based heavily in a standards perspective (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The underlying problem is the capacity of the school organization to overcome disparities that may be linked to the cultural, linguistic and developmental impacts of poverty and race. More recently scholars have also correlated the achievement gap to the persistent social inequality that has beleaguered our education system and society for decades (Zhao, 2016).

Education has long been seen as the great equalizer in our society, the one thing that if obtained, allows citizens to move progressively through the social classes of our

² Urban schools that teach poor children have strong leadership and a climate of expectation that students will learn.

³ (Intro) "All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgement needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself" (para. 1).

society. Education is normally thought of as formal schooling and social mobility is assumed to be climbing up some kind of fixed social ladder of income or lifestyle (Halsey, 2013). Halsey asserted that the aim of social policy should not only be to maximize gross national product but also to protect the well-being of individuals in a secure society. Others believe the purpose of education is to provide students the opportunity to reach their highest potential and realize their highest aspirations (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Noguera, 2008). The reading achievement of students in elementary school, particularly third and fourth grade, is an indicator used in predicting student success and high school readiness. Simms (2012) explained the importance of third grade reading and that its importance extends beyond reading achievement. McClelland, Acock, and Morrison (2006) conducted a study of 538 children in Greensboro, North Carolina, in which “poor learning skills” (e.g., self-regulation, responsibility, independence, and cooperation) initially identified in kindergarten correlated with poor learning skills in third grade which correlated with lower reading and math achievement through sixth grade, even when controlling for such factors as IQ, race, and maternal education. Additionally, Skibbe et al.’s (2008) latent growth curve analysis indicated that reading comprehension in third grade was associated with higher order math skills (e.g., problem solving) through eighth grade in a sample of 46,373 Chicago Public School students (Simms, 2012, p. 25).

While Edwards (2004) and Flowers (2007) contributed significant research regarding Black students and reading instruction, additional research is needed to

examine the impact or influence of local equity policies and professional development trainings on the instructional practices of educators teaching reading and their impact on the reading achievement of elementary students who are Black. Though there have been modest gains in the reading achievement of Black students in the U.S., data from assessments conducted in Oregon and nationally indicate that our practices in school perpetuate the racial reading achievement gaps (NAEP, 2015).

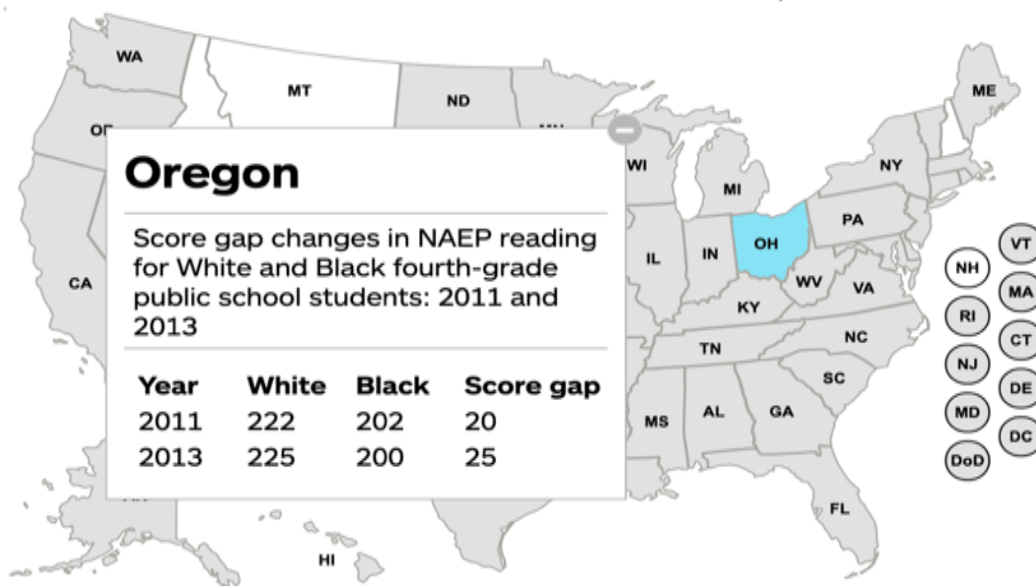
State and local educational agencies, as well as community-based organizations, have focused considerable attention on closing the racial achievement gap. A report commissioned by the Black Parent Initiative⁴ and made possible through a grant provided by The Chalkboard Project, showed an analysis of achievement scores during 2003-2004 through 2006-2007 school years and indicated that Black students score about 6 to 9 points lower than White students, roughly 1.5 grade difference on measures of achievement (ECONorthwest, 2009). The state of Oregon and PPS have explicitly called out third grade reading achievement as a priority for the state and the school district. According to the Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) Reading Equity Summit Report, disparities in third grade are greater today than 4 years ago and we must advance racial equity in third grade reading outcomes (Stevens, 2015). In 2014, all 197 Oregon school districts, except PPS, turned in their achievement goals to the Oregon Department

⁴ A Deeper Look at the Black-White Achievement Gap in Multnomah County: A Report to the Black Parent Initiative, Winter 2009.

of Education (ODE) and set targets for how they aspired to raise student performance in third grade reading. PPS has since set three priorities to drive student achievement that have been adopted by the Portland School Board one of which states, “100% of students reading to learn by the end of 3rd grade” (PPS, 2011, p. 1). NAEP scores in Oregon from 2013 show a 25-point difference in fourth grade reading scores between Black and White students.

Figure 1

NAEP Results for 2011 and 2013 Black-White Score Gap



NOTE: DoD = Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).

Gap narrowed
 Gap did not change
 Gap widened
 Not available/applicable

Source: NAEP Website <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>

In the Oregon Statewide Report Card 2016-2017: Annual Report to the Legislature on Oregon Public Schools, third through fifth grade average achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) for all students in the state was 51.1% while Black student achievement in this area was 30.0% (ODE, 2016). This is a 21.1% difference in reading achievement for our elementary school students who are Black in the state of Oregon (see Table 1).

Table 1

ELA Achievement for Third Through Fifth Grades in the State of Oregon

**English Language Arts Academic Achievement Details
for Elementary (Grades 3-5)**

Long Term Goal¹: 80%

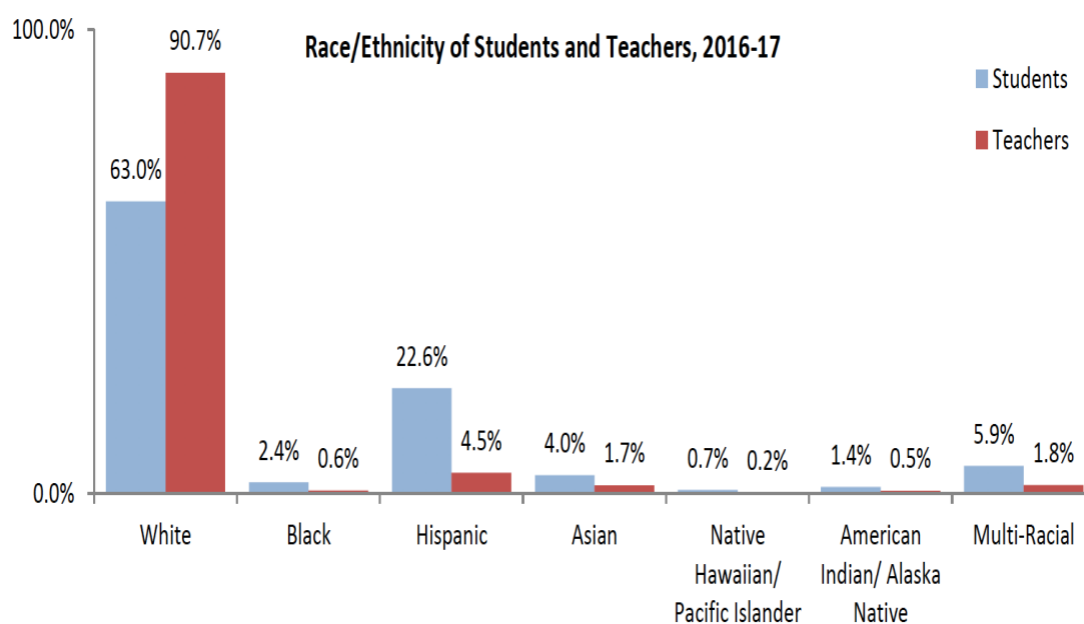
Student Group	School Year 2015-16	School Year 2016-17	School Year 2017-18	3-year Average
All Students	52.4%	49.6%	51.4%	51.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	40.7%	37.5%	39.1%	39.1%
English Learners ²	25.0%	21.8%	26.4%	24.5%
Students with Disabilities	25.0%	23.4%	24.9%	24.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	35.5%	30.4%	34.8%	33.6%
Black/African American	31.5%	29.0%	29.4%	30.0%
Hispanic/Latino	34.1%	30.9%	32.5%	32.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	40.4%	33.8%	33.9%	36.0%
Underserved Race/Ethnicity ³	34.1%	30.8%	32.4%	32.4%
Asian	69.9%	68.5%	69.5%	69.3%
White	59.2%	56.6%	58.6%	58.2%
Multi-racial ⁴	57.1%	54.7%	56.2%	56.0%

Source: ODE (2016).

For additional context, Figure 2 presents the percentage of teachers and students by race in the state of Oregon for the 2016-2017 school year (ODE, 2016). This is noteworthy as the majority of the teacher workforce in the state of Oregon is predominately White, while the diversity of the student population continues to shift.

Figure 2

Teacher and Student Population by Race in the State of Oregon



Source: ODE (2016) data.

In PPS, Black students are overrepresented as underperforming on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. According to data collected by PPS during the 2014-2015 school year, 79% of Black students in third grade scored a level 1 or 2 on the

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium while 27.1% of White students in third grade scored a level 1 or 2. In the 2015-2016 school year, 78% of Black third grade students scored a level 1 or 2 while 26.8% White students in third grade scored a level 1 or 2. In the 2016-2017 school year 82% of Black third grade students scored a level 1 or 2 while 27.2% White students in third grade scored a level 1 or 2. This gap in achievement is relatively constant across all tested grades. The trend depicted by this data is alarming, and the gap between Black student reading achievement and their peers must be addressed.

To address the achievement gap and the system that has created the gap, some states, local governance agencies, and school boards have adopted equity policies aimed at providing more resources and a point of focus when making decisions concerning student experience and educational outcomes. In 2011 the state of Oregon developed and adopted an Equity Lens (OEIB, 2011). This lens was designed to address “the persistent achievement gap between our growing populations of communities of color, immigrants, migrants, and low-income rural students with our more affluent white students” (OEIB, 2011, p. 2). The Oregon legislature also enacted House Bill 2016 which directed the ODE (2016) to develop and implement a statewide education plan for Black student success. Some of the work the state advisory group has been asked to produce deals directly with addressing literacy outcomes and the achievement gap for Black students in Oregon elementary schools (ODE, 2016).

In 2011, PPS adopted their Racial Educational Equity Policy and 5-year plan to address racial achievement gaps at PPS. One of the explicitly stated goals of this policy is the, “(1) narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students and (2) eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories” (PPS, 2011, p. 2). While these policies are vitally important in closing the gap in reading achievement between our Black and White students, we must also measure their effectiveness with respect to closing racial achievement gaps and question their capacity to achieve their intended goals and purpose. Since the equity policy was enacted in PPS, the racial reading achievement gap has remained relatively unchanged.

Other notable factors that contribute to the reading achievement gap that have implications for Black students are inequitable funding between urban schools with higher numbers of students of color and suburban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010), standardized testing (Flowers, 2007), teacher quality (Akiba et al., 2007; Delpit, 2006; Flowers, 2007) parental involvement (Edwards, 2004; Hale, 2001), and curriculum (Thompson, 2004).

Statement of the Research Problem

The racial reading achievement gap has been a persistent problem in every state and school district across this country since the birth of our nation. While much of the research literature focuses on documentation of discrepancies among Black students and White students, little research has focused on practices of schools that are effective in

promoting equitable levels of achievement of Black and White students. This study is focused on identifying the practices of effective teachers of reading to Black students at the elementary level and the role of district equity policy, principal leadership behaviors and professional development in teachers' success in teaching reading to Black students. Reading is a predictor of future academic success and can be attributed to economic prosperity and social stratification (Simms, 2012).

Significance of the Research Problem

Race and education have been essential elements in the way opportunities for learning have manifested in U.S. schools (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Throughout the majority of U.S. history, racial disparities in educational achievement and performance of specific racial and ethnic groups were attributed to inherent genetic differences among groups and were regarded as an acceptable and logical "natural" phenomena (Fredrickson, 1981). Only in the last 20 years has the effort to close, or at the very least reduce, the achievement gap based on race and class become a national priority (Noguera, 2008). Since the passage of No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and its new level of accountability for achievement results as measured by a standardized test, a new sense of urgency has emerged in improving outcomes for specific groups of students. With recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), the continued drive to recognize and address our nation's racial achievement gaps still remains a top priority. While racial diversity continues to increase in our nation's schools, the achievement disparities between non-White and White students have been chronic (Darling-

Hammond, 2010; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Little debate exists among researchers, policymakers and educational stakeholders that reading achievement among Black students is an important issue (Flowers, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Strickland, 1994). While today's civic unrest is focused on police reform, an equal sense of urgency must be applied to the crisis in education in which Black students are not taught to read at rates commensurate with White students.

Presentation of Methods and Research Question

This multi-site qualitative study investigated the experiences of primary grade teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. This study used semi-structured interviews to investigate the primary research question: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? Related research questions are as follows:

1. What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?
2. What is the role of principal leadership behavior in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?
3. What is the role of professional development in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?

This study was situated in an urban setting in the Pacific Northwest, with intended study school districts ranging in enrollment from 3,000 to 50,000. Students qualifying for free and reduced lunch ranging from 20% to 90%, Black student populations ranging from 3% to 15%, and Ever English Language Learners ranging from 15% to 40% of the

student population. Enrollment varies greatly from district to district, but in every district a disproportionate number of students of color qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Key Terms

Achievement gap is a term that refers to the difference in what distinct groups of students know and can do in important subjects including math and reading (NAEP, 2015). The National Education Association (2015) has defined the achievement gap as the differences in academic performance between groups of students of different backgrounds and have been documented with respect to students' ethnic, racial, gender, English language learner, disability, and income status. The OEIB Equity Lens defines the Achievement gap as the observed and persistent disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Others prefer the term "opportunity gap" (Akiba et al., 2007; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012); however, for the purposes of this paper, I use the term "achievement gap," which is the terminology used by the OEIB to look at the reading achievement gap for elementary students who are Black in the state of Oregon.

Critical Race Theory, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012) is defined as a movement by activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in broader perspective that includes economics, history, context group—and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. (p. 3)

One of the key tenets of Critical Race Theory is, “that racism is more than just unconnected isolated acts by individuals, but is endemic to American society, embedded in the legal, cultural, and psychological spheres” (Mitchell & Stewart, 2013, p. 382). Critical Race Theory in education is defined by Solorzano and Yosso (1998) as cited in the work of Lynn (1999) “as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of [Black and Latino] students” (p. 610). For the purpose of this paper I look at Critical Race Theory as it relates to the educational equity policies geared toward changing the instructional practices of teachers in the content area of reading.

Critical Race Pedagogy, as defined by Lynn (1999), is

an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies mostly on the perceptions, experiences, and counter hegemonic practices of educators of color. This approach necessarily leads to an articulation and broad interpretation of emancipatory pedagogical strategies and techniques that are proved to be successful with racially and culturally subordinated students. (p. 615)

Black is a term that refers to people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicated their race or races as Black or wrote in entries on the U.S. Census such as Black, Afro American, Nigerian, or Haitian (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). It is also important to recognize that Black is not a monoethnic group but is often measured that way on most academic achievement assessments.

Equity in education as defined by the OEIB, “is the notion that EACH and EVERY learner will receive the necessary resources they need individually to thrive in Oregon’s schools no matter what their national origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, differently abled, first language, or other distinguishing characteristic” (OEIB, 2011, p. 6). Equity is “achieved when all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success after high school” (Barth, 2017, p. 1).

Racial Educational Equity Policies are policies created to ensure that resources are distributed and decisions are made based on closing racial disparities in education achievement. According to PPS (2011), the racial equity policy “calls out race-based disparities in schools, identifies the district's role in erasing them and holds up high expectations to ensure that all students reach their academic potential” (PPS, 2011, p. 2).

Reading Achievement is defined by NAEP (2011) as

student performance in relation to a range of text types and text difficulty and in response to a variety of assessment questions intended to elicit different cognitive processes and reading behaviors. The specific processes and reading behaviors mentioned in the achievement-level descriptions are illustrative of those judged as central to students' successful comprehension of texts. These processes and reading behaviors involve different and increasing cognitive demands from one grade and performance level to the next as they are applied within more challenging contexts and with more complex information. (p. 1)

Culturally Responsive Teaching is understanding the cultural context of classroom behavior and the role of culture in the teaching and learning process (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching seeks to create a learning process and environment that matches the culture strengths of the students present in the classroom (Gay, 2010).

