MISSION

The Mission of the Academy is to promote the interests of urban education in both public and private schools and universities in the Metropolitan area.

VISION

The Vision of the Academy is to create an AGORA for the exchange of ideas among educators who wish to encourage and uphold the promotion of the highest standards and ideals of Public Education in the Greater New York Metropolitan area.
As we continue our journey towards becoming a full service educational association, I am proud of the support from our contributing authors – both for our Research Section, and our Short Takes and Perspectives on Education sections. Each year, we try to improve upon our last Journal. In fact, as you probably have already observed, we have even changed the name to The New York Academy of Public Education Research Journal.

I would like to dedicate this issue of the NYAPE Research Journal to the memories of Dr. Michael Capobianco and Patrick Dunleavy, two of our officers who were vitally important to the success of the Academy.

Our Journal Committee is always open to suggestions to improve our product. Please contact me through email or in person to discuss your ideas. With this in mind, our Journal’s name change is the result of a suggestion made by one of our members at last year’s Medalist Dinner. Additionally, we always welcome new members to our Peer Review Committee. Although we would prefer members, all volunteers are welcome. Should you think that you will have some time to spend screening and editing research articles during the fall/winter season, please contact either Dr. Linda Patterson or myself.

Again this year, we have contributing authors from other parts of the world. It is always enlightening to read about happenings in education from Europe and the land down under.

As I do each year, I make a push for membership in this space. If you are reading this Journal and are not a member of The New York Academy of Public Education, I ask that you please consider filing an application for membership. You may find an interactive application on our website, www.nyape.org. There, you will find a little bit about the history of the Academy, as well as eligibility.

As always, I would like to thank the contributing authors of this Research Journal and the Peer Review Team who have tirelessly devoted many hours to ensure a quality product. May I repeat what I boast about each year: it seems that every Journal is bigger and better than the previous year’s edition. This Journal is no exception. Please read through it, devour the content and, if you wish, contact the authors for more information, or comment about your feelings. Many of our authors have provided their contact information for this purpose.

Finally, if I may, I would like to leave you with this thought. Please contact me with your comments about what we are including in the Research Journal. If you like it, say something – if you do not, also say something. You can do this in the form of a Letter to the Editor and send it to me at the email address listed below. Also, kindly encourage colleagues to contribute an article or two to future editions of the Research Journal of the New York Academy of Public Education.

Respectfully,
John C. Jangl, Ed.D.
Editor-in-Chief
Triadedu@aol.com
A Message from the President

It has been a pleasure to serve as President of the New York Academy of Education as it ends its 105th year. The vision of the Academy remains to create an agora for the exchange of ideas among educators who wish to encourage and uphold promotion of higher standards and ideals of Public Education in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area.

To continue with the Academy’s vision, I am honored to introduce to you the New York Academy of Public Education’s Sixth Annual Research Journal. Since we accentuate research articles, our name this year has changed to “Research Journal.” Our Journal also contains reports, and practical articles that are applicable to all members of our Academy and educators at large.

On behalf of the New York Academy of Public Education Officers and Board of Directors, we would like to thank Editor-in-Chief, John C. Jangl, Ed.D. and Assistant Editor, Linda K. Patterson, Ph.D. along with the Peer Review Committee for the creation and publication of the sixth annual NYAPE Research Journal. We would also like to thank the authors who contributed their manuscripts to make our Research Journal an informative collaboration from school leaders and college professors.

Marisa A. Bolognino
President
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Engaging Students in Learning: Interpreting Emotions Through Their Drawings

Soonhyang Kim, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida
Marissa Rubino, artist (Pace University alumni)
Francine Falk-Ross, Pace University, Pleasantville, New York
Jennifer Pankowski, Pace University, New York City, New York

Abstract

Providing clues to understanding emotions in students’ drawings can help teachers provide support and guidance for their students. This paper explores how teachers can decode the meanings behind students’ illustrations. Based on various teaching experiences in high school and elementary school settings, coupled with research-based strategies, this paper provides information and suggestions for teachers to provide instructional support through decoding of hidden messages within students’ artwork. This paper also describes a compilation of experiences and findings in order to direct teachers’ attention towards learning about the hidden emotions that are often portrayed within individual student drawings. This paper aids teachers in developing an understanding of student emotions in order to help provide guidance and support.

Drawing has been recognized as one of the ways children express their emotions and has been identified as such by psychologists, psychiatrists, and art therapists who commonly work with children to understand their emotions (Brecher, Baldy, & Picard, 2009; Brechet & Jolley, 2014; Bonoti & Micalodi, 2015). In many cases, drawing is a way a child can express him- or herself when language may not resolve an emotion. Children draw for many reasons, and for some it is because they had a personal experience with art or an affinity for drawing. Often, children express different types of emotions within their artwork. The most commonly displayed emotions are happiness, sadness, anger, and fear (Brecher et al., 2009).

Another consideration is that the environment within which a child draws and the materials he or she uses can influence the drawings, as well (Flood, Brice Heath, & Lapp, 2014). Educators should understand that it is important to learn what color and imagery means to children when analyzing the emotional content of their work. For example, children use art to integrate not only their inner experiences and perceptions but also to link experiences from the outside world to their inner selves, and this helps them to discover and affirm themselves and their relationships to people, environment, and society: “Children’s drawings reflect attempts to create representations of their experiences. These visual representations begin when young children use marks, lines, and shapes to stand for a person, object, and in some cases, movement” (Soundy & Lee, 2013, p. 71). This area is important to investigate to find out if students know they are drawing these emotions or if the drawings are from their subconscious.

In short, educators may be able to use drawings to better communicate with their students and help guide them in the right path for decision making. Students may have a hard time expressing themselves verbally, and artwork can be a way to make a connection without the need for verbal communication. Understanding students’ artwork offers educators the opportunity to use interdisciplinary teaching methods through multiple forms, whether it be writing, music, or theater, as well as physical drawings. If teachers can understand hidden messages in students’ artwork, these can help provide additional personal and emotional support they may need from parents and school representatives.

The purpose of this paper is to identify a process through which teachers can identify emotions in students’ drawings. This project analyzes how a teacher can decode the meanings behind an illustration. Studies show that children draw in stages referred to as the Six Major Stages of Artistic Development (Malchiodi, 1998), and understanding the meaning behind colors can help interpret messages. The inquiry questions that guided this investigation were based on content of medium selection and images to better understand students’ drawings such as: Do young children draw emotions subconsciously, while adolescents draw with a purpose? How do children respond to questions about their drawing? Does the child associate images in the drawing with her or himself, or does she or he not seem to self-associate with the drawing? Lastly, are the student’s drawings developmentally appropriate for the child’s age? It is important for educators to understand their students’ thinking, and “knowing how children normally express themselves through drawing at various ages is essential to understanding children’s drawings in general” (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 64).

Literature Review

Art is a way that teachers and students can communicate in a non-verbal way. Knowing how to interpret hidden messages within students’ artwork can help students in all aspects of their education, such as insecurity, problems at home, being bullied, or any other anxiety that students may experience (Brechet & Jolley,
Students may or may not know they are expressing these emotions as an art form. If teachers can depict any emotional stress, it can be brought to the attention of a guidance counselor to provide the student with any necessary therapy or guidance. A review of related research literature, as follows, indicates that the areas in which art expression and the environment, and words and the emotional environment co-occur. This observational research on students’ artwork for topics on self-expression, interpretation, and captured emotions using words did not document if these emotions were actually known by the artist creating it; that is, the artist did not share information with researchers as to the underlying emotions in the drawings. Student interviews about the drawings are needed to provide insight into teachers’ understandings of the students’ engagement in learning.

Art Expression and Environment

Booth-Church (2013) focuses on the process of art making and how children express themselves through artistic movement. She explains that children need to be able to express themselves, and “we all know how important open-ended art materials are as an outlet for children’s emotions. A lump of clay or a brush at the easel allows children to express joy and happiness, or work through feelings of sadness, fear, or anger. Children express themselves through their artistic movements” (p. 2).

One major topic related to art expression and environment is how to discuss children’s art. Children make a personal connection with their artwork and may feel at times they are judged on what they create. Therefore, the delivery and approach on discussing their art should be to focus on allowing the child to share and talk about their work. The safest way for a teacher to respond is to not respond right away. Soundy and Lee (2013) discuss how a safe environment should be created in a classroom for students to feel willing to share their thoughts and artwork. They explain that students need to have the sense of comfort to be able to express themselves openly: “Teachers can prepare (students) by establishing a safe environment in which children can create and shape their thoughts at will. By taking time to talk with children, teachers can help them become aware of their feelings. Teachers can also work with empathy alongside child artists offering children freedom to voice their imaginations and their creative thoughts” (p. 76). Other research shows that drawing led to a guided path for feelings and emotion, life experiences, verbal interpretation, and helped to create triangulation of study data (Kearny & Hyle, 2004). Further, the students themselves were asked to use a verbal response to their artwork in order to understand and interpret children’s drawings (Malin, 2013).

Words and Emotional Interpretation

Pellish (2012)’s research focused on how students’ knowledge, memories, and experience can be a great source for art making and a way for students to form their identity in elementary school. Key findings in the research were collected by using the words “past,” “present,” and “future” for students to draw and make connections to their life and what they remembered by retrieving memories to create artwork. Other research articles (e.g., Misailidi & Bonoti, 2008) incorporated words to capture self-expression that used happiness, fear, sadness, and calmness to express emotions. They also used line weights and colors in drawings to help interpret a child’s drawing, which allowed for teachers to find subconscious emotion in children’s artwork. Malchiodi (1998) further develops the concept of understanding line weight and color to convey emotion and message that may be subconsciously underlying in the student. Over 100 examples of artwork are included and broken down for understanding.

Other ways students can interpret drawings is to decode and analyze fellow student’s artwork. Brecher et al. (2009) conducted a study that compared the difference of emotional understanding in students ages 6 to 11 and the ability to know emotions in their own figure drawings. This study tested the comprehension of knowing different emotions in figure drawings and found that students ages 6 to 11 were able depict the emotions happiness and sadness first, before the emotions fear, anger and disgust.

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Research also indicated that there is a trend which focuses mainly on the emotions happiness, sadness, anger and fear, and time periods such as past, present and future. After reviewing the articles we found that although these articles discuss the way students express emotions through colors, line weight, and other forms and how teachers can decode it, prior research on this topic does not identify if the students understood their own works of art. If students understand the emotions they are portraying in their drawings, they may be able to better verbalize their feelings or address topics of concern with a teacher or parent. Art is a non-verbal form of communication and should be taken into deep consideration when being evaluated.
Approaches Toward Student Drawings’ Interpretation

Using information gained through observations and experiences with elementary and high school students where students were asked to draw on a topic of their choosing to depict the present time and the future, in order to identify common elements useful for teachers’ applications. Information was gathered to provide support to students through decoding hidden messages within their artwork. The intention was to support teachers and provide insight on how to decode emotions, consciously or subconsciously, being expressed by the students but not voicing it verbally. It gives insight to how an educator should think about non-verbal cues a student may be expressing.

The researchers’ stance is important for contextualizing, the process through which many teachers approach their consideration of students’ drawings and how educators can decode the meanings behind an illustration. While observing an art class one semester, one researcher noticed a student doodling on her paper while listening to the class assignment. After attending the class a few times it was noticed that she often drew teardrops. One teardrop was very bright and vibrant using colors while others were dark and looked very sad. This artwork provoked the question, “why she always drew this one picture over and over again and altered the appearance of it to have different moods? And what was the hidden message she was trying to convey behind this teardrop? Did she know what she was expressing? Was this teardrop something a teacher or parent should be concerned about? Was this a subconscious drawing or was there purpose behind the illustration? Do teachers understand how to interpret a student’s drawing? Research discussing students drawing their past, present and future, and also using the words happiness, sadness, anger and fear led to the consideration that other teachers could use these approaches to support students’ engagement in learning.

Themes for Consideration

Stages of artistic development. Theorists such as Piaget (1959) influence this type of research because this data collection uses methods to research the unconscious mind. Like Piaget, this research observed how children make connections to existing aspects of the world. An activity like this will help teachers understand their students’ drawings better and provide another form of insight to their students’ lives. The Six Major Stages of Artistic Development by Lowenfeld (cited in Malichiodi, 1998) (see Figure 1) and Common Color Associations (see Figure 2) are used to complete an analysis of these drawings.