Chapter 2: A Review of Relation Literature

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of teachers successfully teaching Black students reading in the primary grades. I present current literature and theory in the area of policy, organizational behavior, adult learning and teaching and learning to analyze the racial achievement gap. The current literature indicates that teacher instructional practices may be improved in a given content area through the use of culturally responsive teaching and embracing broader perspectives of student experiences as they create the conditions for success for students of color, including text choices and interactions with text and with the teacher and classroom. Policy may act as a driver for system shifts that must occur in order to reduce inequity and improve conditions for learning. In addition, other teacher characteristics such as cultural competence, may influence the outcomes of Black students (Flowers, 2007; Gay, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, I selected three theoretical frameworks to analyze the racial achievement gap: Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory, Getzels-Guba Model of Social Behavior of Organizations, and Policy Attributes Theory.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory

Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory (CRTT) proposes strategies to effectively teach children of diverse racial and ethnic cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera & Akom, 2000). These strategies include: “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Further, the instruction is validating and affirming of the students’ home cultures, the experiences in home and school are connected, and uses a variety of instructional strategies (Gay, 2010). Gay also indicated CRTT fosters appreciation of one’s own and the cultures of others while incorporating materials that represent the diversity of the students.

We must adaptively grow in our ability to better serve the students who are perpetually left behind by our education system and close the persistent gap in racial reading academic achievement that exists throughout our nation (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera & Akom, 2000). Noguera (1993) asserted that schools and districts have reinforced “assumptions regarding the relationship between race, academic ability and intelligence” (p. 29). Scholars also insist that successful teachers of Black students provide culturally appropriate equitable learning opportunities in their classrooms to foster and develop meaningful relationships, connection to learning and student agency (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Noguera & Akom, 2000). Gay (2010) suggested CRTT brings emphasis to the fact that it is vital for teachers to know the backgrounds of students they teach. This is as important as understanding the

content teachers intend to teach to the students. At the heart of this practice is the ability of the teacher to adapt instructional practices and classroom structures to more closely align with the unique cultural characteristics of the students they serve (Gay, 2010).

Districts are incorporating CRTT into their equity plans. For example, the PPS 5-year equity policy plan outlines key strategies to achieve racial equity along with metrics to evaluate progress. The first of these strategies calls for significant investment and attention in the area Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning. The stated goal being “to provide students of color with rigorous, culturally responsive, and engaging learning environments which accelerate their academic achievement and personal growth” (PPS, 2011, p. 3). After analyzing the state and local equity policies and reading achievement results of Black students, it is reasonable to conclude that any effort to reduce the racial reading achievement gap must be addressed in the classroom through Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies and within the reading instruction that occurs within the classroom.

Getzels-Guba Model of Social Behavior and Organizations

I utilized the Getzels-Guba Model of Social Behavior in Organizations to analyze the role teachers play in reducing racial reading disparities present in our classrooms today (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). This theory identifies the tension that can exist between the individual and the institution and the ability for organization to accomplish its goal within these tensions. Race is a significant factor in educational outcomes and the conditions of learning in the classroom. Given that the majority of teachers in most states

are White despite an increasingly diverse student population (Facing Race: Oregon, 2015), this tension must be addressed. For example, the institutional dimension of what is expected of our teachers can be at odds with the individual dimension of what dispositions, personalities and personal needs teachers may have. According to Getzels and Guba (1957), these dimensions produce the behavior of the organization, in this case a racial achievement gap, and have a significant impact on our system's ability to produce the changes needed to close the racial reading achievement gap. This theory would indicate that implementing an institutional equity policy, coupled with individual dimensions (such as providing appropriate funds for professional development trainings to educators, making research-based instructional shifts, using current best practices in teaching Black students) would significantly reduce racial reading gaps. Moreover, successful implementation of the institutional equity policies requires changes in the behaviors of individuals to significantly impact the reading achievement of our Black elementary school students. We know little about how to create supportive tension between the institution and individual to support teachers' implementation of equitable reading instruction. We also have little information about the ways equity policies support that implementation.

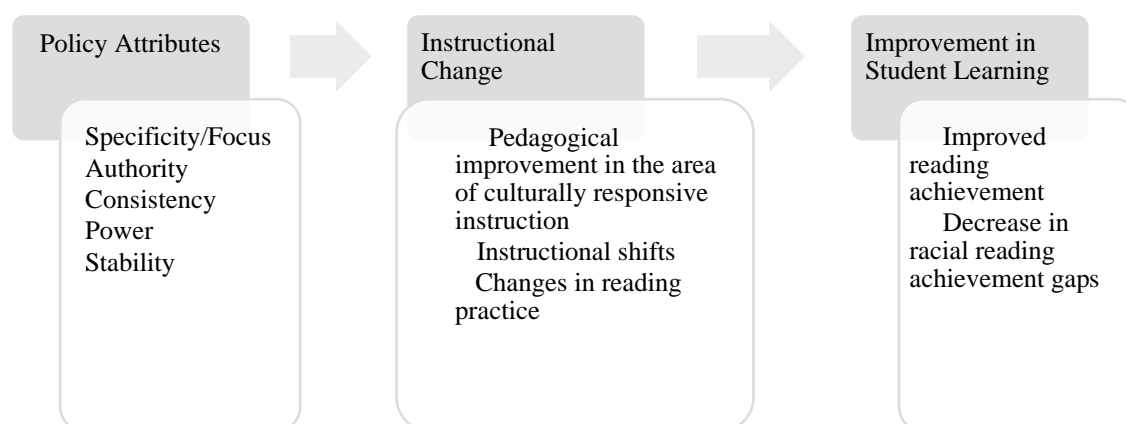
Policy Attributes Theory

To examine equity policy, I utilized policy attributes theory which has been used to study teachers' response to education policy (Edgerton et al., 2017). This framework uses five attributes related to successful policy implementation; (a) specificity—how

extensive, detailed, and or prescriptive a policy is, (b) authority—how policies gain legitimacy and status through persuasion, (c) consistency—the extent to which policies are aligned and how policies relate to and support each other, (d) power— how policies are reinforced and enacted through systems of rewards and sanctions, and (e) stability—the extent to which policies change or remain constant over time (Edgerton et al., 2017). By this logic, policy change in the area of equity produce changes in the instructional practices of teachers thereby creating more equitable outcomes for students who have been underserved (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework for the Study



In the 21st century, educators and policy makers must become critically aware of the inequity that our institutions perpetuate. Toward that goal, in 2011 the state of Oregon developed and adopted an Equity Lens (OEIB, 2011). This lens was designed as a tool to

address, “the persistent achievement gap between our growing populations of communities of color, immigrants, migrants, and low-income rural students with our more affluent white students” (OEIB, 2011, p. 2). Similarly, a number of local school districts have adopted their Racial Educational Equity Policies and created plans to address racial achievement gaps within their district. One of the explicitly stated goals of one of these policies is “(1) narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students and (2) eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories” (PPS, 2011, p. 2).

Likewise, Complexity Theory indicates that equity policies created by local and state administrative leadership systems (school boards, superintendents, state governance) are carried out by the adaptive leadership work groups (principals, assistant principals and teachers) which creates productive tension around the system’s ability to produce the desired changes in practice (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). This tension may manifest itself in a number of ways.

Review of the Research Literature

I begin the review of literature by describing theories of learning as they relate to the concept of a racial academic achievement gap. I then review the literature on school and district organizational capacity to address the racial academic achievement gap. I examine educational equity using a critical race theory and critical race pedagogy lens. I

conclude the review by discussing research on aspects of equity-based reforms in improving reading outcomes for Black students.

The racial achievement gap as a symptom of persistent social inequity has persisted in American education and society since its inception. To gain a better understanding of the racial achievement gap for elementary school students in the state of Oregon, I explore the issue using theories of learning that have implications for explaining why a racial achievement gap happens inside our classrooms. Behavioral, constructivist, critical race and critical multicultural theorists use diverse theoretical frameworks to explain the gap in achievement that are important for school policies.

Behaviorists

Behaviorists have argued the environment inside or outside of the classroom and the conditioning students from different racial groups receive from their teachers in the process of learning impacts student learning. According to Zhou and Brown (2017), Skinner believed that our development is a result of our unique operant learning experiences (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Therefore, the experiences of our Black elementary school students result in the reinforcement of or a manifested behavior that is contributing to the persistence of the reading achievement gap. Skinner may also support the notion that there may be some type of formal or informal conditioning occurring that has contributed to this issue as well. While behavioral models of learning may be useful in explaining how students are conditioned to perform, I argue the model is an inadequate explanation outside of observable behavior and does not explain why students who are

White are more successful in school. A cognitive development psychologist such as Jean Piaget may look at this issue through stages of development and/or the learning capacity present within those stages (Zhou & Brown, 2017). Piaget might say that some students move more quickly than others through developmental stages. This approach would not explain the racial differences in scores as the stages of Piaget's Cognitive Development only consider the age of the pupils as they move through those stages. One of the key primacies of Piaget's work and foundational beliefs of constructivist theory that does lend itself to the problem is that knowledge is constructed and learners are more likely to be engaged in learning when the learning is personally relevant and meaningful (Zhou & Brown, 2017).

Another theory of learning used to examine the problem is the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) of learning. SCT emerged primarily as result of Bandura's (1986) work. SCT emphasizes that learning occurs in social context and much of what is learned is gained through observation (Zhou & Brown, 2017). If we apply this theory to our problem of practice, we can attempt to gauge the attention, retention, production and motivation that our Black elementary school students are experiencing in the classroom as it relates to learning and reading achievement. These four inter-related processes are fundamental to SCT in understanding observational learning of expected behaviors or skills. Other fundamental elements of SCT that have implications for the problem as it relates to learning are modeling, outcome expectation, perceived self-efficacy, goal setting and self-regulation (Zhou & Brown, 2017). SCT can offer some insight into our

problem though it lacks the cultural and racial depth needed to fully gauge the learning aspects of the problem. While there are many theories and approaches to the way we as humans receive, obtain or acquire knowledge, or become educated, there are theories that do consider culture and race and have direct connections to the issue of reading achievement for Black elementary school students in Oregon.

Constructivism—Social Cultural Theory

Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory suggests that social interactions (teacher-student, peer-peer) lead to continuous step by step changes in the development of thought and behavior in children and this can vary greatly from culture to culture (Zhou & Brown, 2017). This would suggest that there is a disconnect between instruction, learning and culture that is happening inside of our classrooms every day for our students outside of the dominant culture. Gay (1993) asserted, "a growing body of behavioral science research and scholarship suggests that the burden of school failure does not rest on individual students and teachers but is nested in the lack of "fit" or synchronization between the cultural systems of schools and diverse groups" (p. 298). Developing a closer fit between a student's culture and the classroom can have a significant impact on a student's ability to experience academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The achievement gap among Black students in Oregon may be due to Black students experiencing a lack of cultural connection to the institutions and to most of the teachers tasked with guiding their learning. In her work Gay (1993) stated, "Some of the most crucial cultural discontinuities in classrooms occur in the area of cultural values,

patterns of communication and cognitive processing, task performance or work habits, self-presentation styles, and approaches to problem solving” (p. 289). We have allowed a lack of diversity in the teaching force, the curriculum, and educational institutions to be devoid of and non-representative of Black culture (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Reading lessons were designed with Euro-American culture at the center and has yet to adequately shift toward serving the needs of all students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds and cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Because the school system was built on the socially accepted behaviors, attitudes and beliefs, symbol systems and language of White America, we are failing to connect students who are not White to the process of learning. The work of Piaget, Bandura and Vygotsky emphasized that individual development is inherently bound with cultural, historical and interpersonal factors (Zhou & Brown, 2017). One’s culture cannot be devoid from the process of learning. In this way, our problem of the racial reading achievement gap finds multiple connections to Vygotsky’s work in Social Cultural learning.

In proposing ways of looking at learning related to the reading achievement gap for Black students in Oregon elementary schools, I will draw on a framework that includes a student’s culture in the process of learning. Gay (1993) developed a framework of learning termed Cultural Context Teaching. Cultural Context Teaching draws on the technical and mechanical aspects of teaching but utilizes the “Cultural Frameworks” of various ethnic racial and social groups (Gay, 1993). According to Gay, this approach requires educators to become “cultural brokers,” those who understand

cultural systems that differ from their own, is able to interpret cultural symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, and knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures that facilitate the instructional process. Cultural brokers can translate expressive cultural behaviors into pedagogical implications and actions” (Gay, 1993, p. 293). In considering a student’s culture and the role it plays in learning, we can better meet students where they are and utilize the cultural strengths that the student brings with them every day to the classroom.

Critical Race Theory/Critical Race Pedagogy

Critical theorists argue that education disparities are a manifestation of the present and historical inequalities in our society based on race. They propose that the dominant White culture is so deeply rooted and connected to the problem that only addressing this problem in schools, classrooms and the process of learning would stop short of adequately addressing the larger societal issues. According to McLaren (2003), “schools and classrooms can be characterized as terrains of transactions, exchanges, and struggle between subordinate groups and the dominant ideology” (p. 204). Our students outside the dominant culture are expected to not only assimilate to the learning process inside our classrooms, that is mostly devoid of any of their cultural characteristics, but to achieve at the same levels as those the system was intended to work for. The ability of students to express their culture is related to the power which certain groups are able to wield in a given social order (McLaren, 2003). The expression of values and beliefs by individuals who share historical experiences is determined by their collective power in society as a

whole (McLaren, 2003). The empowerment of our Black students in our classrooms in Oregon matters greatly. How can Black students be expected to achieve at the same level as their White counterparts when their experience in school is mostly oppressive and seeks conformity with the status quo? There is also the aspect of “hidden curriculum” and its goals of introducing students to a particular way of life that serves to prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in our society (McLaren, 2003). How, if the schooling system and curriculum were designed to meet the needs of the dominant White culture, are our Black students to achieve at the same level as their White counterparts? CRT scholars argue that only through the process of assimilation and/or degradation of their own culture are they able to find their way within our system. This is clearly stated by Yosso (2005), “White middle-class culture as the standard, therefore all other forms and expression of culture are judged in comparison to this norm” (p. 76). By using a CRT lens we are able to see that communities of color nurture cultural wealth in the form of aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). These forms of cultural capital truly draw on the knowledge and experiences students of color bring with them into their classrooms (Yosso, 2005). Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth model calls for the commitment of educators to conduct research, teach and develop schools that serve a larger purpose striving toward social and racial justice. Bell (1995) stated that Critical Race Theorists strive for a more egalitarian society, one in which traditionally excluded views are included and empowered to bring about a truer sense of collective wisdom.

Although there are many approaches to teaching and learning, educators must always continue to question the nature of power, the role of racial bias for educational outcomes of students of color, and practices, processes and policies that contribute to a just and equitable school experience for our students who are Black.

Critiques and Implications

Much of the discourse around theories of learning above, while valuable, leave certain questions unanswered. SCT and the Cultural Context Teaching framework do not address the racial bias of our teachers and instructors or the levels of support needed to impact change in the process of learning. SCT and Critical Race Pedagogy also consider the resistance of populations unaffected by the status quo in changing current practice or policies to affect learning in the classroom. There are also unresolved questions around how to alter instruction to incorporate issues of equity and produce positive reading achievement results for our Black elementary school students. Our teachers, 89% of whom in the State of Oregon are White (ODE, 2016), are not being adequately prepared nor are they in the role to create system-wide policy to overcome systemic inequities in our school system or prepared to become “Cultural Brokers” within our framework for learning (Gay, 1993). Researchers suggest the importance of having teachers of color in our classrooms, and because most teachers in Oregon are White, it is imperative that we prepare our teachers to be successful practitioners of CRTT (Dee & Wyckoff, 2015). Equity policies are designed to address inequity within our education system. However, the equity policies designed to produce change in the achievement outcomes for our

Black students are disconnected from classroom practices and the teaching and learning happening inside the classrooms (Edgerton et al., 2017). The equity policies themselves do not specifically name teaching practices or change instruction in any meaningful way to produce the results they were intended to create (Edgerton et al., 2017). Which leads me to the question of whether equity policies adequately address the barriers. While evidence exists that we collectively recognize the importance of closing racial achievement gaps, equity policies may not yet have translated to practices in classrooms across our state and within urban districts in our state that ensure Black students are effectively taught.

Organizational Capacity as it Relates to the Racial Reading Achievement Gap

School districts are complex organizations and compete with demands from many different external and internal pressures (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). With that said, it is best to approach the organizational structure of districts and schools in relation to producing equitable outcomes for students using Open Systems Organizational Theory. Open systems theorists have argued that an “organized complex system modifies its goals with and receives feedback from the environment and that goals and environmental stimuli are dynamically intertwined” (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p. 76). Kaplan and Owings (2017) also suggested

Schools are open systems, taking inputs (resources such as educators, students, and materials) and (ideally) transforming them into increasingly knowledgeable and literate students and experienced educators. Feedback (data) from outputs-including graduation rates, achievement test scores, attendance records, college acceptance, scholarship amounts, and employment histories-flow back to the

transformation process (the school improvement process) to refine or revise current practice. (p. 14)

Applying this theory to equity policies, school districts have adopted an equity policy (input) and are expecting changes in underserved student outcomes (output) as response. Part of this study is examining this question: What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?

Using Open Systems Theory we can account for, or at the very least consider, the environmental and contextual effects of deeply ingrained and persistent racism that continues to be a factor in reducing disparities in achievement and plays a significant role in the capacity of districts and schools to achieve equal outcomes for students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Noguera & Akom, 2000). Some may argue that Open Systems Theory's lack of clarity and guidance around certain aspects of organizational functioning is cause for rejection (Kaplan & Owings, 2017).