Analysis of the drawings were completed by rating the drawing for the category in which most of the characteristics were present and then having another rater independently rate the characteristics to find the reliability of the rating. When agreement is found, the drawing was labeled for its characteristics. Figure 1: Six Major Stages of Artistic Development by Lowenfeld (cited in Malichiodi, 1998)

1. Scribbling (ages 2 to 4 years): earliest drawings often kinesthetically based, eventually becoming representative of mental activity; various types of scribbles including disordered, longitudinal, and circular; naming of scribbles at the end of this stage.
2. Preschematic (ages 4 to 7 years): early development of representational symbols, particularly rudimentary forms representing humans.
3. Schematic (ages 7 to 9 years): continuing development of representational symbols, particularly a schema for figures, objects, composition, and color; use of a baseline.
4. Dawning Realism (ages 9 to 11 years): increasing skill at depicting spatial depth and color in nature, along with increasing rigidity in art expression.
5. Pseudorealism (ages 11 to 13 years): more critical awareness of human figures and environment and increasing detail; increasing rigidity in art expression; caricature.
6. Period of Decision (Adolescence): expression is more sophisticated and detailed; some children do not reach this stage unless they continue or are encouraged to make art.

Figure 2: Common Color Associations

Red birth, blood, fire, emotion, warmth, love passion, wounds, anger heat, life
Orange fire, harvest, warmth, energy, misfortune, alienation, assertiveness, power
Yellow sun, light, warmth, wisdom, intuition, hope, expectation, energy, riches, and masculinity
Green earth, fertility, vegetation, nature, growth, cycles of renewal, envy, over protectiveness, creativity
Blue sky, water, sea, heaven, spirituality, relaxation, cleansing, nourishing, calm, loyalty
Purple royalty, spirituality, wealth, authority, death, resurrection, imagination, attention, excitement, paranoia, persecution
Black darkness, emptiness, mystery, beginning, womb, unconsciousness, death, depression, and loss
Brown fertility, soil, sorrow, roots, excrement, dirt, worthlessness, and new beginnings
White light, virginity, purity, moon, spirituality, creation, timeless, dreamlike, resurrection, clarity, loss, synthesis, enlightenment
Drawings’ Interpretation

Main themes for teachers to consider include the following. The teacher’s comments along with field observations were analyzed for main themes in the students’ drawings.

Adolescent Drawing

Adolescents’ anxiety focused on the future. Adolescent drawings below show the students self expression for each description asked by the instructor: free – draw, past, present and future expressions. Each student’s drawing reflects an abundance of expression and hidden messages, cues and meaning an educator can use to help provide guidance and support to the student. In general, adolescents’ focus on the future depicted negative emotions. Specifically, for drawings focused on the present time, many of the female students drew using color, while many of the male students only used black or pencil to draw. The free-draw consisted of things from nature, bubbly organic shapes, and fairytale like characters or abstract figures. The past drawings contained figures of hearts or animals, or depicted pain or trips they took as children (Refer to Figure 3). Overall, there was a sense of sadness in many of these drawings. The present drawing for many of the students were positive and contained more use of color than the other drawings. The overall sense of emotion within the present drawings was optimism, happiness, and experiences students were looking forward to such as birthdays, vacation, working or the class they most enjoyed in school. The future drawings for many students were line drawings with limited color or an overall composition that was not completed and missing elements, such as a classroom with a chalkboard and desk without the teacher in the drawing. By understanding students’ emotions through the comparison of their present- and future-time of their drawings, we can see that they have doubts how they can accomplish this and might be confused.

An educator can now be aware of which student needs guidance and support, and although a specific student may hide behind the facade of being a troubled teen, she is extremely bright and can do many things if she is shown the people around her believe in her. Adolescents look for guidance although they may not verbal express this. The past, present, and future exercise can be used to help guide students to accomplish the inevitable and make their dreams come true by finding the opportunities that lie within their emotion expressing drawings.
Elementary Students’ Drawing

Elementary students focus on family and fear of the unknown. The children started quickly and were allowed to draw with pencil, colored pencils and/or markers. They were very excited to tell the teacher what they were drawing and why. The teacher noticed that the children, like the teenagers, tended to be much more reserved and kept to themselves. Many of the young children shared the same thoughts within their drawings. Fear for many was a thunderstorm and/or death. Happiness was filled with bright colors of a landscape with flowers, candy, and activities they like to do. Sadness revolved around a pet or family member that passed away and, for some children, getting in trouble. Many students wrote sentences to explain the scene in their drawing. Based alone on her fear drawing a teacher can see there certainly are situations in which she is scared or a sense of confusion of the unknown.

A teacher can use this to make connections to home life situations and/or dig deeper to see if there are any underlying reasons for this dark and fearful use of expression to provide the student with needed support. If a student is showing changes in behavior with no verbal communication as to why, a teacher can use this exercise in form of imagery to indirectly communicate with the students’ self-expression. This type of drawing tells a story from within the student that allows the teacher to use as guidance to help provide the tools needed to improve a student’s education, social skills, confidence, create a solution or any other help a student is reaching out for. Drawings hold non-verbal cues which an educator should be open to and
Figure 4: Elementary Students’ Drawing

Hidden emotions. Both case studies showed that hidden emotions are portrayed within students’ drawings. Educators can look at the artwork of a student and help guide them in directions they may need to go but are not receiving from home, school or their community. These non-verbal messages are expressed in ways that the student may not know they are expressing, and it is up to the teacher to see these messages and provide the guidance or needed support.

Discussion

Students draw for many reasons. By understanding how to analyze emotions within their artwork, teachers can better understand how to provide support to their students (Dadds et al., 2016; Buchanan, 2016). This research illustrates that, both children (k-6) and adolescents (7-12) students use both conscious and unconscious drawing within their artwork. Students’ drawings hold hidden messages within their illustrations and “children feel the need to tell their own stories to make sense of what is unfolding around them” (Pellish, 2012, p. 19). Teachers can use these strategies to help students through difficulties they may be enduring in their lives. Throughout the various stages of this study, observations of young children and adolescents tended to be very similar but, at the same time very different. The topics the young children chose to draw, such as fear of death, were astonishing. The maturity of the elementary students to draw and discuss this fear was altogether amazing and interesting. Although the adolescent drawings carried more depth and detail, the younger children portrayed powerful meanings within their line drawings as well, and it was found that both categories of students draw on a conscious and subconscious level.

Based on these observations, it was noted that children found it hard to draw strictly from imagination, and “art making always occurs in a cultural context, and so understanding who children are as artists requires looking at how they situate their art making in their cultural setting” (Malchiodi, 2013, p. 8). There is little stimulation needed for younger children; they tend to be self-starters when it comes to drawing, and are generally more spontaneous and less concerned with photographically accurate details in their drawings. Adolescents tend to be more reluctant to begin work and will draw what they see physically in front of them or what they see surrounding themselves in life or the world. The elementary students were very excited to start drawing. Meanwhile, some high school students sat for three minutes before they were told they only have a few minutes left to draw something. Educators have to act as facilitators and encourage students to construct their own life as a narrative because, “young children assume the role of investigators during their elementary years (Pellish, 2012, p. 24). One student in high school mentioned there was no color in her future when drawing her “future drawing.” Later on, when viewing her work there was color but it was very muted and faded. There was a true disconnection from how she was expressing herself verbally and her drawing. Malchiodi (2013) states it the best when she said, “knowing how children normally express themselves through drawing at various ages is essential to understanding children’s drawings in general” (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 64).

Educational Implications

Drawing as Non-Verbal Play

Teachers can put the information of understanding students’ emotions through drawings into practice by using these drawings as a non-verbal way of self-expression and teacher/student communication. This study illustrates that drawings contain multiple different elements, and it is important for teachers to know what these elements are in order to correctly analyze illustrations and subsequently determine the emotion message they may be sending. It provides an insight to self-expression through images/drawings a student may be trying to convey but not voicing it verbally. It gives insight to how an educator should think about non-verbal cues a student may be expressing. Malchiodi (1998) stated, “The overall consensus is that art expressions are uniquely personal statements that have elements of both conscious and unconscious meaning in them and can be representative of many different aspects of the children who create them” (p. 33). This statement portrays similar findings to this study. Rather than using spoken language with a student, drawings can be used as another form of communication and capture the underlying subconscious expression.

Consideration of Setting/Environment

Another recommendation developed from this study is that a teacher be aware of the setting/environment around their students. This study shows that the environment within which a child draws can influence the drawings along with the materials they are given, and “children, like adults, have preferences of colors for certain images they like to draw, compositional styles and other characteristics that they may repeat in their work” (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 65). Knowledge of the environment within which a student draws is also necessary to understand what certain colors and/or images
mean to the student when analyzing their work. As a teacher you should question if you see a student constantly drawing and repeating the same object/image because “visual representation begin when young children use marks, lines, and shapes to stand for a person, object, and in some cases, movement” (Soundy, 2013, p. 71). Children use art to integrate not only their inner experiences and perceptions but also to link experiences of the outside world with their inner self. This helps them to discover and affirm themselves and their relationships to people, their environment, and society.

**Awareness of differentiation**

Educators can learn an abundance of information from both case studies, and these findings can have an impact on their teaching. While remembering that it is important to include/infuse fun, interesting art projects in educational experiences, teachers need to be mindful to keep in mind that every student is different, and they express themselves in different ways (Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2004, 2006). Some students like to have instruction and others like to explore their own creativity. Art is a way for children to express themselves in a creative way and may be an escape from reality for some. Children arrive at the images they draw by memory, imagination and life. Educators need to remember that art comes in all shapes, forms and sizes, and there is emotional meaning in every work of art. Art making is a process that bring various experiences into context to create something new, personal, and unique, and with that impression, each student will always create a piece of artwork that is emotional and personal to them in one shape or form.

**Conclusion**

Teachers without art training can use this article to gain knowledge about color and age expression through art, and to be more attentive to their students’ drawing to see if students may express something they may not express verbally and perhaps seek a school therapist, counselor if needed to learn how to interpret students’ drawing. Teachers can also use this article as reference on how to use this type of drawing to create a safe atmosphere for communication between student and teacher using emotional words stated within the article. Providing a safe atmosphere in an educational environment a student may feel open to expressing hidden feelings and/or messages, providing the teacher with opportunity to gain insight on each student’s needs.

**References**


Soonhyang Kim, Ph.D., is ESOL/TESOL program coordinator and an assistant professor of TESOL in the Department of Childhood Education, Literacy, and TESOL at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, USA. Her recent research interests are pre-/in-service teacher preparation, second and bilingual language/literacy development, academic oral classroom discourse, non-native, English-speaking teacher issue, and online teacher education. E-mail: S.Kim@unf.edu or TESOLKIM@gmail.com (60 words)

Marissa Rubino, MST., is an Artist, Holistic Life Coach, and Art Education Graduate of Pace University, Pleasantville, New York. Her interests consist of self-discovery and self-expression through art, meditation and movement.  Her recent focus is her own line of inspirational works of art to promote encouragement throughout the mind, body and soul. E-mail: mrubino84@gmail.com

Francine Falk-Ross is Professor and Coordinator of the Literacy Education Program at Pace University in Pleasantville, New York. Her interests are language and literacy issues, media literacy, and middle level teacher education. Her articles, books, and book chapters on literacy education issues have been published in peer-reviewed publications. Her recent text is Language-Based Approaches to Support Reading Comprehension. E-mail: ffalkross@pace.edu

Jennifer Pankowski, Pace University, New York City, New York
After completing her Educational Doctoral Degree at Long Island University in Curriculum and Instruction (2013), Dr. Pankowski joined the Pace University School of Education as the coordinator of Special Education in NYC. Her research is currently focused in the field of special education teacher preparation using technology and the arts as a means of developing teacher efficacy.
Preparing Early Childhood Educators to Work with Infants and Toddlers

The first three years of life constitute a period of profound advances in reasoning, language acquisition, attachment formations, and problem solving. Importantly, a child’s social environment can dramatically influence the degree and pace of these advances (Siegel, 2011). Research in brain development in early childhood has found that early interactions between children and caregivers play a key role in the development of the structure and functioning of the brain (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007). From birth, a young child’s brain is experience-dependent and it requires supportive, caring, stable, and stimulating interactions with adults in order to develop properly (Gerhardt, 2003). These interactions impact children’s ability to learn, their capacity to socialize and communicate, and their sense of self-worth and competence throughout their life span (Fogel, 2014). Increasingly, children ages birth-to-three spend a significant amount of time in early childhood education settings. Children in this age group have unique developmental and curricular needs, and consequently, it is important that early childhood educators are trained to work with this age group.

This article proposes that teacher preparation programs in early childhood should offer teacher candidates a special course focusing on the needs of children ages birth-to-three, because the developmental and programmatic needs of infants and toddlers are distinct to those of children at other early childhood stages. The article explores the effectiveness of such courses by comparing early childhood teachers who took a birth-to-three course as part of their teacher preparation program to teachers who did not, in regards to their levels of knowledge and skills related to working with infants and toddlers.