While using open systems to look at the organizational behavior of schools allows us to look at the myriad of factors that affect schools, certain aspects of schools often function as closed systems. The general structure of the schooling system operates like a closed system, highly scheduled, orderly, and sequential (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Schools produce grades, that are intended to tell us how well we have retained the requisite knowledge to be successful, what skills we need to learn, how many credits are needed to proceed to the next step, what time to show up, and how long in the day we should devote to learning the content. With that said, using Open Systems Theory may

leave out the degree to which the education system functions as a closed system. While Closed Systems Theories such as Scientific Management and Structural-Functionalism may serve to address aspects of effectiveness, efficiency, and task-based compliance concerns, they stop at considering outside pressures, emotions, and one's personal experience and motivation that can have a significant impact on the organization's ability to achieve its goals (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Education has a common goal of preparing students to meet defined proficiency standards in respective content areas. With this goal in mind, the organization builds its acceptable practices, norms, and expectations to gain credibility and legitimacy as working to meet the needs of students (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Open Systems Theory illuminates the vast number of systems that support the educational activities within the school and classroom (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Reading instruction is supported by publishers, curriculum, pre-service teacher programs, family involvement, classroom organization, teacher development and knowledge, as well as many other resources. It is well known that some states, specifically Texas, have a very conservative curriculum and the Texas schools drive the content of texts used in most U.S. states (Dossey, 2011). Changing this structure to produce more just and equitable outcomes shifts the current inertia of the organization. This change is highly complex, due to the fact that it requires the organization to change the systems and supports at every level and allocate resources to better achieve its stated goals. Marion and Gonzales (2014) stated, "There will likely be some level of resistance to learning a new way of doing things, but at any rate a

learning curve can be expected when adopting new strategies” (p. 349). According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), by utilizing the professional capital (Human, Social, and Decision making) of the organization we can bring about meaningful and sustainable change needed to shift practice and outcomes.

As cited in Marion and Gonzales (2014), New Institutional Theory suggests that some organizations live within certain fields that are instilled with cultural values and pressures and lead to non-rational activities within the organization to operate inside these norms and expectations in order to be perceived as legitimate. These “norms,” institutional theorists would argue, are socially constructed cultural scripts that define what appropriate practices are for our schools (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). In recent years, schools and districts have had to reexamine their practices and norms and how they may enable or inhibit equitable outcomes, thereby presenting, according to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), an adaptive challenge to these organizations. These are problems for which new organizational knowledge is needed. Schools and districts cannot afford to treat issues of producing equitable academic outcomes solely as technical. Meaningful change, they argue, requires an examination of how the components of the system interact to produce desired outcomes (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Heifetz and Linsky pointed out that we need adaptive solutions.

Contingency theory envisions the organization as one in which we can study the relationship between organizational or environmental contingencies and organizational structures and leadership (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Organization and environment

would be considered input variables, while leadership, management, and employee response are considered outputs. Looking at the interaction of the organization, its environment, and the perceptions of individuals within the organization is crucial in understanding the factors affecting the organization's ability to produce equitable outcomes. Contingency Theory stresses the importance of contextual factors (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). This theory argues that different behavior patterns will be effective in different situations. While many scholars agree with this statement, our schools function as they have been conditioned and producing different behavior patterns within this organization can be challenging. The education system has proven it has a difficult time constructively adapting to changing circumstances and achieving outcomes without disparities for all our students. Consistent with Contingency Theory, schools and districts have examined these factors in order to address closing academic reading achievement gaps for students. When adopting and implementing programs, policies and professional development designed to reduce disparities for students, organizations must examine the presumed objective; fixed, individual, subjective, and socially constructed realities of the organization; and the personnel delegated to achieve the task (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The Getzels-Guba model suggests the organization's expectations for meeting its intended goals may differ from the individual needs of those who achieve them (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Within this model we can differentiate the institutional dimension, which focuses on employee roles and expectations, and the individual dimension which includes personalities, needs, and dispositions (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Critics of the

Getzels-Guba model believe it to be rationalistic, bureaucratic, and sterile (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). While it has proven very useful in educational administration settings, some argue that the model lacks accuracy because of the inherent gender bias implicit during the development of the model (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). With that said, the unique personalities and dispositions of those tasked with achieving the organizational goals affect how they perceive those goals and how they do their jobs. Furthermore, individuals in different parts of an organization are often exposed to different pieces of the environment in which they develop differing views of organizational reality. This creates creative tension, the dissonance between the current reality and organizational vision (Senge, 1990). These realities or lived experiences differ for people from racial backgrounds outside of the dominant culture (Voight et al., 2015). Often those from non-dominant racial groups experience a different reality than those from the dominant racial group.

From a leadership perspective, it is important for educators to have the capacity to understand the diverse perspectives within the school setting and adjust their social, political, managerial, and instructional decisions to meet the needs of our students and communities not being adequately served by our current model. Complexity Theory moves away from linear views of the world and views organizations as complex adaptive systems made up of diverse agents who interact, affect one another, and generate the behavior of the organization (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Applying Complexity Theory to look at the interactions of the school and community from racial and cultural perspectives

gives us the ability to consider how the perception of the school may differ from the organization's intent (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). This allows us to better understand the wide variety of contributors, both internal and external, who bring their own understanding, history and interpretation to the issue. Some scholars contend Complexity Leadership Theory's intricacy, ambiguity, and how to measure its influence make it difficult to research (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). The lack of substantial research around Complexity Theory has hindered the ability to move it from theory into practice. Some argue that Complexity Leadership Theory is systems thinking in practice (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Other scholars have concluded that more research is needed to substantiate Complexity Leadership Theory (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Additionally, from the Complexity Theory perspective, this type of leadership arises when faced with adaptive challenges that require schools and districts to use new learning, innovation, and fresh behaviors to meet the needs of chronically underserved and socially oppressed students (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

From a Critical Race Theory perspective, schools have acted historically as holders of education and knowledge and for hundreds of years only those of the dominant race and culture could access the knowledge and learning needed to promote one's self within society (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The organization has operated on the assumptions that, if learning does not occur, it is the fault of the student and not the teacher or system (Zhao, 2016). Moreover, for a long period of history education organizations believed that students of color were genetically inferior to White students (Noguera & Akom,

2000; Zhao, 2016). Schools and districts have held lower expectations and provided disproportionate resources for students of color since the inception of the modern-day education system (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Only recently have we begun to shift our thinking and worked to adjust the organization accordingly. The organization as a whole must continually ask itself what districts and schools do to perpetuate the systems of academic oppression, class stratification and subjugation. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), educational institutions produce the outcomes they are designed to produce. A system of White supremacy has created the educational system that fails Black students. Critical Race Theory provides a lens through which school organizations can identify barriers based in race and class and how they are perpetuated (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Implementation of Equity Policies and Professional Development

Meeting the needs of diverse student populations is critically important to the success of school districts in closing achievement gaps and addressing educational inequities. This requires changing the cultures of school and district relationships to the infrastructures of policy and regulation (Fullan, 2016a). Further, it requires changing the nature of teaching itself and incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies into each classroom and school. While teachers have the highest impact on student achievement, school leaders have the second highest impact (Hattie, 2012). It is also worth noting the degree to which principal behaviors contribute to teacher success. Cotton (2003) was one of the first to highlight the role principals play in student

achievement. The Mid-Continental Research for Education and Learning, built on her work through the examination of quantitative data has begun to establish the science of leadership (Waters & Grubb, 2005). Waters and Grubb (2005) confirmed Cotton's findings that leadership matters greatly in teacher success; they have identified 21 key areas of school leadership responsibility that are significantly correlated with student achievement. The identified areas are interrelated but have unique defining characteristics. The top five are listed as follows; culture, order, discipline, resources, and adherence to as well as knowledge of, curriculum, instruction and assessment (Waters & Grubb, 2005).

There are many factors, both internal and external, that have influenced the development of educational policies and organizational structures by districts and school boards designed to ameliorate for the persistent achievement gap: the passage of federal law, pressure from constituencies on providing adequate education, and the moral imperative to ensure every student is successful. It is the responsibility of the educational institution to find solutions to racial disparities that exist in academic outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Fullan (2016b) proposed, the "right" drivers or policies build organizational and individual capacity, pedagogy, and system wide change. One approach of the organization in achieving more equitable outcomes has been to address the racial diversity of the workforce. While certainly necessary, especially in the State of Oregon given its historical inequality for people of color, this increase in diversity does

not necessarily result in equal outcomes for students (Facing Race: Oregon, 2015; Kezar et al., 2008).

Another approach has been to provide employees with professional development and training in anti-racism and equity-focused initiatives such as Courageous Conversations About Race and the Undoing Racism Workshop (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015). These projects focus on organizational learning, challenge individual beliefs and assumptions, and work to illuminate institutional barriers and individual biases that promote or hamper student success, particularly among racial groups that have traditionally experienced oppression and unequal treatment (Kezar et al., 2008). While useful in developing equity lenses within organizations, programs and protocols these do little in terms of giving substantial tools to educators who are tasked with closing achievement gaps. Although not instructionally focused, trainings such as these do raise the collective perception and felt need for solution (Fullan, 2016a). Establishing this sense of urgency is imperative in building the collective engagement needed to produce real change. Research suggest that context (external environment and internal conditions) have a significant effect on whether a program or initiative is successful (Kezar et al., 2008). Changes for schools and districts of this enormity are not only structural in nature, dismantling organizational pathways that have enabled inequity to persist, but also deeply personal, humanistic and experiential. Understanding the interplay between the organizational context and the evolution of individual attitudes and awareness with regard to equitable student outcomes is a significant factor in gaging the desired changes

in practice (Kezar et al., 2008). By utilizing a systems thinking approach the organization can better recognize the complete patterns and interrelationships rather than isolated snapshots of the factors affecting student outcomes (Senge, 1990).

It is also important to consider how policies can be emboldened or left lifeless during times of organizational change or shift. Schools and districts experience turnover that often leave gaps in policy understanding and knowledge. This factor must be taken into consideration when thinking about how policies are implemented and the weight they are given by schools and districts. Our current policies may lead us to focus on abstractions of the “achievement gap” and other terms that do not contain specific, actionable direction and strategies for altering the delivery of instruction. We may gain deeper and more accurate understandings of the problem, but we may not be gaining insights into how we alter instructional practice. If this is correct, the teacher may respond by complaining that no one is helping them learn new skills, or, more likely, to complain that external barriers (perceived), e.g., class size, lack of parental support, funding, etc., is preventing them from achieving better more equitable results (Akiba et al., 2007). However, achieving the same poor results should be expected if there is no change in the actual delivery of instruction based upon the new insights provided by the professional development or the policy itself.

Equity-Based Reform to Improve Reading Outcomes

It is important to state from the outset of this section that the disparate student outcomes discussed often arise from historical practices of the institutions and not from

student deficiencies (Y.Zhao, 2016). As Noguera and Akom (2000) pointed out, there are many inherent difficulties for schools and districts in serving the educational needs of different constituencies. Increasing equity-based education practices while enhancing student reading outcomes require teachers to deeply reflect on current practices and develop their ability to respond to the diverse needs of students from whom traditional Euro-centric approaches fall short of serving (Choi et al., 2017). Behind appropriate policies, strategies and structures are effective and sustainable learning processes to ensure continual improvement of the organization (Senge, 1990). Creating the conditions in which teachers can grow and develop can increase the professional capital within the organization.

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), of all the factors that affect student achievement the teacher is the most important. Creating the conditions for and building the professional capacity of the district's teachers can increase the human capital, social capital, and decision capital of the collective (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Collaborative cultures focusing on instructional practice are a crucial part of achieving the instructional goals within policies (Fullan, 2016b). The organization must look beyond solely developing the equity lens of educators tasked with closing disparities in reading achievement and provide real, relevant high leverage tangible practices and strategies that reduce reading disparities. Deep pedagogical change and the relationships among teacher and student is imperative in addressing issues of organizational inequity (Fullan, 2016a). Policies themselves provide context to espouse "laws," beliefs, goals, focus and intent but

how they are implemented to achieve those goals are of equal importance. Often instruction designed to improve literacy achievement focuses on skill-based learning ignoring the cultural, social and personal positions of students (Wood & Jocius, 2013). The development of more equitable structures, systems and personnel within schools must also be accompanied by ongoing professional development of instructional practices and supports aimed at reducing the reading achievement gap for students outside the dominant culture. Standards instruction alone is not sufficient enough to meet the needs of our Black students (Wood & Jocius, 2013). Embedded in how to increase reading outcomes for Black Students is social, cultural, economic and historical dynamics (Wood & Jocius, 2013). Academic institutions often fail to consider the whole child and this creates a chasm between the school and the student (Wood & Jocius, 2013). The vast majority of our teachers are White and often fail to meet the specific cultural needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Organizations that actively reflect on their own privilege and biases can develop their capacity to engage with and draw on the multitude of cultural strengths outside of their own (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015). The issue to be examined in this study is the critical question of how changes of policy actually do or do not lead to the changes in instructional practice.

Schools and districts are undeniable complex organizations and there are many factors that affect the organization's ability to achieve its goals. By developing and implementing socially just policies, providing professional development on culturally responsive instructional practices, engaging in activities and identifying measurable goals

to meet the needs of the diverse learners within our schools, we may begin to shift practice and bring the policies, programs and initiatives to meet their intended goals.

Review of the Methodological Literature

A review of the methodological literature indicates scant qualitative and quantitative research on the impact of state and local school board racial educational equity policies on the academic achievement of Black students. I have included studies that focus on the racial educational achievement gap as it relates to policy and teaching and learning. Studies that focused solely on the historical nature of the gap have been excluded as I am seeking to investigate the policies, professional development trainings, teacher characteristics and school leadership qualities of third, fourth and fifth grade teachers successfully teaching Black students reading. The historical causes of this achievement gap have already been addressed in previous sections. The studies reviewed include qualitative and quantitative research designs which mostly seek to collect data through interview, survey or pre-existing data analysis the effects of policy and/or teacher practice and beliefs on classroom instruction. Some of the studies offer a closer look at policy as it relates to closing the achievement gap. A variety of measures to determine the effect on student achievement (state and local academic assessments as well as NAEP results) have been employed in these studies. The use of statistical analysis is also present throughout these studies to determine group differences in outcomes. Disaggregation by race is not uncommon but specifically looking at local school board equity policy is non-existent. I will summarize the results of these studies and how they impact classroom

instruction and/or closing racial student achievement gaps through policy, professional development trainings and leadership qualities.

Polikoff (2012) investigated the association of state policy attributes with teachers' instructional alignment in multiple states. The hypothesis is that if supports are well aligned to policies emphasizing standards-based reform, then teachers will modify their instruction which should produce improved achievement and narrowed gaps (Polikoff, 2012). By using the policy attributes framework, specificity, stability, consistency, power and authority, Polikoff compared reported content of teachers' instruction with content analyses of state standards and assessment. More than 9,900 instructional content teacher surveys were utilized via the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum from 2003 to 2009. Trained content specialists also analyzed state documents in the three content areas being examined, Math, English and Science. They incorporated descriptive statistics and a series of fixed effects regression models to investigate the relationship between state policy attributes and the instructional alignments. The results indicated great variation in attributes across states and small to moderate relationships of policy attributes with instructional alignment (Polikoff, 2012).

Braun et al. (2006) conducted research seeking to accumulate and evaluate evidence on the relationship of state education policies and changes in the Black-White achievement gap. Looking at the NAEP math assessment from 1992 to 2000 they disaggregated the data into three categories including: state as a whole, groups of schools defined by socioeconomic status, and school within the stratum within the state. The

researchers employed hierarchical linear models to partition overall achievement variance. Using the mean level of achievement for each level they found that both Black and White student achievement rose over this period. They then analyzed the heterogeneity, coherence and consistency of state policies pursued from 1988 to 1998. Braun et al. found that states overall policy rankings correlate moderate improvement with that state's record of improving Black student achievement, but the findings were less useful in predicting state policy reducing achievement gaps.

Hinnant-Crawford (2019) documented the effects of accountability policies on student outcomes and instruction in urban schools. Her research explores how federal education policies affect teachers' perceptions of classroom pedagogical choices by analyzing survey results from 260 teachers and conducting phenomenological interviews of seven teachers in a sequential explanatory design (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019). The research was conducted in two school districts in Georgia to assess the relationship between policy and perceived instructional behavior. The findings suggest that policy changes based in accountability have shifted focus away from equity and are highly concerned with achievement but leave out needed attention to instruction. Hinnant-Crawford closed by asking if policies designed to close the achievement gap actually exacerbate gaps in the opportunity to learn.

Overall, the results of these studies suggest some connection between policy, instruction and pedagogy. Policy does have some impact on student outcomes and teacher practice (Braun et al., 2006; Hinnant-Crawford, 2019; Polikoff, 2012). While

these studies analyze federal and state policy as it relates to outcomes and instruction, there is little research on local board equity policy and changes in teacher practice serving Black students as a result of policy.

Studies that analyze teacher characteristics that contribute to increased academic outcomes for Black students include Dee and Wyckoff (2015), Noguera (2008), Noguera and Akom (2000), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000), and Gay (1993). These studies generally include qualitative methodologies and seek to understand the teacher attributes and instructional moves that improve outcomes for diverse student groups. These studies found the significance of educators and leaders being inclusive of student culture with learning environments to be a determining factor in students' success.

To determine what policies, professional development trainings, and school leadership qualities of elementary teachers contribute to successfully teaching Black students reading, I conducted a multi-site qualitative investigation study using semi-structured interviews. Schools with above state average achievement for Black students during the 2017 school year in grades three through five were selected and analyzed. All schools in participating districts had a district equity policy.

Summary of Research Literature and Application to Study

Policy can provide an avenue to espouse beliefs and address the inequities that exist within our education system today. Incorporating culturally responsive teaching practice can improve the reading outcomes of our perpetually underserved Black student population. While equity policy is intended to address the inequity in student opportunity

and outcomes, it does not entirely address the cross-cultural perspectives of critical race theory. Moreover, many scholars argue that schools alone cannot ameliorate for the societal factors affecting Black students in a White dominant society and system (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Noguera & Akom, 2000). Nonetheless, we must continue to challenge the status quo in schools through policy changes and grow in our collective efficacy to close the achievement gaps present in our education system today. Closing gaps in learning is more than a moral obligation, it is imperative for the future of our nation and speaks to who we are as a people. Given the apparent absence of evidence on the effectiveness of local board equity policy on improving achievement and shifting teacher practice, this qualitative study contributes to the knowledge base of teacher response to policy initiatives and professional development. Specifically, this study investigated the relationship among district equity policies, professional development trainings and school leadership qualities of primary grade teachers successfully teaching Black students reading. I will outline the study, setting and participants, as well as the instruments for answering these questions, in the following section.

Chapter 3: Methodology

While there are many factors contributing to disparate educational outcomes for Black students, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. I define criteria for “successful” later in this chapter under “participant selection.” I examined the relationship of district equity policy, professional development, and school leadership qualities that has led to closing the racial reading achievement gap and improving the reading instruction of teachers serving Black students. I contend that first we must determine in what ways, if any, policy, professional development, and school leadership characteristics manifest themselves in serving our Black student population and if and how these conditions have a relationship with reading achievement gaps by race (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Methods

This study is a multi-site qualitative study that investigated the experiences of primary grade teachers successfully teaching Black students reading. I sought to gain a “deep understanding” of the experiences of teachers successful in teaching reading to Black students, which Lunenburg and Irby (2008) noted is the purpose of qualitative research (p. 177). Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) noted that a researcher “may want to obtain a more holistic picture of what goes on in a particular situation or setting” (p. 12) which aligns with qualitative research design. This study sought to “understand the

meaning people involved in education make of their experience” (Seidman, 2013, p. 10); in this case teachers who successfully teach Black students, which is a match for qualitative methodology. Qualitative data emphasizes “people’s lived experience” which is “fundamentally well suited for locating the meaning people place on events, processes, and structures in their lives and connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 11). Because the purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and conditions, including the relationship among policy, professional development trainings, and school leadership qualities, as well as instructional practices successfully used by teachers, a qualitative research design was appropriate. A qualitative approach was also warranted; there are multiple facets of the research question that can be answered by using qualitative data in a trustworthy manner (Creswell, 2013). To increase the trustworthiness of this study, I began by “examining evidence” from transcripts to “build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 196). Furthermore, I used a member check to “determine the accuracy of findings” by confirming the themes with participants and ensuring their accuracy (p. 196). I also utilized Saldaña’s (2016) method of memo writing to conduct a member check with the study participants and did not send the full transcription to participants. This ensured that the information disclosed in the interview to the researcher conveyed the meaning intended by the research participant. Every researcher has a bias, and I reflected on my biases to “create an open and honest narrative that resonates well with readers” which is further discussed in the section entitled “role of the researcher” (p. 196).

Because of the many influences on a teacher's success, a quantitative methodology was not chosen due to the complexity of isolating the impact of a given variable (Creswell, 2003) on Black student reading success. Further, this study was not an experiment, or quasi-experiment, which is conducive to a quantitative study (Creswell). I used the interview method, which as Seidman (2013) noted, "is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues" (p. 13).

Participants

This study utilized purposive sampling (Maxwell, 2013) to interview teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. To define "successful," I identified schools that exceed the state average for performance of Black students in grades 3, 4, and 5 and are thus considered "successful" in ELA achievement within districts that have currently enacted equity policies. The term "successful" teachers for the purpose of this study are teachers in schools that have exceeded the state test ELA average for Black student achievement in the 2016-2017 and are identified by their principals as excellent teachers of Black students. This study is important given the lack of studies examining the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students and the relationship among equity policy, professional development trainings, and school leadership characteristics on the reading achievement of Black students. Seidman (2013) noted that if "random selection is not an option, the most commonly agreed upon answer is purposive sampling" (p. 55). Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated that "purposive

sampling involves selecting a sample based on a researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled. Clear criteria provide a basis for describing and defending purposive sampling" (p. 175). For this study, I purposively identified subjects by first identifying schools whose third through fifth grade reading scores among Black students were higher than the state's average reading scores for Black students. For the purposes of this study, successful teachers were purposively selected from those schools whose 2017 state ELA achievement scores on the state test are higher than the ELA achievement state average in reading in grades three through five for Black students as measured by the statewide assessment. According to the 2017-2018 Oregon Statewide Report Card, the state average in ELA for Black students in the 2016-2017 school year is 29.0% (ODE, 2018), thus all purposively selected teachers will be in schools where the ELA for Black students exceed 29%. I then selected schools with greater than 29% achievement for Black students in ELA and have also enacted district equity policies supported by the local school board. This study was situated in an urban setting in the Pacific Northwest, with intended study school districts ranging in enrollment from 3,000 to 50,000. Students qualifying for free and reduced lunch ranging from 20% to 90%, Black student populations ranging from 3% to 15%, and Ever English Language Learners ranging from 15% to 40% of the student population. Enrollment varied greatly from district to district, but in every district a disproportionate number of students of color qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The districts in this study have all enacted equity policies and held trainings or promoted professional development with the aim of closing the racial reading

achievement gap. While there are a variety of ways to identify success in teaching reading, Nieto (2009) argued there is too high of an importance on standardized test scores and rigorous content. While this may be true, this study utilized Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium scores to identify teachers who have been successful in teaching reading to Black students. The study identified “successful” teachers of Black students by drawing on existing state student performance data.

Table 2 presents the demographic information of the school sites included in this study.

Table 2

School Site Information

OR School Sites	Percentage of Black students reading at Benchmark (29% is state average for 16-17)	Like Schools percentage of Black Students reading at benchmark for 16-17 school year	Percentage of Black Students at school site for 16-17 school year	Percentage of Black students in the state as a whole for 16-17 school year	Total enrollment of school	Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch
School A	40-50%	20-25%	10-13%	2.40%	400-500	75-85% 16-17 year
School B	65-75%	30-35%	3-6%	2.40%	450-550	Last known year (13-14) 60-75%

Next, I emailed superintendents to request permission to conduct this research and principals to select the teachers with the most success in teaching reading to Black

students within their schools. With purposive sampling, researchers also ask what is an adequate number of participants? Seidman (2013) noted there are two criteria for “enough”: (a) participants reflect the range of participants and sites of participants (p. 58) and (b) there is adequate “saturation” in that it is unlikely that no new information would come from additional participants. For the purposes of this study, I proposed continuing to interview additional teachers should “saturation” not be met, meaning no new themes or categories are emerging from additional interviews. Seidman noted that establishing a number should be done as a part of the process, not in advance I purposively selected those teachers whom the principals of these schools identified as successful in teaching reading to Black students. Table 3 presents the demographic information of participants included in this study.

Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) and district approval, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers identified as successful by their principals. Possible confounding variables were differences in class size, socioeconomic status, and changes in teaching staff year over year. I would argue that these confounding variables, while significant, are unlikely to produce rival explanations or findings because they are ever present within our education system. Furthermore, these variables have continually existed and have not significantly influenced changes in closing the reading achievement gap for Black students. This qualitative study utilized existing data to analyze Black student reading outcomes and seeks to conduct teacher interviews.

Table 3*Teacher Participant Information*

Participant Information	Race of Participant	Gender of Participant	Years of Experience 0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 30+
#1 (School A)	White	Male	0-10 years
#2 (School A)	White	Female	11-20 years
#3 (School B)	White	Female	21-30 years
#4 (School B)	White	Female	21-30 years
#5 (School B)	White	Female	11-20 years
#6 (School B)	White	Female	0-10 years
#7 (School A)	White	Male	11-20 years
#8 (School A)	White	Female	0-10 years
#9 (School A)	White	Female	0-10 years

This study used semi-structured interviews to examine the primary research question: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?

Related research questions are:

1. What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?
2. What is the role of principal leadership behavior in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?
3. What is the role of professional development in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?

Procedures

After obtaining IRB approval I sought to recruit participants. I utilized state assessment data from 2017 to locate elementary schools where Black students in third, fourth and fifth grade performed above the state average in reading achievement for this disaggregated racial group. After identifying which schools had higher than state average reading achievement for Black students, I ensured the district has an enacted equity policy in place. I then emailed the superintendent of that school district recognizing their success based on higher than state average reading achievement for Black elementary school students at particular schools within their respective districts (see Appendix A, B & C for emails to superintendents, principals and teachers) and sought permission to complete district IRB procedures. Upon approval from the superintendent and completion of any district IRB procedures, I received approval to reach out to the principals at the designated schools and inquired which teachers they believe had contributed greatly to their success in teaching Black students reading. Next, I emailed the teachers at these schools to conduct interviews outside of their work site and workday. These interviews were conducted in a private location agreed upon by the participants to maintain confidentiality. Any and all information that could link a subject to the study (names of people, schools, districts, community names, years of service, or any other data that could connect a respondent to the data) was de-identified, presented in a range, and confirmed with participants. Confidentiality was guaranteed to all subjects (see consent form under Appendix E). Furthermore, I conducted a member check prior to publishing any findings

related to the collected data to ensure trustworthiness of interpretation of the data and that confidentiality was maintained.

Informed Consent

Participation in this study was voluntary. A consent form was shared with every participant via email before beginning interviews (see Appendix E for consent form). The participants were asked to review the form and the researcher's contact information was provided to answer any questions they had about the process. After the participant decided to participate in the study, they signed the form and returned it to the researcher prior to the interview process. Every participant was given a copy of their consent form which included the researchers contact information should they have any questions at a later date.

Quantitative Data

While this study is a multi-site qualitative investigation, I used and examined quantitative state data from the ODE and other data collection entities within the state. This was done to recognize schools that exceed the state reading average for Black students and to look for additional information that may provide insight into my research question.

Data Collection

The data collection method for this study is semi-structured interviews with 10 participants (Creswell, 2003; Saldaña, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are one of the best ways to collect data when a researcher will not have multiple

opportunities to interview participants (Creswell, 2013). The use of open-ended questions was employed in order to give participants wider breath in answering so I could more fully capture their perspectives without leading them to desired responses. Follow-up questions were utilized in order to gain clarity and greater insight into participant responses. I used active note taking and audio recorded all interviews for transcribing purposes to ensure the expressed perspectives of the participants were accurately captured.

Data Confidentiality

Confidentiality was guaranteed to all participants and for any data collected. Pseudonyms are used for information collected that could be used to identify participants. All names of schools, educators and any information that could be potentially compromising to the confidentiality of the participants was de-identified and presented in ranges. Any notes, interview materials and audio recordings collected throughout the course of this study are stored on a password protected computer. The records will be stored for a period of 3 years from the publication of the study.

Risks

There were no anticipated physical or mental discomforts to the participants of this study. According to Corbin and Morse (2003), there are some possible steps to ensure the emotional well-being of participants who could experience discomfort during the interview. These may include but are not limited to 1. The researcher will stay with the subject until they reach a calm and regulated state; 2. The researcher may offer a list

of counselors to give subjects should they experience emotional discomfort during or after the interview. It is noted that most participants who voluntarily participate in a given study react positively and are often thankful for the opportunity, even when the topic being discussed may be difficult to talk about due to unpleasant experiences (Corbin & Morse, 2003). The principal investigator and co-principal investigator of this study have been licensed Oregon administrators who have a combined 40+ years of experience teaching and leading schools and research. Both the principal investigator and co-principal investigator have completed IRB training and adhered to the Human Subjects Review Board guidelines.

Instruments and Measures

For this study I sought to investigate the experiences of primary grade teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. As previously noted, “successful” means teachers in schools that have exceeded the state test ELA average for Black student achievement in the 2016-2017 and are identified by their principals as excellent teachers of Black students. I also explored the relationship of policies, professional development trainings, and school leadership qualities and other emerging themes of primary grade teachers successfully teaching Black students reading. This combination of factors cannot be easily discerned by solely observing instruction. Seidman (2013) stated, “If a researcher’s goal is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, interviewing provides a necessary, if not completely sufficient, avenue

of inquiry” (p. 10). The interview is the primary method for studying complex social structures (Krathwohl, 2009).

Interview questions were prepared prior to interviewing participants as well as anticipatory sets with the intent of being prepared to develop new questions and follow unexpected leads that arose throughout the interview process (see Appendix D). The main idea of the interview instrument was to learn from each teacher which combination of, or specific policies, professional development training, and school leadership qualities made them successful in teaching reading to Black students in the primary grades and find a connection to their assigned meaning and instruction. The following questions were asked in each semi-structured interview in this order:

1. What experiences contributed to your success teaching reading to Black students?

Ask follow up questions based on the respondent’s answers; make note of the follow up question.

If the respondent does not mention policy, principal leadership behaviors, or professional development, then ask these questions:

What is the role of your district’s equity policy in your success teaching reading to Black students?

What is the role of principal leadership behaviors in your success teaching reading to Black students?

What is the role of professional development in your success teaching reading to Black students?

2. What else do I need to know about why you’re successful teaching reading to Black students?
3. Is there anything else you want me to know?

Role of the Researcher

My experience in education includes teaching self-contained elementary content areas and self-contained middle school content areas. I also possess experience as a building level administrator in a local school district. My administrative experience includes supervising teachers and staff, providing relevant professional development, and ensuring adherence to federal, state and local policies within the school. I have not been involved in the drafting of any equity policy or been part of any work group sessions whose time is dedicated to the production of policy itself. For the past 4 years, most of my time has been dedicated to building level administrative duties in two very different elementary schools. Throughout my tenure as a teacher and administrator, I have been asked to look deeply at data disaggregated by race which consistently reveals disproportionate outcomes in student achievement for students from historically marginalized groups. Improving outcomes for Black students has been a focus of my teaching and administrative career. I began my dissertation with a statement from Noguera (2008) in which he stated that education is largely reproducing the historical and present inequities that exist. My commitment to educational equity and repairing the system that reproduces the historical and present inequities is a source of potential bias in this study. My use of existing data sources and predetermined interview questions in a qualitative research design reduces the role researcher bias played in this study. Moreover, I took several steps to increase the integrity of this study and diminish researcher bias: (a) stating the research question in advance of the study, (b) identifying

which data sources will be used to answer the research question, (c) applying In-Vivo and open coding to analyze the data, (d) specifying themes or categories that emerge, and (e) conducting a member check to confirm my findings.

Data Collection and Analysis

Conducting interviews with participants resulted in comprehensive data sets to analyze. I double coded the data focused on answering the primary research question and related research questions: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (a) What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (b) What is the role of principal leadership behavior in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (c) What is the role of professional development in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?

In analyzing the collected data, I sought to find themes through a cycle of coding rounds interwoven with on-going data collection and careful reflection. Saldaña (2016) referred to this process as analytic memo writing. Memo writing and meaningful deliberation about the data sets and memos guided my interpretation of the data. For this study, I collected data from teachers identified by their principals as being successful in teaching Black students reading. I coded the data individually after each interview. In the first cycle of coding, In Vivo and Open coding was combined (Saldaña, 2016). This combination of In Vivo and Open coding allowed the teacher's own words to be used as guide post in developing themes. Additionally, by coding the data initially it allowed me

to categorize what was said and flag any potential word or phrases directly related to the primary or related research questions. After initial coding of interviews, I reflected with my dissertation chair through dialogue and analytic memo writing. This technique allowed me to more acutely analyze the participant responses and be strategic throughout the coding process about code choices. Furthermore, it produced transparency and reliability of how the process of inquiry took shape, the emerging patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in the data are built (Saldaña, 2016, p. 41).

The second round of coding combined the use of focused coding and axial coding (Saldaña, 2016) in which categories were identified. Within this round of coding, any developed themes from the initial and open coding cycle were placed into categories. In some cases themes varied in their ability to fit into a particular category. Axial coding was used to find commonalities between themes from the initial round of coding (Saldaña, 2016). I actively searched for words, phrases and synonyms and used these to eliminate redundant themes so that the findings of this study are well articulated.

All data were coded in an iterative process to ensure categories and themes that emerged were trustworthy within the findings (Creswell, 2003). This iterative process looked for new information that emerged throughout the course of study. Data were presented in relation to policy, professional development trainings and school leadership qualities, as well as other emerging themes and categories of those who are successfully teaching reading to Black students. I used member checking to ensure the message

conveyed by participants was accurately captured. This strategy allowed us to mitigate any possible bias and increase the trustworthiness of the study.