Theoretical Background

Infancy and toddlerhood are part of early childhood, yet at the same time, are a distinctive stage in development. Most developmental theorists consistently view the years between birth and age three as a unique phase in child development. For example, Piaget (1932) believed that children at this age are in the sensorimotor stage of cognitive development, and they need to explore and understand the world through their senses. At this stage children need to master object permanence and begin the process of symbolic thinking and symbolic representation. These processes have an impact on a child’s reasoning, language acquisition, and problem solving throughout the life span.

Similarly, Erickson (1963) believed that infants have the developmental task of learning to trust the world and the adults around them and begin the process of attachment formation. According to Erickson, the blue prints for all human relationships are laid out during infancy, and the task at this stage has clear developmental impacts on the processes of socialization and the ability to build trusting and lasting emotional relationship with others. According to Erickson, during toddlerhood children begin to negotiate a balance between the need for autonomy and the need to cope with social expectations. The way a child solves this task has clear developmental impacts on emotional regulation and behavioral outcomes such as compliance and self-assertion through the rest of the child’s life (Erickson, 1963).

What Important Information do Educators Need?

Children ages birth-to-three require a great deal of adult guidance, care and support. For the first few years of life children are totally dependent on their caregivers for all their needs. For these reasons, educators need to be highly competent at addressing children’s needs. The following areas were identified as central for birth-to-three teacher preparation (Wittmer & Petersen, 2010):

1. Infant and Toddler Development:
   a. Understanding infants’ and toddlers’ cognitive, language, social and emotional development
   b. Skills to support development in infants and toddlers.

2. Early Childhood Education Programs for Children Ages Birth-to-Three:
   a. Understanding the variety of infant and toddler programs
   b. Skills to develop age appropriate curriculum
c. Skills to work closely with families and in the home environment

1. Infant and Toddler Development:

Educators need an understanding of infants’ and toddlers’ significant and rapid gains in the areas of perceptual and sensorial skills, conceptual, representational and symbolic thinking, communicative and linguistic skills, social and interactive skills, self-regulatory, copying, expressive and emotive skills (Fogel, 2014). These rapid and significant changes in development also present vulnerabilities, and educators need to recognize signs of typical and atypical development, risk factors, disabilities, delays, and resilience (Wittmer & Petersen, 2010). Educators need a deep understanding of what conditions are most conducive for infants’ and toddlers’ learning, and the developmental origins of perceiving, remembering, thinking, and speaking (Fogel, 2014). Some questions educators need to answer are: How are infants connected to the world of people and objects around them? What are the roles of caregiver-child relationships in early development? (Fogel, 2014).

Educators need information about ways to support these diverse developmental tasks, while recognizing that infant and toddler developmental needs are the same time universal, but vary across individual, family, and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1978).

2. Early Childhood Education Programs for Children Ages Birth-to-Three:

In addition to the need for understanding the distinct developmental and learning needs of infants and toddlers, educators need a comprehensive understanding of the various educational programs and settings in which infants, toddlers, and their families are served. Infants and toddlers are served through several different programs aiming at fostering optimal early development and reduce exposure to risk factors, such as child-care, Early Head Start, Early Intervention, and home visitation programs.

Child-care programs are used by a growing number of children and families. Due to family work trends, the number of children birth-to-three in child-care has been increasing steadily in past 30 years. For example, the number of mothers of young children joining the workforce has been rising sharply in the past decades, and in 2013 approximately 70 percent of all American mothers, were part of the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). These changes in the workforce have led many countries to make changes in the way they prepare educators to work with the youngest children (Kamerman & Gatenio Gabel, 2007). Child-care programs typically operate as non-profit community or agency supported, for profit, church supported, or on-site businesses available for company employees.

Other programs for infants and toddlers are considered intervention programs targeting infants and toddlers at risk. For example, Early Head Start serves children birth to age three, who are at risk of poor developmental outcomes because of poverty or other contextual risks. This federally funded program provides services for families such as child development class, parent education, and early child education in community centers or in the home environment. Early Head Start stresses high quality programing and collaboration between community agencies and families (Wittmer & Petersen, 2010).

Another program for infants and toddlers is early intervention for children with delays or disabilities. All infants and toddlers are entitled to a comprehensive assessment to determine whether the child has a delay or disability. If a child’s development is delayed, a plan is developed to meet the needs of the infant or toddler and the family. This plan usually includes a combination of services including early education, typically taking place in the child’s home or child-care center.

Lastly, many home visitation programs are available for this age as part of Early Head Start, Early Intervention, or other federally and state funded programs to support development, prevent abuse or neglect, and promote health (Roggman, Boyce, & Innocenti, 2008).

In addition to a substantial understanding of the varied educational programs available for children this age, educators need to develop competency in developing appropriate curriculum to fit these different settings. One important difference between birth-to-three educators and other educators is that that birth-to-three educators need to development a comprehensive understanding of effective strategies and skills for working with families both in a center-based program and in the home environment, as well as familiarity with community-based organizations and agencies (Roggman et al., 2008).

How Are Early Childhood Educators Being Prepared to Work with Children Ages Zero-to-Three?

Early childhood education teachers are trained to be competent at addressing the developmental and curricular needs of children ages birth-to-eight. Nevertheless, this early childhood period includes a variety
of ages and stages that are distinct. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that all early childhood professionals have a broad knowledge of development and learning across each stage ranging from birth through age eight, including infants and toddlers, preschool, kindergarten, or early elementary grades (NAEYC, 2009). NAEYC states that without knowing about the precursors to children’s current development and learning trajectory, teachers cannot design effective learning opportunities within their specific professional assignment (NAEYC, 2009).

Because infants and toddlers have different developmental, socialization, programming, and curricular needs than preschoolers, kindergartners and school age children, early childhood teacher education programs attempt to prepare professionals to work with infants and toddlers in two ways. Some programs choose to embed implications for children birth-to-three throughout their general early childhood coursework. Such programs might address infant and toddler needs in courses such as “literacy and language development of children birth-to-eight” or “math and science teaching methods for children birth-to-eight.” In some cases, programs address infants and toddlers needs in courses designed to address the needs of children birth-to-sixth grade and even birth-to-twelve grade. The second approach institutions take is to design a specific course that addresses the distinct needs of this developmental stage.