This qualitative study utilized existing data to identify teachers successful with teaching Black students reading and then conducted semi-structured interviews to reveal what contributed to their success. The study used the information collected in the semi structured interviews to examine the primary research question: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? Strengths of this study are sound, reflecting the research methodologies of widely accepted researchers, and the deductive and inductive analysis method should serve to inform future policy and professional development efforts within school districts and states on how to better serve systemically underserved student groups, specifically Black students. In the following section I review the analysis and results of the data that were collected.

Chapter 4: Results/Analysis

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I detailed the process of collecting and analyzing the interview data of teachers identified as successful in teaching Black students reading. As noted in previous chapters, my research question is the following: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? Related research questions are as follows: (a) What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (b) What is the role of principal leadership behavior in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? (c) What is the role of professional development in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? In Chapter 4, I restate the purpose of this study, analyze and present the collected data, interpret the findings, and illuminate limitations of this study and data analysis.

For this study, I purposively selected schools and teachers based upon analysis of annual Oregon state assessment data using the Smarter Balanced Assessment in reading administered in the spring of each academic year. Reading scores were disaggregated by race in order to identify schools with Black students performing above the state average. Selected participants responded to the interview questions regarding their success in teaching reading to Black students. Interview questions focused on policies, professional

development trainings, and school leadership behaviors they deemed to be important to the success of teaching reading to Black students. Participants also reported the barriers that may impede their success with teaching reading to Black students. These questions were intended to identify the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students and the relationship to policy, professional development, and school leadership qualities, as well as other emerging themes and categories of those who are successfully teaching reading to Black students.

To answer the primary and related research questions, I initially analyzed the data related to each interview question asked of the participants. I then synthesized the themes by using analytical memo writing (Saldaña, 2016) and used direct quotations to support categories and emerging themes. After carefully analyzing each participant's answers to every individual question, I synthesized the results by connecting the findings to the research questions. Each interview question elicited responses that generated themes from the participants in the interview process. These themes were identified through the process of double coding to ensure trustworthiness (Saldaña, 2016). The majority of themes were taken from the participants' own words which is often referred to as In Vivo coding (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016).

Analysis of Data

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature and theories in the area of policy, organizational behavior, adult learning, and teaching and learning to analyze the racial reading achievement gap. In Chapter 3, I explained the purpose of the study, which was

to investigate the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students and the relationship to policy, professional development training and school leadership qualities. I also described the research methods I utilized to analyze the research questions.

In this section I analyze and present the collected data and interpret results and findings of this study. I share the major categories and related themes generated through In Vivo coding (Maxwell, 2013) and memo writing (Saldaña, 2016) with direct quotations from interviews to support categories and emerging themes. Quantitizing (Maxwell, 2013) is another way to reveal important categories. This is the process of seeing which words or phrases are mentioned the most throughout the participants transcripts. The major categories which In Vivo coding, memo writing, and quantitizing revealed in the interview data are as follows: strong relationships; teacher focus on motivating and engaging students; teachers' development and experiences in understanding privilege and positionality; high expectations. Additional findings not common to all participants but worthy of discussion were as follows: school-wide systems and district equity policy. I discuss the major categories below.

Important Categories

Strong Relationships

All participants mentioned some aspect of strong relationships as being an influential factor in their experience of success in teaching reading to Black students. The category of strong relationships includes the themes of teacher-student, teacher-team, and

teacher-principal relationships. Over the course of interviewing each participant relationships were mentioned 53 times in response to multiple questions (see Appendix F). Most participants shared that relationships were the foundation for academic success and shared that leveraging those relationships to further student learning was a top priority for them as a classroom teacher.

Teacher-Student Relationships. Participants interviewed emphasized the importance of building trusting, caring relationships with students as being vital in ensuring they were able to connect with Black students during reading instruction. All participants were not only focused on learning but also developing the “meaningful,” “motivating,” “fun,” and “caring” relationships they needed in order to connect with students during instruction. These participants regularly highlighted aspects of, without specifically naming, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and Reality Pedagogy (Emdin, 2011). Gay (2010) said, “caring teachers that focus more on the quality of personal being and relationships with students over the instructional methodology” (p. 50) create meaningful learning opportunities for students of color. All participants noted the importance of meaningful relationships, with one participant echoing the research findings of Gay (2010) and culturally responsive teaching by stating:

I think that, personally, my educational philosophy is really just trying to build relationships with students. I think that that's kind of the foundation of having any success in the classroom is having kids that respect you and kids that know you respect them, so focusing really on building that relationship, building that trust, building that respect.

Gay also said, “In their interpersonal relationships with students culturally responsive teachers are warm, supportive, personable, enthusiastic, understanding, flexible yet rigorous in demanding high quality academic performance from their students” (p. 46).

Another participant echoed these research findings of Gay and culturally responsive pedagogy by stating

I mean, I just . . . I care. I think it all goes back to what I said earlier about just trying to connect with the kids and be mindful of sometimes these are kids who are not trusting me. Sometimes these are kids that don't see themselves related and represented—that don't see themselves represented and can't relate to staff members because we don't have African American teachers here in the building, and just trying to find small ways to build that connection, to build that trust, to build that relationship to where they're going to sell out for you and they're going to give you what they can when they can. It might not be as much as somebody else, and it might not be the same amount every day, but that they're giving the maximum effort that they can at any given moment.

Just as the participant above focused on relationships, another participant connected the importance of relationships directly to academic success: “I would say a lot of my success comes from building really strong relationships with my kids and then I leverage that for their academic success.”

Table 4 shows the specific responses of participants regarding relationships between teachers and students.

Table 4*Teacher-Student Relationship Actions*

Actions That Support Strong Teacher-Student Relationships	Number of Responses
Meaningful care for students	8/9
Build trust with students	9/9
Respect for students	9/9
Making learning fun	7/9

Teacher-Team Relationships. Positive productive relationships among grade level teams and staff were also emerged as important in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students by most all participants. Participants pointed to a positive school climate and culture in which they alone were not solely responsible for their individual success in teaching reading to Black students. The collective effort of their team had played a crucial role in their individual success. One participant shared

I think the biggest thing—I also very much rely on my team. This grade level is very much—our fifth-grade team is—we are very much a team and I would not be successful without my teaching partners. I've worked on teams where it was much more each person does their own independent thing and I am able to do my best teaching when we are really collaborative and we can design activities together. We can divide up, “Okay. You do this component. I'm going to do this component. We're going to swap kids. We're going to make reading groups.” We don't really rule anything out in terms of like, “Well, let's try this,” or, “what's working for you?” My success is not just me. Ever. I mean, I really— my team is really key to the success overall of all of our kids.

Beyond teacher-team relationships, participants also noted the importance of the teacher-principal relationship. Table 5 shows the specific responses of participants regarding relationships between teachers and their grade level team.

Table 5

Teacher-Team Relationship Actions

Actions That Support Strong Teacher-Team Relationships	Number of Responses
Trusting team members	9/9
Supportive of each other	9/9
Value other opinions and experiences	8/9
Focus on strengths	6/9

Teacher-Principal Relationships. Additionally, strong relationships between teachers and building administrators was also a theme that emerged. The importance of the teacher-principal relationship was brought up by all nine participants when asked about the leadership behaviors of their principal supporting Black student reading achievement. Note that all of the participants spoke about their current or former principal as being very supportive of their work and cultivating high levels of trust between teachers and the principal. Table 6 shows the specific responses of participants regarding relationships between teachers and building principals.

Table 6*Teacher-Principal Relationship Actions*

Actions That Support Strong Teacher-Principal Relationships	Number of Responses
Putting trust in us/professional discretion	9/9
Strong relationship with teachers	9/9
Very supportive (professional regard)	9/9
Focus on school community	7/9
Works with students (Academics and Behavior)	5/9
Allows professional discretion in teaching	7/9
Flexibility in working with teachers	6/9

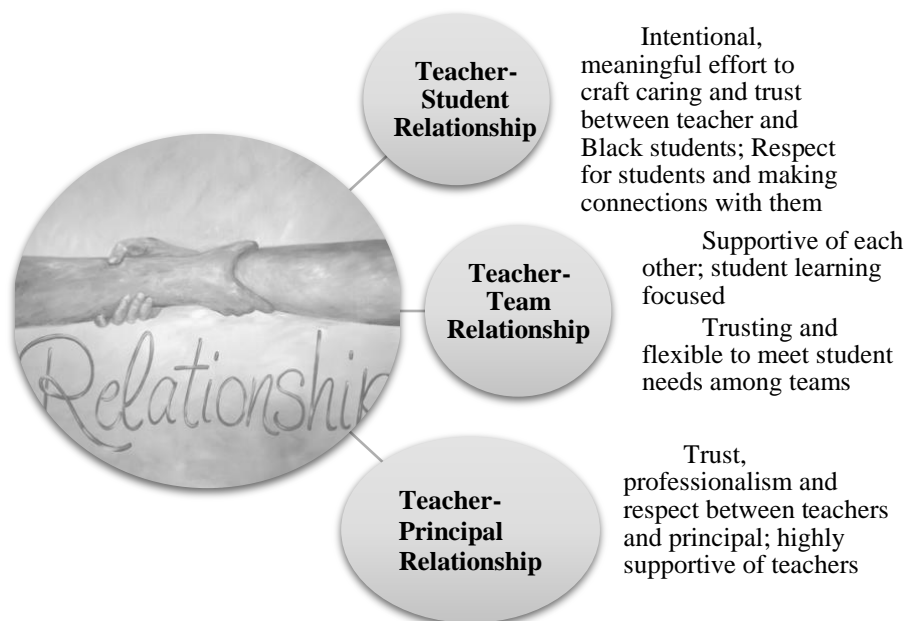
Most all participants expressed that having a positive and productive relationship with their fellow teachers and building administrator allowed them to be more successful in teaching reading to Black students. As one participant stated, “She doesn't hesitate to jump in and cover a class” and “You know she has your back and that together we're really trying to figure out how to make it work.” While another participant echoed, “I think that she's been very supportive of building those relationships with staff and putting trust in us. “I feel like her high expectations of us in her role as principal set the tone for us to rise to that.” A common theme among all the participants was that having this trust and strong relationship with the building principal allowed them to feel very supported,

which gave them the flexibility and professional discretion to offer multiple points of access during reading instruction. This was emphasized by one participant: “She is very supportive of doing what's best for kids and not just following this pacing guide that you have to do.” She also echoed, “She always puts our professional judgment first, which is really helpful for teachers who do have an equity focus.”

As one participant stated, “I'm in an environment where I am feeling supported by my leader and by my team and just by my community of staff members. I think that makes a huge difference as well because I know that it's not like that in all buildings. And so it's a wonderful thing to be a part of that and to try to continue to foster that.” Figure 4 shows the connection of these ideas to relationships.

Teacher Focus on Motivating and Engaging Students

The ability to motivate and engage students was another theme that emerged as an important factor in teachers' experience of success in teaching reading to Black students. Throughout the process of interviewing each participant, motivating and engaging students was mentioned by all nine participants in response to the interview questions as being an influential factor in their experience. The category of motivating and engaging students includes the themes of Curriculum and Text Connections and Strategies for Engagement (see Appendix G).

Figure 4*Relationships*

Curriculum and Text Connections. Finding unique and different ways to motivate and engage students was a central theme of all teacher participants. These teachers did not rely on the standard curriculum of boxed set of books to motivate their Black students to become successful readers. One aspect of the supportiveness and flexibility by principals allowed teacher participants to engage students using a variety of texts that were more culturally and ethnically specific to Black students. As one participant stated, “Making sure my kids are more reflected in what they're reading is super important.” Another participant said, “Where the kids see themselves in the books and can relate more closely with the characters in the books, there's more buy-in.”

Having the relationships with their students and knowing their stories, who they are and where they come from, allowed teacher participants to be much more mindful in their reading instruction by crafting and tailoring text they used during instruction to motivate and engage students.

Where the curriculum was lacking in people from diverse backgrounds or did not match the racial make-up of the students, teacher participants supplemented or extended their own learning to build more text to self-connections for their black students. One participant stated they had to

do more research and more planning on my own so that I had background knowledge on people that I hadn't been exposed to before, more than just the three-paragraph blip that I was given in our reading curriculum. So yeah, I mean, researching for teaching reading to diverse student groups definitely exposed me to more diverse people in history as well.

The research the teacher did caused them to learn more about diverse people and find appropriate texts for students, which resulted in more connected and engaged Black students during reading instruction. As one participant stated, "reading and writing when it's meaningful to [Black students] because they're interested in it" gives the participant the ability to more effectively engage and teach their Black students.

Strategies for Engaged Learning. During the interviews, teachers talked about the unique ways they made connections with their Black students and leveraged those in their learning. They regularly engaged in self-described "overly enthusiastic" teaching about reading skills and content. One teacher stated, "We really try to pump them up for learning and say, this is your chance to show off everything that you've been learning so

we'll have talks about just being your best. I made up a little cheer for the class.” Keeping students interested and excited to just be at school was something participants highlighted as well. Another participant stated, “I learn from them every day and I'll try to make a big deal of that saying, ‘Oh, my goodness. That's incredible. You just taught me that today.’ Just some of those sharing excitement when you learn something new as an adult with the kids, I think gets them excited.”

Participants also found ways to motivate their students by connecting the students' popular culture. One participant stated, “I am always trying to keep an ear to the streets, know who the popular YouTubers are, what the popular dances are, and then humiliate myself doing them in front of the class, using slang incorrectly. I just try and keep things light and, yeah, just get them to want to be here.” Another participant expressed using hip-hop and pop culture music to engage diverse student groups stating, “just kind of bringing those moments into the classroom to build relationships has been huge in teaching reading.” This idea is supported by Emdin (2011) who stated Reality Pedagogy, “focuses explicitly on understanding the realities of youth within a particular classroom and supports the teacher in utilizing an understanding of these realities as an anchor for instruction delivery.” Table 7 shows the specific responses of participants regarding motivation and engagement between successful teachers and Black students.

These actions were brought up by most of the teacher participants as ways in which they motivate and engage students during their reading instruction. One of the recurring themes expressed by teacher participants was their ability to leverage the

relationship with students to better understand their interest and strengths and use these to engage and motivate them during reading instruction. Figure 5 shows the connection of these ideas to motivation and engagement.

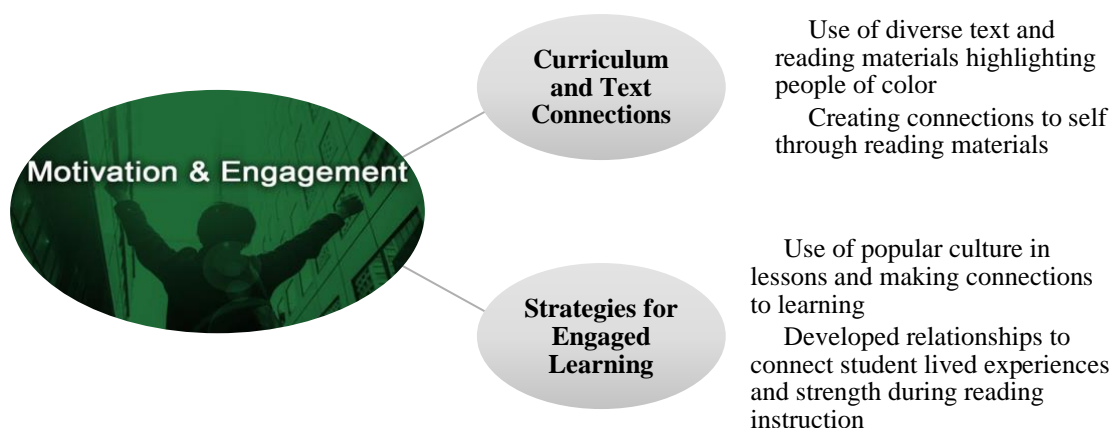
Table 7

Actions Supporting Motivation and Engagement

Actions That Support Teacher-Student Motivation and Engagement	Number of Responses
Using racially-inclusive texts in reading instruction	7/9
Using student interest to activate learning	9/9
Moving beyond the standard curriculum	6/9
Being authentic and real with students	8/9

Figure 5

Motivation and Engagement



Teacher Development and Experiences in Understanding Privilege and Positionality

All nine participants mentioned their development and experiences in understanding their privileges and positionality as being an influential factor in their experience of success in teaching reading to Black students. The category of teacher development and experience with privilege and positionality include the themes of experience and reflection as well as equity related professional development. Over the course of interviewing each participant, teacher development and experience with privilege and positionality was mentioned 45 times in response to multiple questions (see Appendix H).

Experience and Reflection. All nine participants stated that either a personal life experience or professional experience had allowed them to better understand their own privilege and/or positionality. Often participants pointed to a time when they realized that their education experience, culture and background differed from that of the students of color they serve. This reflection on their own experience was a point of learning and transition for them to become more immersed in how to better teach their underserved students. As one participant stated

It helped me to see that these kids don't have the same experiences in childhood that I had growing up. And it really helped me to see that in a lot of ways I had a really privileged childhood. And so just I think the biggest thing to come from that was just it helped me to understand and to see that these kids are struggling with things that I didn't struggle with. And I think it's just helped me be more empathetic, more sympathetic to what these kids need.

Another participant shared why they thought their background and experience made them more successful by stating

I grew up in an area that was very diverse, and there were a lot of black students and black teachers. It was much more integrated than Portland is and so perhaps my background helps me understand black culture a little bit better. I'm not saying, I'm not a black person, obviously, and so I'm not suggesting that I am in any way am an expert. What I am suggesting is that I understand and recognize and respect that there are some differences, and I don't take it as—let's see, how can I put this. Some behaviors, white teachers can't handle. They think it's disrespectful, and I don't. I mean, obviously, there is some behavior that's disrespectful. But there is some behavior that is—it's culturally different. That's all it is, and it's not disrespectful.

One teacher participant pointed to a time when they had failed as the moment when they knew they needed to develop themselves more to serve their Black students. The participant highlighted this when answering the first interview question

I started my teaching career doing Teach for America in Miami. I taught kindergarten in an all—actually, mostly Black-student school, very inner-city. And I ended up leaving within a month just because I didn't feel like I was equipped to give those students the best that they needed. And I struggled with that decision because I still had the very much White savior mentality of, "I'm here to help these kids, and if I leave what will happen to them."

This teacher pointed to this moment in their experience as “a huge experience” and something that set them up to “do a lot of training and realizing, especially for White folks, about White privilege, and what that presents going into a school where students are not white.” For a number of participants it was also their reflection on the experiences where they had failed to teach underserved students that made them better teachers.

Another teacher stated

I started teaching 20 years ago in the Bronx with Teach For America and was horribly—I was a horrible failure at it, but really set my vision of just a lot of the inadequacies and inequities in our system. And so from there, I've really been driven by that just on a personal level.

All nine participants believed their success could be attributed to one or many personal and professional background experiences such as these. It was also their reflection and understanding on their part that drove them to become the successful reading teachers of Black students they are today.

Equity-Related Professional Development. Another theme that emerged was how particular equity related professional development had spurred growth in the participants' ability to successfully teach Black students. Often this professional development was sought out by the participants and was not included in district related trainings. One participant noted, "The right professional development I think is very hard to find, and I've been searching it out on an ongoing basis. Whether that's going to Zaretta Hammond things or just recently I saw Dr. Hollie speak or just trying to do all the things to educate myself." Also, a number of participants pointed to their learning in college or post-secondary college programs as being beneficial in their experience in teaching Black students. As one participant said, "my multicultural college classes were more helpful in broadening my understanding of cultural differences in the educational scene. I don't think our professional development in our district has added to that."

While most participants pointed to professional development they had sought out themselves, there was one participant who pointed to a program their district was

conducting with a local higher education institution as being meaningful. In the participant's words, "The Equity Program was huge. I think we also, last year, each building had two people that were in charge of professional growth because of a grant and would do observations where it was focused on the equity piece and looking at the classroom and the environment." According to this participant, whose experience put them into the 0-10 years of teaching experience, said the learning that has come from this program has given them an equity lens with which to look at instruction and focus in their practice. Table 8 shows the specific experiences of participants regarding teacher development and experience with privilege and positionality.

Table 8

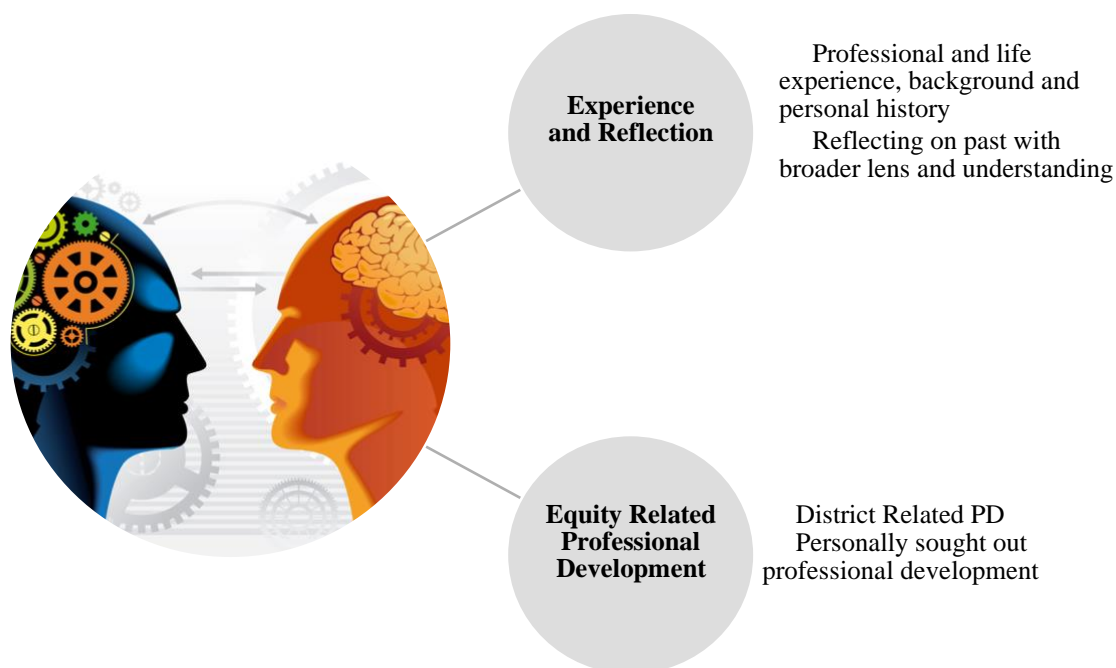
Teacher Development and Experience With Privilege and Positionality

Experiences That Support Teacher Development With Privilege and Positionality	Number of Participants That Mentioned
Discovering personal privilege	7/9
Seeking to understand diverse cultures	9/9
Seeking professional development to work with diverse student groups	6/9
Reflection on own experience and background	8/9
Previous experience of failure in working with a diverse student group	5/9

These experiences were brought up by teacher participants as experiences that they attribute to leading them to be successful teachers of Black students. One of the recurring themes from the interviews was teachers' own personal reflection of these events which spurred them to further develop themselves as educators. Figure 6 shows the connection of these ideas to Teacher Development and Experience with Privilege and Positionality.

Figure 6

Teacher Development and Experience With Privilege and Positionality



High Expectations

All nine participants noted that having high expectations for student growth was an influential factor in their experience of success in teaching reading to Black students. The category of high expectations includes the theme of high teacher expectations for students and high principal expectations for teachers. Over the course of interviewing each participant, high expectations were mentioned 42 times in response to multiple questions (see Appendix I).

Teacher Expectations. Often participants brought up their personal beliefs about how they approach working with students. The term “high expectations” was often used to describe participants' approach to teaching reading to Black students in their respective classes. As one teacher participant noted, “It's just the high expectations are there for all [students]. And I think that's just kind of the baseline—the marker—of where to start.” Having high expectations in these schools and classrooms was noted by many participants as a contributing factor to their success in teaching reading. Teacher participants expressed ways they encouraged student success in reading while holding them to high standards, “I do feel like kind of pumping the kids up and setting the expectation that their role as a learner is just as important as my role as a teacher.”

These teacher participants believed their Black students were as capable, if not more capable, than every other student in their class, and they did not let students' disbelief in themselves to stand in their way Black students making academic gains. As one participant stated

I just refuse to accept just anything—I don't not lower my standards for my kids. And yes you're having a hard time and yes, I will modify an assignment and yes, I will help you and yes, come in at lunch and I will do your homework with you and all those things, and I'm going to hold you to this expectation because I believe that is what is best for you and I believe you're capable of it. And anything less than that is really not fair to the kid because, ultimately, I'm not helping them be successful.

Some participants expressed great joy and enthusiasm for their work in education. They were not complacent or stagnant in their ability to grow and adapt their practice to meet student needs.

Principal Expectations. Participants also stated that the high expectations of the building principal were an influential factor in their success. Principals expected their teachers to meaningfully engage with their racially diverse and trusted teachers to engage in effective strategies, this was often brought up by participants when being asked question three related to principal leadership during the interview. As one participant noted, “[our principal] has very high expectations for us. And for me, I felt like, ‘Okay. I hear you. I’m with you.’ I’m going to be on board with that and jump in/dive in. How can I help you get to the vision you want for your school?” It was the high expectations around instruction that these principals set that persisted in the interview responses by teacher participants. As one participant stated, “We have an administrator here who was very willing to say that the standards and the outcomes were what drive instruction, not the program.”

Participants also expressed the importance of having a building principal who set the tone for the culture of the school. Having a focus on equity and maintaining those high expectations were invaluable as stated by one participant

when the principal makes it clear to the entire staff that racism, sexism, all that stuff is completely unacceptable, that needs to be stated and just be part of the overarching culture. I think it's important for the principal to learn how to diplomatically challenge people's thinking because people can get very defensive about race, and their opinions about it or whatever. So I think it takes a lot of courage and understanding for a principal to be able to take such a diverse staff and lead them in the right direction.

The expressed importance of having high expectations, both from teachers and principals for the school as a whole, surfaced as influential in the individual teacher's success in teaching reading to Black students. Table 9 shows actions that conveyed high expectations on the part of teachers and principals.

Table 9

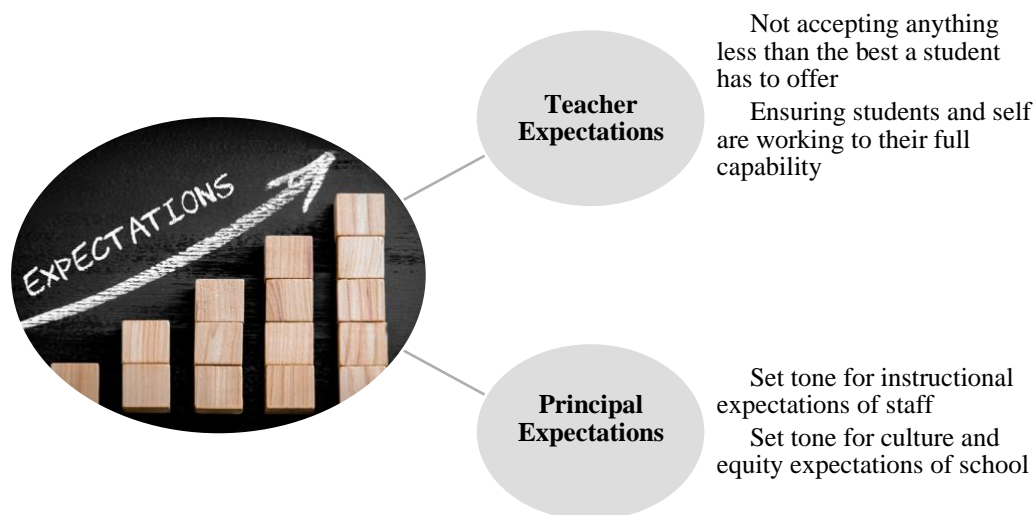
High Expectations

Action that High Expectations From Teachers and Principals	Number of Participants That Mentioned
Expecting students to work at or above their current reading level	9/9
Not allowing students to give up or not complete work	6/9
Setting the instructional tone for the classroom/school around what is expected of adults	7/9
Ensuring equity is at the forefront when looking at data and providing additional reading support	5/9

All of the teacher participants conveyed the category of high expectations as key to their success teaching reading to Black students. Figure 7 synthesizes the concepts of high expectations.

Figure 7

High Expectations



School-Wide Systems

Less commonly noted, but also stated by participants was a school-wide systems approach to teaching and learning. While school-wide systems may be a factor in teachers' success teaching reading to Black students, having strong systems without other supporting conditions, is not the solution. A systems approach is good for teachers and students but only within a culture where relationships with students are the foundation for success. Participants expressed value in having some sort of formalized system to look at data and standards, how to sequence lessons.

Seven of nine participants mentioned their building team's focus on standards or learning systems for assessing student academic needs as being an influential factor in their experience of success in teaching reading to Black students. The category of standards and learning systems include the theme of systems to support teaching and learning. As one participant said, "We have an administrator here who was very willing to say that the standards and the outcomes were what drive instruction, not the program." Over the course of interviewing each participant, standards and systems was mentioned 32 times in response to multiple questions (see Appendix J).

All participants mentioned some aspect of a school-based system that supported them in their success teaching reading to Black students. In two schools the system included a standards-based approach, the use of power standards, regular use of formative assessment tools to inform instruction, and teacher clarity around activity related to standard and expectation of students.

While two participants pointed to using standards-based approach to teaching as a positive contributor in their ability to successfully teach reading to their students, this was presented as an after-thought for teacher participants as relationships seemed to be the most important factor. Likewise, without the strong relationship between teacher and student a standards-based approach to teaching would fall short of being effective if students were not connected to the content or the deliverer of content. As one participant put it, "Really just digging into our content standards. Our common core standards. In our

district right now the push is teacher clarity. And so we are working to make sure that our students understand what they're learning, why they're learning it, and how they know when they will have learned it.”

More often participants focused on systems within the school that allowed them to recognize the disparities in achievement and an avenue to address these outcomes. One participant commented on how their school implemented the systems of support approach noting that, “there was a shift in how I structured my systems in the classroom, how I did reading groups, how I used my time, what assessments I chose to give, and what I chose to focus on as far as power standards and things like that.” These systems of support gave participants a way to go about navigating how to provide struggling students with additional support. As one participant put it, “We're going to give a pre-assessment. We're going to look at our results. We're going to have some key learning strategies that we're going to target. And we're going to do formative assessments along the way to see if it's working, make adjustments, talk about adult actions, what we can control, and then do that post-assessment at the end and set goals around it and things like that.” Having these systems for providing support for struggling students helped students who may not have received support under other models for addressing student needs. As one teacher commented

We identify the bottom 20%, and then we pull them for a 30-minute reading intervention. And I feel like that is really helpful for a lot of those struggling students. And so we meet again throughout the year, and we analyze who is still in our bottom 20%. And often we're able to serve more than just our bottom 20% in those reading groups.

Participants noted that having these systems was helpful to them as educators, “so I think all of those things really do catch anybody who may be falling behind, and we have just like systems in place to try to get as many kids caught up.”

The expressed importance of the schools’ approach to supporting student learning by participants was brought up to emphasize the role of the school’s system to support the individual teacher’s success in teaching reading to Black students. Table 10 shows the specific systems of support participants noted standards and learning systems.

Table 10

School-Wide Systems

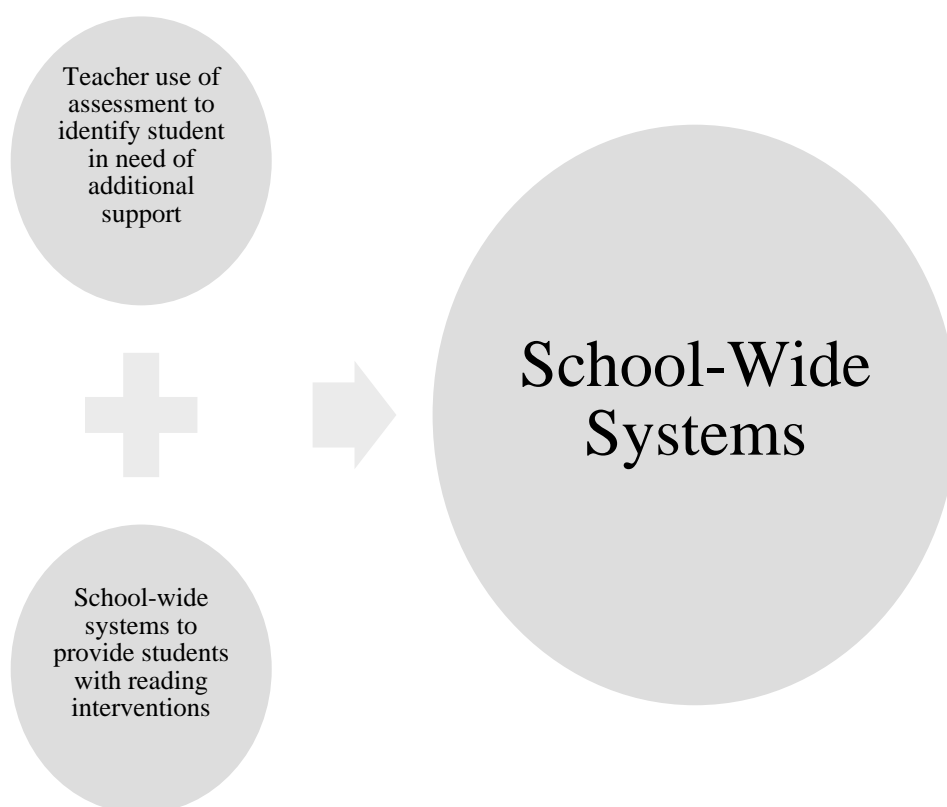
Systems That Support Teacher Success	Number of Participants That Mentioned
Use of pre, formative and post assessments	4/9
Knowledge and use of power standards	5/9
Teacher clarity around activity related to standard and expectation of students	7/9

These supports were brought up by teacher participants as systems that they attribute to leading them to be successful teachers of Black students. One of the recurring themes from the interviews teacher participants expressed was the school-wide approach to implementing these systems of support—within the overarching umbrella of strong

relationships with students. Figure 8 shows the connection of these ideas to standards and learning systems.

Figure 8

School-Wide Systems



District Equity Policy

This study examined the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students and the role of the district's equity policy, if any, in their success. The second interview question was: What is the role of your district's equity policy in your

success in teaching reading to Black students? While I expected to find some relationship between enacting the equity policy and teacher success, none of the participants stated that their districts equity policy influenced the way they taught reading to Black students. In this section, I discuss participants' responses.