For example, an exploration of Schools of Education in the State of New York revealed that 100% (N = 47) of schools of education in New York State offer early childhood education programs, and 68% (N = 32) attempt to address infant and toddler needs by embedding implications for this age group throughout other early childhood education coursework, while 32% (N = 15) offer a course specialized in addressing the needs of infants and toddlers (a detailed list of school names and course offering is available in APPENDIX A). This information is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Schools of Education in the State of New York.
special course designed to work with children ages birth-to-three as part of the early childhood preparation program and half the candidates did not take such a course, but covered the content in birth-to-eight courses.

Participants

There were 73 participants that took part in this study. Participants were candidates for the degree and certification in early childhood education in the State of New York. All candidates were in the final stages of their education and were surveyed before student teaching. Candidates were identified through faculty in their programs. Forty-one (56.1%) participants took an infant and toddler development and education course as part of their program, while 32 (43.9%) did not.

Procedure

Candidates were asked to answer a survey specifically designed for this study. A copy of the survey is available in APPENDIX B. All participants consented to participate in the study.

Measures

Knowledge and Understanding. Knowledge and Understanding of key birth-to-three topics were measured by part one of the survey. This part of the survey asked candidates to rate their knowledge and understanding of the following topics: the different programs in the U.S. that are designed for infants and toddlers, brain development and its importance in the first three years of life, attachment and the role of relationships, language development and its importance in the first three years of life, cognitive development and its importance in the first three years of life, curriculum considerations for infants and toddlers, and services for infants and toddlers with special needs, disabilities or delays. Respondents used the following response scale to answer the survey questions: 1= I don’t have a good understanding at all, 2 = I have a somewhat good understanding, 3 = I have a good understanding, 4 = I have a very good understanding, 5 = I have an excellent understanding. These topics were identified as the most significant topics in infant and toddler development, based on a review of the literature (e.g. Fogel, 2014; Wittmer & Petersen, 2010).

Skills. Skills in working with children ages birth-to-three were measured by part two of the survey. In part two, candidates were asked to rate how prepared they felt to accomplish the following tasks: promoting language development in infants and toddlers, promoting social and emotional development in infants and toddlers, promoting cognitive development in infants and toddlers, developing multi-sensory curriculum for infants and toddlers, developing age-appropriate behavior expectations for infants and toddlers, employing several home-visiting strategies that engage families, and working with families in the home environment. Respondents used the following response scale to answer these survey questions: 1= not prepared at all, 2 = somewhat prepared, 3 = prepared, 4 = well prepared, 5 = very well prepared. These skills were identified as the most significant skills in working with infants and toddlers based on a review of the literature (e.g. Fogel, 2014; Wittmer & Petersen, 2010).

Results

To answer the research questions, two MANOVA models were conducted. In the first model, the variables related to knowledge were used as the dependent variables; the independent variable was whether or not the participants took a class with infant and toddler content (Yes/No). In the second model, the variables related to skills were used as the dependent variables while the independent variable was whether or not the participants took the infant and toddler class (Yes/No). The results from Wilks’ λ test were used in addressing the research questions. The analyses were conducted using SPSS and statistical significance was evaluated at an alpha level of 0.05.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 evaluated the differences in knowledge and understanding between those who took an infant and toddler class and those who did not. A MANOVA was used to examine the effect of taking the class (Did you take a course that is specific to infant and toddler development and education?) on seven dependent variables that were related to levels of knowledge and understanding. The results showed a statistically significant multivariate effect of taking the class (multivariate F (7, 65) = 6.82, p = .001; Wilk’s λ = 0.57, partial Eta squared = .42) for the combined dependent variable that included the seven survey questions related to levels of knowledge and understanding. Next, the researchers examined the specific dependent variables that contributed to the significant overall effect for Research Question 1. The univariate effects displayed in Table 1 for the effect of taking a class on each of the seven dependent variables were statistically significant (p < .05). Rating of understanding were significantly higher for those who took the course in each of the seven variables.
Table 1
Comparing Knowledge and Understanding among Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of knowledge</th>
<th>Candidates who took a birth-to-three course</th>
<th>Candidates who did not take a birth-to-three course</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs in the U.S. that are designed for infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain development and its importance in the first three years of life</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment, and the role of relationships</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language development and its importance in the first three years of life</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive development and its importance in the first three years of life</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum considerations for infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for infants and toddlers with special needs, disabilities or delays</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** = p < .001

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 evaluated the differences in skill level between those who took an infant and toddler class and those who did not. An initial MANOVA examined taking the class (yes vs. no) as the independent variable; the seven variables related to level of skills and preparation were the dependent variables. The results showed a statistically significant effect of taking the class (multivariate F (7, 65) = 6.82, p = .001; Wilk’s λ = 0.57, partial Eta squared = .57) for the combined dependent variable made up of the seven survey questions related to level of skills and preparation. Next, the researcher examined the specific dependent variables that contributed to the significant overall effect for Research Question 2. Table 2 shows the effect of taking the class on each of the seven dependent variables. The univariate effects were statistically significant (p < .05) for all dependent variables. Participants who took the class had significantly higher average ratings of preparation as compared to those who did not take the class in each of the seven variables.

Table 2
Comparing Skills among Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Candidates who took birth-to-three course</th>
<th>Candidates who did not take birth-to-three course</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting language development in infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting social and emotional development in infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting cognitive development in infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop multi-sensory curriculum for infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop age-appropriate behavior expectations for infants and toddlers</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employ several home-visiting strategies that engage families</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with families in the home environment</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** = p < .001

Discussion

Birth-to-three constitutes a critical and vulnerable stage in development. Increasingly, children spend a significant amount of time during those years in early childhood education programs. Training early childhood education professionals to work with this age group should be considered a priority to teacher preparation programs in early childhood. This study proposed that in order to meet the needs of birth-to-three educators, programs should develop and offer a specialized course focusing on the content that professionals need.

The results of this study support this approach. This study compared pre-service teachers in their knowledge and skills related to working with children ages birth-to-three gained in their early childhood programs. The findings show that teachers who were offered a specialized birth-to-three course rated their knowledge regarding programs in the U.S. that are designed for infants and toddlers, brain development, attachment and the role of relationships, language development, cognitive development, curriculum considerations, and services for infants and toddlers with special needs, disabilities or delays significantly higher than teachers who did not take this course.