All participants stated they were aware the district had an adopted equity policy. However, awareness of the equity policy did not transfer to impacting teachers' curriculum, teaching strategies, instructional focus, or any other aspect of culturally responsive teaching to implement the policy. As one participant stated, "I am aware that we have an equity policy. I am not familiar with the equity policy." Another participant stated, "I don't know that I am very familiar with their equity policy, to be honest." If educators cannot connect actions in the classroom to equity shifts within the district, there is a disconnect between the district's espoused values and teacher development within the district.

When asked about how the equity policy influenced their success in teaching reading to Black students none of the participants indicated any influence. One participant stated, "Zero." They went on to say that the policy "may very well be posted somewhere in our building" However, most importantly, they pointed out the policy has not resulted in meaningful changes:

Our district, I think, is very far behind the curve of making equity meaningful. And maybe that's just the . . . in our building, in particular, we're really . . . it's not at the forefront of what we do. We struggled to even find an actual equity lens for our district. I sat on our district equity team last year and there wasn't a lot of really meaningful actual change happening.

Another teacher participant went on to elaborate, “it hasn't impacted how I teach.” The lack of overall influence of district equity policy on the practices of these successful teachers of Black students was consistent in every interview.

One participant did illuminate the district-sponsored equity-related professional development as being influential in their growth and development in becoming a successful teacher of Black students. This respondent chose to attend a voluntary professional development session that was helpful. They stated

two years ago, they [school district] started offering professional development courses. And there's one teacher in another school who has taken the district curriculum, but she has—using all of the standards and using the organizers and the scope and sequence, she brings in different pieces that kind of highlight leaders of color and focusing on empowering students.

Overall the absence of influence of equity policies as a driver for these teachers as well as their commitment to equity and success in teaching reading to Black students is an important finding of this study. It is a significant finding of this study that none of the teachers in this study who successfully teach reading to Black students knew any details of their equity policy, nor did they believe the equity policy impacted their success in any way. I discuss the implications of this finding further in Chapter 5.

Limitations of Study

All studies have limitations and mine is no different. Limitations of the study included a small sample size, a small geographic area, the participants being selected by the principal, not conducting principal interviews, lack of racial and gender diversity of

respondents, and that this study was conducted during a global pandemic which may have impacted participant responses and researcher interpretation.

As was noted earlier, I have employed several methods to mitigate limitations of this study. Methods include double coding (Saldaña, 2016) with the research chairperson of this study, analytical memo writing (Saldaña, 2016), and discussion. The sample size of our study included interviews with nine successful teachers in two elementary schools in two separate districts. The reason for the small sample size was how we chose to define successful teachers: those in schools that exceeded the state average of 29.9% in ELA for Black students by 15% to 40% and whose district had a board adopted equity policy. I found four schools in the greater Portland metro area who met these criteria, two of which declined to participate in this study. Another reason for the small sample size is the teacher participants were selected by the principals as teachers who are successful in their schools teaching reading to Black students. Despite a small sample size, I ensured adequate “saturation” in that after nine interviews, no new categories or themes emerged, indicating the low likelihood that new or different information would come from additional participants (Seidman, 2013). Despite taking these measures to mitigate the limitation of the sample size, it is a limitation.

An additional limitation was not including students or principals in this study. I did not seek approval to conduct interviews with Black elementary aged students for this study nor did I conduct interviews with principals to seek additional information about why they selected certain teachers to be interviewed. The student perspective would be

extremely helpful in understanding what teacher practices have led to their success (Mirra, 2016). The principal perspective would also be helpful in that school leaders have the second largest influence on student achievement after teachers (Hattie, 2012). Another limitation is the racial makeup of the participants, all of whom are all White. I do believe that additional interviews including Black teachers, other teachers of color, Black students, and principals would be beneficial and are areas for further research.

Moreover, this research was conducted during a global pandemic. This posed a significant challenge to conducting in person interviews and the IRB was revised and received approval to utilize a digital way to connect and conduct interviews. It is possible that in-person interviews, at a time when the general population was not experiencing high levels of anxiety due to the global pandemic, may have resulted in different responses.

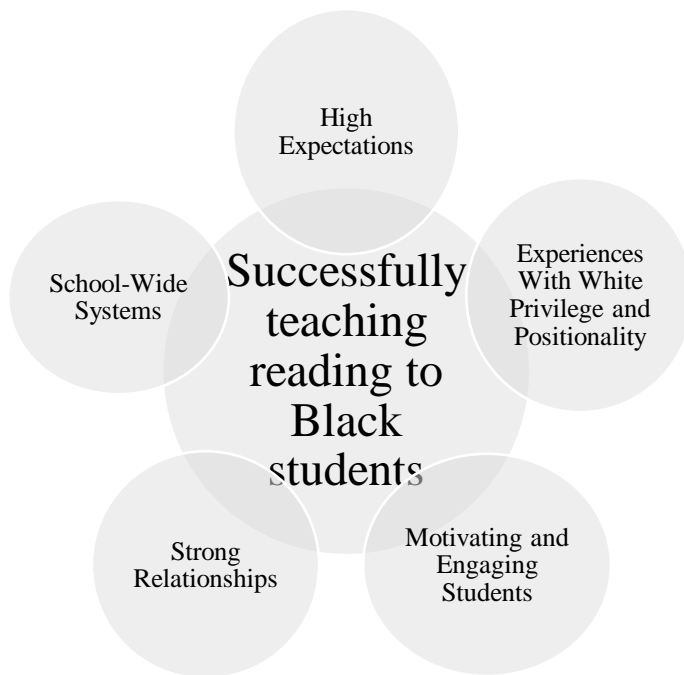
Finally, another limitation of this study is researcher bias. As I disclosed in Chapter 3, despite my commitment to educational equity and repairing the system that reproduces the historical and present inequities, I am a White, educated man, and my privileged positionality is a source of potential bias in this study. My experience in education includes teaching self-contained elementary content areas. I am currently serving as building level administrator in a local school district in which 50% of my students are Black. While I have not been involved in the drafting of any equity policy or been part of any work group sessions whose time is dedicated to the production of policy itself, I do believe in and strive to approach my role with an equity focus. Improving

outcomes for Black students has been a focus of my teaching and administrative career. My use of predetermined interview questions in a qualitative research design aims to reduce the role researcher bias played in this study. Moreover, I took several steps to increase the integrity of this study and diminish researcher bias: (a) stating the research question in advance of the study (Maxwell, 2013) , (b) identifying which data sources will be used to answer the research question (Maxwell, 2013), (c) applying In-Vivo and Open coding to analyze the data (Saldaña, 2016), (d) specifying themes or categories that emerge (Saldaña, 2016), and (e) conducting a member check to confirm my findings.

In spite of the listed limitations above, I have conducted detailed interviews and carefully analyzed data to reduce my bias within this study. Steps such as double coding and analytical memo writing were employed to minimize the bias within this research. While it is not possible to completely eliminate researcher bias, these measures are designed to increase the trustworthiness of the study by illuminating my own positionality and assumptions and in so doing ensuring that the audience for this study can seriously consider my interpretation of the findings. The following model represents the findings of this study (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Model for Successfully Teaching Reading to Black Students



Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusion

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I analyzed and presented the collected data, interpreted results and findings of this study and illuminated limitations of this study and data analysis. In Chapter 5, I synthesize my findings and share my recommendations for further studies and implications for policy and practices.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of primary grade teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students. This study used semi-structured interviews with the primary research question: What are the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students? Related research questions were:

1. What is the role of a district's equity policy in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?
2. What is the role of principal leadership behavior in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?
3. What is the role of professional development in the experiences of teachers successfully teaching reading to Black students?

For this study, I purposively selected primary grade teachers from schools that have had higher than state average ELA achievement on the state's standardized assessment for the year 2016-2017 and in districts that have enacted equity policies. The participants were purposively selected for an interview using the above questions

regarding their success in teaching reading to Black students. The main purpose of the interview was to learn what experiences they believe have contributed to their success and the subsequent implications for policy, professional development trainings, and school leadership qualities. After conducting the interviews, I analyzed each interview question, synthesized the emerging themes, wrote analytic memos, and used direct quotations to support categories and themes. Each interview transcript was double coded to ensure the trustworthiness of results and findings. After the analysis, I identified specific characteristics that connected to my research questions.

Synthesis of Findings

In this section I briefly synthesize the findings of this study and discuss the implications. After carefully analyzing the collected data, I identified six important findings related to teachers' beliefs regarding their success. The following contributed to teacher success: strong relationships, teacher focus on motivating and engaging students, teachers' experiences in understanding privilege and positionality, high expectations, and team or school-wide focus on standards or learning systems. The district equity policy did not impact teacher behaviors.

My findings, like Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995), found that building strong relationships with students, being inclusive of student culture in the classroom community, developing cultural competence and critical consciousness as an educator are key tenets in successfully teaching reading Black students. My findings extend the research of Gay and Ladson-Billings by revealing the importance of the experiences in

understanding privilege and positionality of successful teachers of Black students and the role of teacher relationships with principals and teammates. This particular part of the findings may be relevant to White teachers, specifically since understanding positionality and privilege is more relevant to White teachers and all the teachers interviewed in this study were White. This study also examined the role of local district equity policy in teachers' success; the implications of the equity policies not having any impact on the teachers in this study will also be discussed later in Chapter 5.

During the interviews, participants shared the value of teacher-student relationships (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995), teacher principal relationship (Waters & Grubb, 2004) and teacher-team relationship (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). While the notion that having strong and overwhelmingly positive relationships with students and staff contributes to student academic success is not a new idea (Hattie, 2012), having these present in the classrooms and at the schools in this study demonstrated their role in creating a school culture around learning and inclusiveness that produced positive learning experiences for Black students. According to participant responses, building these strong relationships was a priority for these teachers. Dufour and Marzano (2011) suggested that students who make these strong connections with teachers will work harder and possess more confidence in their ability to be successful. Related to the category of strong relationships, participants shared the importance of teacher-team and teacher-principal relationships. Having trusting and supportive relationships among colleagues and with the building principal (Fullan, 2016b; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) gave

participants the ability to be open, honest and supportive in their interactions with each other and adaptive in their approach to teaching and learning. All participants stated that having these strong relationships present in the classroom, on the grade level team and with the school administration gave them the ability to be more successful in teaching reading to their Black students.

Creating the conditions in their classroom to motivate and engage their Black students was also something teachers described as being influential in their success. Teacher participants supplemented and enriched the racial diversity in the texts they used in their classrooms by utilizing a variety of texts that were culturally and ethnically specific to Black students, and by using supplemental materials. Where the current curriculum was lacking in representation of people from diverse backgrounds or did not match the racial make-up of the students, teachers supplemented the curriculum. Only by having supportive relationships with their principal (Marion & Gonzales, 2014) were they allowed to feel “safe” in branching out beyond the adopted curriculum and tailoring the text to match the demographic make-up of their classroom. This also allowed the teacher to extend their own learning of people outside of their own culture and racial backgrounds.

Keeping students interested in and excited to just be at school was something participants highlighted as well. These teachers regularly engaged students by using what the students were interested in to draw them into the learning. By leveraging their strong relationships with students and their understanding of the students’ pop culture, these

teachers would use popular songs or topics of interest to engage students in learning (Emdin, 2011).

Interviews also identified the role of the teachers' development and experiences in understanding privilege and positionality. All participants mentioned a time in their life or experience that has led them to having a deeper understanding of their privilege and positionality. Recognition of privilege and how their background, race, and culture differed from others (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015) gave them a new perspective and lens through which to approach learning in their classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Some participants shared an experience when they had not been successful teaching students of color and how this experience shaped their goals and career aspirations to become highly capable teachers for all their students. Others shared the importance of equity related professional development (Choi et al., 2017) and the role it played in shaping them. The importance of the role of the teacher as being one whose development is never ceasing (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), is highly reflective personally and professionally (Dufour & Marzano, 2011) and embodies a strong focus on educational equity (Barth, 2017) are traits that emerged in the interviews of these successful teachers. A future study on this topic should include the perspective students, all teachers, and the principal, to ensure the perspective of students of color and teachers of color are included.

During the interviews, participants shared that having high expectations for their students and working for principals with high expectations of teachers were factors that were influential in their success. Teachers expressed that having high expectations for

their students and not lowering standards (Gay, 2010) was crucial in their success teaching reading to their Black students. Teacher participants agreed that being supportive (Ladson-Billings, 1995) in helping students reach those high expectations was vitally important to ensuring that students did not give up or lose confidence in themselves along the way. Likewise, teachers expressed that having a principal who held them to high expectations was important in their success (Cotton, 2003). The building principals in these schools held the teachers to maintaining high levels of expectation in their teaching and commitment to equity through examining unequal outcomes (Waters & Grubb, 2004).

Some participants expressed the importance of having clear approaches to addressing disparate student outcomes using the school-wide systems (Dufour & Marzano, 2011) they had in place at their schools. These systems focused on teacher understanding of content area standards and gave teachers the ability to identify which skills students were lacking. These school-wide systems created pathways which allowed them to ensure interventions were employed to address student learning needs. In accordance with principles of Transformational Leadership, principles of improvement science must also be reflected in principal leadership qualities. As Peterson and Carlile (2019) noted,

"Rather than imposing top-down, system-wide, large-scale, mandated solutions to problems of practice in education, as many educational initiatives of the early part of this century have, *IS* specifically supports an organic, democratic, and ecological approach to educational interventions, with short cycles of improvement tested and measured for their impact (Bryk et al., 2015). " p. 173.

Lastly, response to equity policy was another category identified after analyzing the teacher interviews. This category emerged as significant due to the fact that no teachers identified their districts' equity policy as being influential in their success in teaching reading to Black students. Teachers interviewed for this study employed adaptive and innovative ways of approaching teaching reading to their Black students in their classrooms, while an equity policy is a technical, bureaucratic and oversimplified change designed to address education inequities (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The lack of influence of the district equity policy on strategies for teaching and learning as highlighted by these teachers is a significant finding in how the districts communicate and how the teaching staff exemplifies the expressed values stated within equity policy. A future study should interview superintendents regarding how the district-enacted equity policy is used within the organization.

Situated in Larger Context

With the demographics of the United States continuously shifting (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), the urgency for closing racial achievement gaps and creating optimal learning conditions in schools serving Black students is paramount. As noted earlier, 89% of Oregon teachers are identified as White (ODE, 2016). As a state education system, we are responsible for ensuring these educators are prepared to serve diverse students from cultures outside of their own. According to Noguera (2008), our current education system is largely reproducing the historical and present inequities in our society which is disproportionately affecting our marginalized communities of color (Children's Defense

Fund, 2012). Thus, racial achievement gaps in K-12 education are contributing to lifelong income and wealth gaps among communities of color. The findings of this study are vitally important as the school sites chosen and teachers within those schools show substantially higher averages than the state average in achievement for their elementary Black students in the content area of ELA.

Implications for Further Research and Actions in the Field

Principal-identified exemplary teachers were interviewed regarding three core issues from the research literature: the role of a district equity policy; the role of principal leadership behavior; and the role of professional development opportunities. These interviews revealed six important characteristics of teacher success in teaching reading to Black students: (a) strong relationships among faculty and with students, (b) teacher focus on motivating and engaging students, (c) teachers' development and experiences in understanding privilege and positionality, (d) high expectations, to a more limited degree (e) school-wide systems, and (f) district's equity policy. Highly successful teachers as identified in this study were more likely to be motivated by factors internal to the school and less motivated by external policy. I now propose implications for further research and actions in the field.

Preservice Teacher Preparation

Currently, 89% of Oregon teachers are identified as White. The importance of White teachers developing culturally-responsive relationships with students, their teaching team and principal cannot be understated. The degree to which this is reinforced

in teacher preparation programs should be examined. Teachers need to be exposed to cultures outside of their own to gain perspective and understanding of their cultural biases, and if they are White, to examine their privilege and positionality. This will only be accomplished through being intentional about the experiences teacher preparation programs provide and the way we develop our preservice teachers within the state. Next, continuing education for teachers must similarly focus on providing meaningful experiences that ensure they are successful working with students from their own background as well as backgrounds different from their own. A workforce of teachers, whose culture and lived experience is different than that of students of color, cannot be successful in closing racial achievement gaps if they are not adequately prepared to do so. We must intentionally provide the experiences for our educators so they have an in-depth understanding of the cultural strengths (Gonzalez et al., 2009) that students of color possess and bring with them into the classroom every day. Investment in the development of both the current workforce and preservice teachers is the only way to ensure our state's majority White teacher workforce develops understanding of its privilege and experiences exposure to and understanding of cultures outside of their own. Teacher reflection and action on these facets are key in personal and professional growth.

Successful teaching as demonstrated by the teacher participants in this study point to the empowerment of teachers at the individual site as opposed to larger external drivers such as policy and law. Teachers' experience in examining their own privilege and positionality related to their success in teaching reading to Black students is an important

finding of this study. Many of these teachers intentionally sought out professional development or volunteered for the experiences that gave them the ability to examine these factors in their role as educators. Principals and school districts should set aside funds for teachers to have more opportunities to self-identify from a menu of development exploration opportunities focused on examining privilege and positionality as it relates to student success which they would like to participate in. How to identify which opportunities would be most beneficial for teachers and students will require further study.