In addition, the results of the study show that teachers who were offered a specialized birth-to-three course rated their ability to promote language, social, emotional, and cognitive development in infants and toddlers, develop multi-sensory curriculum, develop age-appropriate behavior expectations, employ several home-visiting strategies that engage families, and work with families in the home environment significantly higher than teachers who did not take this course.

Although some higher education programs may embed information about children ages birth-to-three throughout their courses, the time dedicated to this age period is not clear. It is possible that when information about infants and toddlers is embedded in birth-to-eight courses, faculty and assignments focus primarily on the needs of preschoolers, kindergartners, and school age children, while very little time is dedicated to the specific needs of the youngest children. Further research can explore how much time is focused on infants and toddlers in such courses.

In sum, the results of this study have implications for teacher education and for policies addressing the needs of professionals and of the increasing number of children ages birth-to-three in early childhood education programs.
References

### APPENDIX A

Teacher Preparation Programs in Colleges and Universities in the State of New York

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/University</th>
<th>Offers Early Childhood Certification Program</th>
<th>Offers Infant and Toddler Specialized Course</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Adelphi University</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank Street College of Education</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Canisius College</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia-Greene College</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUNY Brooklyn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X PreK-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY City</td>
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</tr>
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<td>CUNY Lehman</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY Medgar Evans</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Manhattan College</td>
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<td>University of Rochester</td>
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<td>SUNY College at Oneonta</td>
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<td>SUNY College at Plattsburgh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers College at Columbia</td>
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<td>Tompkins Cortland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utica College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wagner College</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX B

Infant and Toddler Survey

1. Did you take a course that is SPECIFIC to infant and toddler development and education?

2. How do you rate your understanding of the following?

3. How prepared you feel to do the following?

Raquel Plotka, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Development, Learning, and Intervention at Pace School of Education. Her research is centered on social and emotional development in early childhood. She has studied the role of culture, media, and policy in supporting family interactions in early childhood. She currently studies the effect of parent interactions in the development of complex narratives in multilingual Latino children. Her research has been presented in national and international conferences and has been published in several peer reviewed journals. E-mail: rplotka@pace.edu

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Raquel Plotka, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Development, Learning, and Intervention at Pace School of Education. Her research is centered on social and emotional development in early childhood. She has studied the role of culture, media, and policy in supporting family interactions in early childhood. She currently studies the effect of parent interactions in the development of complex narratives in multilingual Latino children. Her research has been presented in national and international conferences and has been published in several peer reviewed journals. E-mail: rplotka@pace.edu

Ruth Guirguis, Ed.D. is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Pace University School of Education. She received her Master of Science in childhood mathematics and her Interdisciplinary Educational Doctorate at Long Island University. Her background encompasses early, elementary, special, and bilingual education. Her research focuses on self-regulation, play, and English Language in preschoolers. She has presented her research at several national conferences. E-mail: rguirguis@pace.edu
Abstract
The topic of play and development “has been a topic of immense importance in early education and child development throughout the twentieth century and into the present decade such that play must now be very structured and part of the academic curriculum. This study explored the interactions between self-regulation, language/literacy, and different types of plays in preschool. It specifically looked at the type of play: structure or free play and how it influences the aforementioned variables. These constructs were assessed by: Get Ready to Read (GRTR), Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary (EOWPVT), Receptive One Word Picture Vocabulary (ROWPVT), Pre-Idea Proficiency Test (Pre-IPT), and Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment (PSRA). A convenience sample of 70 participants was drawn from two early childhood programs. Both schools were located in a low SES and culturally diverse district. Participants were tested in the spring (Time 1) and fall (Time 2) of the school year to measure the growth in regulatory skills, literacy, and language in the different play settings. MANOVA results were examined to observe interaction between type of play self-regulations and language/literacy. Results indicated that a structure or free play setting does have interactions effects with the development of self-regulation and language/literacy. Implications relating to self-regulation, language/literacy, and types of play are further discussed.

Interactions between Self-regulation and Language/Literacy in Play Based Classrooms

As results of the call for an increase in focus on accountability and high stakes testing, educational legislation has put the overall development of the preschool child at risk (Miller & Almon, 2009; Patte, 2012). President Barack Obama’s Race to the Top initiative rewards those states that are raising student achievement. Focusing on just literacy or language acquisition without addressing skills such as self-regulation, and attitudes, allows for little improvement in academic outcomes (Diamond, 2010). Currently, educational practices focus on high stakes testing and accountability without much regard for core skills such as self-regulation and social competencies (Liew, 2012). Policymakers are interested in evaluating data from standardized tests and make educational decisions based on what these tests suggest to measure (Alexander, 2010).

However, equating the results of standardized test scores with actual learning without considering or measuring for other cognitive and non-cognitive abilities in a child is misleading (Alexander, 2010). This becomes even more challenging with functions such as self-regulation, which can be used as a predictor of school success (Denham, Bassett, Way, Mincic, Zinsser, & Graling, 2012). A child can be at greater risk when entering preschools with lower levels of self-regulatory abilities rather than lower academics (Wanless, McClelland, Tominey, & Acock, 2011). Additionally, preschool students who also enter schools with lower language and pre-emergent literacy skills are also at a greater risk (Castro, Garcia, & Markos, 2013).

Concurrently, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) aims to rigorously prepare preschool to high school students in literacy/language arts, science, history, and mathematics. The CCSS was adopted by the New York State Department of Education as a result of New York’s acceptance of funds granted from Race to the Top. Brown’s (2011) study reported that these policies have had preschool teachers face “the challenge of incorporating their child-centered programmatic and instructional practices into policymakers’ standards-based accountability reforms that define most of the K–12 education systems across the United States” (p. 153). Consequently, the current polices lead curriculums to focus primarily on cognitive abilities with little emphasis on socio-emotional, physical well-being, or self-regulatory skills in preschools (Alexander, 2010; Liew, 2012).