This study suggests that teacher development programs at colleges, universities as well as school districts should seek to provide preservice and practicing teachers with ways to expand their ability to meaningfully connect with students of color and students outside of their own race and culture. Ensuring curriculum is inclusive of popular culture and student interest is also crucial area of development for teachers, providing preservice experiences that focus on working with students and families whose racial background reflects the diversity of students they serve might be a more helpful strategy in both teacher and administrator preparation as opposed to focusing on individual skill preparation.

Principal Preparation. In order for principals to be better prepared to offer experiences like these to their educators their preparation will also need to be tailored to meet the needs of historically underserved students (Mendels, 2016). The preservice development of our building principals is vitally important to the success of our Black

students. Cultivating and crafting the ownership of personal mission and vision in a school leader who is supportive is vital to ensuring our teachers have the transformational leadership present in their building to achieve their goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). The literature on Transformational leadership was synthesized by Peterson (2011) and includes: solves problems with teachers together, communicates school norms values and culture while sharing power with teachers, develops goals/mission with teachers to impact teacher behaviors and leader has a moral focus on equity.

Examining privilege, how principals select and develop teachers, how they provide PD and on what topics, and the types of interview questions asked are areas of principal preparation worth of examination. Lastly, the importance of the relationship at the school and within the process of providing educational opportunities as a whole cannot be understated. The degree to which this is focused on by our higher learning institutions in the preparation of our preservice principals should be examined.

Professional Development. Teachers who have the ability to create and craft strong relationships with their students, colleagues and principals are more likely to be successful in their ability to teach reading to Black students. As many teachers in this study noted, they leveraged this connection to motivate and engage their students academically. Developing the ability of preservice and practicing teachers to create strong professional relationships among themselves and supportive relationships with their students is one approach to helping close racial achievement gaps among students. Only by instilling this as a high value in their educators and creating and crafting

professional development targeted to this development can we shape our teachers' approach to student learning. With racial achievement gaps persisting across this nation's school districts, teacher preparation programs and states should take steps to learn from educators who are having success in their classroom teaching reading to Black students and to create professional development specifically geared toward Black student success to be implemented at every school in the state.

District Hiring Practices. The findings of the current study suggest that through intentionally focusing the development in educators of an ethic of service (Sergiovanni, 1992) to our historically underserved student groups, districts may be able to close pernicious racial achievement gaps. Successful teachers in this study appear to be strongly motivated by a desire to alter the traditional outcomes of school for students of color. The deliberate recruiting of such teachers and placing a high priority on these characteristics is important. Likewise, the recruitment of principals who are interested in this type of school climate and are committed to collegial work with teachers would be very important.

Equity Policy Development and Implementation. This study found no connection between district equity policies and teacher success teaching reading to Black students. While the district equity policy may have filtered down from district policy to building policy to building practice to teacher practice, the participants in this study are unaware of this. Additionally, while having equity policies to state values and intentions are important, simply having an equity policy is not enough to achieve equitable

outcomes for all students. School districts or states that have adopted educational equity policies should consider how they are being communicated and used district wide. Teachers included in this study emulate characteristics of equitable educators, the concepts of which are in the equity policies, but there is no evidence to suggest that the districts' equity policies had anything to do with their practice. School districts with adopted equity policies should ensure that teachers know how this policy is used at the district level to drive decision making at the school level. Likewise, teachers should be able to speak to the focus on equity their school district employs and how this impacts their instructional practice. If a school district's teacher workforce cannot state how their district's equity policy improves their ability to close achievement gaps in their classrooms, then the policy is just words on a page with no action or accountability to ensure it is occurring.

As noted earlier, policy alone is a technical approach while adaptive approaches are what is needed to ensure our most underserved students experience success in our education system. Teachers are the workforce expected to bring the words of the policy to life inside classrooms in order to ensure every student gets what they need to be successful. Only by developing in teachers an understanding of educational equity as a school's mission can we expect to see meaningful progress in our ability to create an education system that serves all students.

Areas for Further Research

Further research is needed to examine the most beneficial way to provide educators with these experiences, rather than relying on them to occur by chance. This study could be expanded to a larger group of educators in more diverse geographic parts of the nation. Also, ensuring respondents include people of color, principals and students would be another way this research could be expanded.

Conclusion

Every person, of every race, gender, language of origin, mental or physical ability or social class, deserves an equal educational opportunity. Schools should be places where children from every walk of life thrive and grow and ultimately become productive, healthy contributors to our society. In order for us to reach that which continues to evade us, students need educators everywhere to grow in their ability to serve students of color. This study has given me the opportunity to examine the experiences of successful teachers of Black students. Using the model presented at the end of Chapter 4 (figure 9), I propose that the findings of this study be used in the continuous development of our preservice and current teacher workforce by providing them with these strong foundations. When we as a nation work to ensure that every student has access to and experiences success in the education system, students of color benefit, as does every child, family, and business in our state. With more students experiencing success in the education system, the economic advantage to our society will accrue through tax revenue and saving expenditures in crime, health care and a variety of programs (Levin, 2009). Racial wealth gaps will begin to close and society will become

more socially just as a result. Given the racial tension in current times experienced in towns small and large across this nation, social justice must be our goal. I raise my voice in favor of a stronger system where our policies are not just words on paper but have the resources needed to allow every child to reach their fullest potential. Overall, the literature here suggests that policy can play a role in addressing inequality, but the extent to which equity policy plays a role in closing racial reading achievement gaps remains to be seen.

Oregon classrooms, like the rest of the United States, are becoming increasingly more diverse and with that comes an amazing opportunity for us to change the way our education system serves our students. These demographic shifts in our classrooms are not temporary events but a reflection of our future as a nation. We must adaptively grow as educators to meet the needs of our diverse student population and develop ourselves to be culturally competent, culturally responsive, culturally sustaining curators of learning experiences for our nation's youth. I close by quoting civil rights leader the late congressman John Lewis, "If not us then who and if not now then when?"

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Appendix A

Letter to Superintendents to Request Permission to Interview Successful Teachers

Date:

Dear _____,

My name is Kevin Walker, Principal at Rosa Parks Elementary School in Portland Public Schools. I am also an Education Doctorate candidate at Portland State University, and it is for this purpose that I am reaching out to you. My dissertation topic involves reading teachers who are successful teaching reading to Black students in the primary grades. The aggregate results of this study will be published in my final dissertation. We are writing you to request permission to contact teachers in order to ask them to participate in a one-hour confidential interview for the study.

These teachers are being asked to participate in this study because their school has outperformed the state average for reading achievement for Black students. I am hoping to learn more about how they are achieving these remarkable results.

	% of Black students reading at Benchmark (29% is state average 2016-17)	Like Schools % Black Students reading at benchmark (2016-17)
School Name	exact data	exact data

I will use this data to investigate which policies, professional development training and principal leadership behaviors contributed to their success in teaching reading to Black students in the primary grades. The participants will all be confidential, and there will be no way to tie the responses to individuals or to schools/districts included in the study. **I thank you for your assistance in my research and if you approve, the permission to contact the teachers about their participation.**

If you have any questions whatsoever about this request or the research itself, please feel free to contact me, Kevin Walker, at 863-640-0449, kwalke2@pdx.edu, or our Portland State University doctoral candidate supervisor, Deborah Peterson, at (503) 490 5504 or dpeterso@pdx.edu. I would appreciate your approval to include your successful teachers in the study.

Sincerely,

Kevin Walker
EdD Candidate Portland State University

Appendix B

Letter to Principals

Date:

Dear _____,

My name is Kevin Walker, Principal at Rosa Parks Elementary School in Portland Public Schools. I am also an Education Doctorate candidate at Portland State University, and it is for this purpose that I am reaching out to you. I am conducting a study of reading teachers who are successful teaching reading to Black students in the primary grades. The aggregate results of this study will be published in my final dissertation.

I am writing to request your help in identifying which teachers in your school contributed greatly to this success so I may email them for permission to conduct an interview with them. You are being asked to participate in this study because the school you work in has outperformed the state average for reading achievement for Black students and I am hope to learn more about how you are achieving these remarkable results. Teacher participation in this study and all information is confidential, and there will be no way to tie the responses to you or to your teachers/schools/districts. I will confirm with you, prior to publishing the study, that we have protected your confidentiality. I am contacting teachers from different districts across Oregon to participate in this study.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, then let me thank you in advance for your assistance in my research. In addition, after the study begins, you may choose to stop your participation at any time during this study. If you have any questions whatsoever about this request or the research itself, please feel free to contact me, Kevin Walker, at 863-640-0449, kwalke2@pdx.edu, or our Portland State University doctoral candidate supervisor, Deborah Peterson, at (503) 490 5504, dpeterso@pdx.edu.

If you are interested in participating in this study of successful reading teachers of Black students in Oregon please respond to me at kwalke2@pdx.edu by (Date).

Sincerely,

Kevin Walker
EdD Candidate
Portland State University

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter to Teachers

Date:

Dear _____,

My name is Kevin Walker, Principal at Rosa Parks Elementary School in Portland Public Schools. I am also an Education Doctorate candidate at Portland State University, and it is for this purpose that I am reaching out to you. I am conducting a study of reading teachers who are successful teaching reading to Black students in the primary grades. The aggregate results of this study will be published in my final dissertation.

I am writing to request your participation in a one-hour confidential interview. You are being asked to participate in this study because the school you work in has outperformed the state average for reading achievement for Black students and I hope to learn more about how you are achieving these remarkable results. Your participation and all your answers are confidential, and there will be no way to tie the responses to you or to your schools/districts. I will confirm with you, prior to publishing the study, that we have protected your confidentiality. I am contacting teachers from different districts across Oregon to participate in this study.

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, then let me thank you in advance for your assistance in my research. In addition, after the study begins, you may choose to stop your participation at any time during this study. If you have any questions whatsoever about this request or the research itself, please feel free to contact me, Kevin Walker, at 863-640-0449, kwalker2@pdx.edu, or our Portland State University doctoral candidate supervisor, Deborah Peterson, at (503) 490 5504, dpeterso@pdx.edu.

If you are interested in participating in this study of successful reading teachers of Black students in Oregon please respond to me at kwalker2@pdx.edu by (Date).

Sincerely,

Kevin Walker
EdD Candidate
Portland State University

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Teachers Successfully Teaching Reading to Black Students

(Date)

Principal Investigator: Kevin Walker

1. What experiences contributed to your success teaching reading to Black students?

Ask follow up questions based on the respondent's answers; make note of the follow up question.

If the respondent does not mention policy, principal leadership behaviors, or professional development, then ask these questions:

What is the role of your district's equity policy in your success teaching reading to Black students?

What is the role of principal leadership behaviors in your success teaching reading to Black students?

What is the role of professional development in your success teaching reading to Black students?

2. What else do I need to know about why you're successful teaching reading to Black students?
3. Is there anything else you want me to know?

Appendix E

Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title:	Teachers Successfully Teaching Reading to Black Students
Population:	Adult Primary Grade Teachers; Interviews
Researcher:	Kevin Walker, Educational Leadership and Policy Deborah Peterson, Educational Leadership and Policy Portland State University
Researcher Contact:	Kwalke2@pdx.edu / 863-640-0449 Dpeterso@pdx.edu / 503-490-5504

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The box below highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether or not to participate. Carefully review the information provided on this form. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide to participate.

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to investigate teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students in the primary grades. It will seek to identify what has contributed to your success. Teachers are being asked to participate in this study because the school where you work has outperformed the state average for reading achievement for Black students and I hope to learn more about how you are achieving these remarkable results.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last for one hour during which you will be interviewed. This interview will take place outside of your work day and area of work.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to questions related to your experience as a successful teacher of Black students. I will use interview data to draw on what experiences have made you successful in teaching Black students reading.
- **Risks.** While there is little risk of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience or loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in this study, if you should

experience any of these, please contact Kevin Walker, at 863-640-0449, kwalke2@pdx.edu or our Portland State University doctoral candidate supervisor, Deborah Peterson, at (503) 490 5504, dpeterso@pdx.edu immediately and they will assist you with finding appropriate support and will discontinue your participation in the study. In addition, if at any time you would like to withdraw from the study, you may contact Doctoral student Kevin Walker or Doctoral supervisor Dr. Deborah Peterson (dpeterso@pdx.edu) and they will withdraw your data from the study.

- **Benefits.** The benefit of your participation is that you will contribute to the body of research on Black student success. The benefit of participation in this study is high, as the study could potentially provide an evidence-informed method of determining what contributes to successfully teaching reading to Black students. The study could make a significant contribution to the research.
- **Alternatives.** Your participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

Who is conducting this research?

The researcher(s) Kevin Walker and Deborah Peterson from Portland State University are asking for your consent to this research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of the research is to investigate teachers who successfully teach reading to Black students in primary grades. It will seek to identify what has contributed to your success. You are being asked to participate because the school where you work has outperformed the state average for reading achievement for Black students and I hope to learn more about how you are achieving these remarkable results. About 10 people will take part in this research.

What happens if I agree to participate?

If you agree to be in this research, your participation will include being asked pre-determined interview questions during a one-hour interview related to your experiences successfully teaching reading to Black students. We will tell you about any new information that may affect your willingness to continue participation in this research.

What happens to the information collected?

Information collected for this research will be used to draw on what experiences have made you successful in teaching Black students reading. I will protect your confidentiality, ensuring that no information you share can be attributed to you in any way. All information that could link you to this study will be deidentified and will remain confidential. I will confirm the findings with you prior to sharing findings with others.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We will take measures to protect your privacy. All information that could link you to this study will be deidentified and will remain confidential on password protected computer. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy, we can never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected.

To protect the security of all of your personal information, we will use ranges when presenting data and pseudonyms for participants. Despite these precautions, we can never fully guarantee the confidentiality of all study information.

Individuals and organizations that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect research records. This may include private information. These individuals and organizations include the Institutional Review Board that reviewed this research.

What are the benefits if I participate?

You may benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits of participating in this research include contributing to the body of research on Black student success. The benefit of participation in this study is high, as the study could potentially provide an evidence-informed method of determining what contributes to successfully teaching reading to Black students. The study could make a significant contribution to the research.

What are my responsibilities if I choose to participate?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible for: attending a one-hour interview at a date and time that works best for you with the researcher to answer questions related to your experiences.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Portland State University.

There are no costs associated with participation and there is no expectation the participant may incur a cost as a result of taking part in the study.

Will I be paid for participating in this research?

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

<p>General Counsel / Office of the President PO Box 751—POF Portland, OR 97207-0751 (503) 725-4419</p>	<p>Office of Research Integrity PO Box 751 Portland, OR 97207-0751 (503) 725-5484 1 (877) 480-4400</p>
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A law called the Oregon Tort Claims Act may limit the amount of money you can receive from the State of Oregon if you are harmed.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team at:

Kevin Walker or Deborah Peterson
863-640-0449 or 503-490-5504
Kwalke2@pdx.edu or dpeterso@pdx.edu

Who can I speak to about my rights as a research participant?

The Portland State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who independently review research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. The Office of Research Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Office of Research Integrity
PO Box 751
Portland, OR 97207-0751
Phone: (503) 725-5484
Toll Free: 1 (877) 480-4400
Email: psuirb@pdx.edu

Consent Statement

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

By signing below, I understand that I am volunteering to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to provide consent prior to me continuing in the study.

I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date
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Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date
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Appendix F

Responses That Include the Theme of Relationships

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Total
#1	2	-	3	1	3	9
#2	-	-	2	-	1	3
#3	2	-	1	-	2	5
#4	2	-	2	2	3	9
#5	3	-	2	-	3	8
#6	1	-	1	1	3	6
#7	1	-	2	-	1	4
#8	1	-	3	-	3	7
#9	1	-	1	-	1	3
Total	13	0	16	4	20	53

Appendix G

Responses That Include the Theme of Student Motivation and Engagement

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Total
#1	3	-	1	1	3	8
#2	1	-	-	-	2	3
#3	2	-	1	2	3	8
#4	3	-	1	2	3	9
#5	2	-	-	1	2	5
#6	2	-	-	2	2	6
#7	1	-	-	3	2	6
#8	2	-	-	-	1	3
#9	1	-	1	-	2	4
Total	17	0	4	11	20	52

Appendix H

Responses That Include the Themes of Teacher Development and Experience With Privilege and Positionality

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Total
#1	1	-	2	2	1	6
#2	-	-	-	1	1	3
#3	1	-	1	1	1	4
#4	3	-	3	3	3	12
#5	2	-	2	2	-	6
#6	2	-	2	2	2	8
#7	1	-	-	-	1	2
#8	1	-	-	-	1	2
#9	2	1	-	-	-	3
Total	13	1	10	11	10	45

Appendix I**Responses That Include the Theme of High Expectations**

Participants	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Total
#1	1	-	2	1	2	6
#2	1	-	3	2	1	7
#3	3	-	2	-	1	6
#4	2	-	2	-	2	6
#5	-	-	1	-	1	2
#6	1	-	1	1	1	4
#7	-	-	2	1	-	3
#8	1	-	2	-	1	4
#9	1	-	1	-	1	3
Total	10	-	16	5	11	42

Appendix J

Responses That Include the Theme of Standards and Systems

Participants		Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Total
#1		1	-	2	1	-	4
#2		2	-	3	3	3	11
#3		1	-	2	1	1	5
#4		1	-	2	2	1	6
#5		-	-	-	-	-	0
#6		1	-	-	-	-	1
#7		-	-	1	-	-	1
#8		-	-	-	-	-	0
#9		-	1	1	-	-	2
Total		5	1	11	8	5	30