Yet, research demonstrates that students who enter kindergarten without self-regulatory skills are at greater risk for difficulties such as peer rejection and low levels of overall academic achievement (Denham et al., 2012; Miller & Almon, 2009; Tominey & McClelland, 2011; Wanless et al., 2011). This is attributed to the decrease in self-regulatory abilities of preschool children today (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Martinez-Pons, 2002; Miller & Almon (2009). Regulatory skills are related to not just academics such as language development and literacy, but school readiness. School readiness serves as a precursor for academic success. Regulatory skills require guidance in developing and
The Power of different Types of Play

Children learn best through play and it is because of this optimal relationship that exists between learning and playing, that has categorized the two aspects as a complex phenomenon. Johnson, Christie and Wardle (2005) write that “play provides vital functions, such as general and skill learning strategies, as well as creative thinking, positive self-esteem and divergent thinking” (p. 199). The term play is hard to define and articulate, because play is abstract and has multiple meanings for different groups and individuals. Gordon (2009) has attempted to define play as a “voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players to the unexpected, and making transformation possible” (p.8). Based on the Vygotskian framework used for this study, play serves as a vehicle to support the to behave beyond their chronological age. Specifically, Vygotsky (1978) describes play as having three main components. The first being the ability for a child to create an imaginary situation, secondly, take on and act out roles and lastly, follow a set of rules that were determined by the roles children took on in play. There are different types of play that have been defined by the literature today which are key to this study. There is structured play and free play. Structured play that is operationally defined as play that is guided/facilitated and initiated by the teacher and set curriculum. Free play is operationally defined as play, which is guided and child initiated, and solely based on the child’s interest. In a structured play setting, for example, children are told what play center to go to during play time and students are to remain in their centers during this time. The teacher choses the topic of the play, such that it is linked to a theme that is being worked on for the month, and teachers here, carry a more didactic role. In a free play setting, students have the opportunity to pick the center they want to go into for example, and can switch centers and start a new socio-dramatic or a pretend scenario that does not have a key connection with the concepts being taught in class. Nonetheless, either type of play is considered to carry a high value in the early childhood setting and is described to be an active form of learning that unites the mind, body and spirit (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988).

Almon and Miller (2011) state that play has correlations with expulsion rates; the more dramatic play, the less the rate of expulsion and aggressive behavior. The topic of play and development “has been a topic of immense importance in early education and child development throughout the twentieth century and into the present decade…since the turn of the century a number of significant trends have conspired to demote play in early childhood education” (Cheng & Johnson, 2010, p. 250). Due to the shift in policies and culture perspectives academics has become a more important focal point when teaching young children. Thus, play in many settings has taken on a structure or pre-planned and set program leading this major developmental com-
ponent to become yet another structured segment/block in an early childhood setting when embedded into a classroom. Yet, there are many developmental gains that not even a child is aware of in play such as the self-regulatory skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2008) and academic skills such as literacy and language development (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2003). The focus on this study is what type of play leads to greater developmental gains.

Play and Language/Literacy

Play serves as one foundation for the development of oral language skills that children need in order to later extend to actual reading skills (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009). Vukelich and Christie (2009) state that play in early years has the potential to offer students the opportunity to engage in meaningful contexts that are vital to literacy skills and concepts of print. Language and literacy are the main focus in young children’s experiences (Bridges, Justice, Hogan, & Gray, 2012). According to Bridges et al. (2012) language allows for communication, leading the child to greater opportunities to learn and to continue developing. Through the medium of play, literacy development is stimulated as play offers children the opportunity to integrate tools associated with literacy before starting actual literacy instruction (Tsao, 2008).

Play offers the opportunity to develop not only cognitive and social skills, but it specifically allows young children to develop higher order thinking skills such as self-regulation. Self-regulation allows for children to follow and comply with rules, manage emotions and carry out problem solving tasks on their own (Bronson, 2000). These skills are of particular importance to young children entering formal schooling.

Play and Self-Regulation

Bodrova and Leong (2008) state that self-regulation is best taught to young children by allowing them creative opportunities in which to practice the rules of certain behaviors and apply those rules to new situations. Self-regulation “is a deep, internal mechanism that enables children as well as adults to engage in mindful, intentional, and thoughtful behaviors” (Bodrova & Leong, 2008, p. 56). According to Bronson (2000) self-regulation is the core of being human and “it underlies our assumptions about choice, decision making, and planning” (p. 1). Based on the Vygotskian perspective the ability to act intentionally involves the internalization of higher mental functions that develop through social relations between parent/caregiver and child, teacher and child, or older peer and child. Self-regulation has also been defined as having two major factors. The first refers to the capacity to monitor inhibitory aspects. Inhibitory control refers to the ability to suppress impulsive thoughts or behavior and resist the surrounding temptations and additional distractions. The second factor is working memory, which is the ability of a child to hold, update, and manipulate verbal and non-verbal information. Self-regulatory skills represent an important developmental factor in young children as this allows them the control over their thoughts and feelings and behavior.

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that the concept of language in a child serves as a tool for the development of self-regulation. Language is a mediating variable between functions of cognitive regulation (Roelers & Schneider, 2005). Vygotsky (1978) stated that private speech originates from the child’s interaction with his/her social world, and thus social speech between child and parent or caregiver, serves as a guide to regulate behavior and attention (Vygotsky, 1978; Winsler et. al, 2009). Children communicate with adults and older peers and observe their actions/behaviors in order to regulate their own behaviors through the use of communication with oneself or ‘private speech’ (Vygotsky, 1978). Ogan (2008) describes the process of private speech as becoming internalized as inner verbal thoughts, which leads to the ability to then self-regulate cognitive processes and direct and control one’s behavior. Day and Smith (2013) report that private speech does not only have associations with cognitive regulation but that it explicitly allows a young child the ability to regulate their emotions.

Developing language is used as a regulating or mediating tool for preschool children (Winsler et. al 2009). Perner, Lang, and Klokker (2002) also suggest that there is a strong association between receptive language and cognitive-regulation. Receiving and modifying behavior through inner speech are the initial steps in the development of self-regulatory skills. Preschool students who lack strong behavioral self-regulation skills have difficulty performing in classrooms with set curriculums and agendas (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Blair 2002; McClelland et. al, 2007; Raver, Jones, Li-Grining, Zhai, Bub, & Pressler 2011). Children with low levels of inhibitory control have difficulty paying attention in class. The impulsive behavior limits their ability to hold on to new information taught in classrooms, and leads them to become unsuccessful students when tested in a formal school setting. Bodrova and Leong (2007) state that improving
self-regulatory skills in young children, can improve not only their overall development, but numeracy and literacy development as well. Also, the development of these skills can potentially reduce the referrals that are given to children for special education, as well as suspensions and retention in schools (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Children’s ability to regulate emotion and behaviors are positively related to school readiness (Arslan, Durmusoglu-Saltali, & Yilmaz, 2011). Specifically, the ability to regulate attention is important for cognitive competence (Garner & Waajid, 2012).

Specifically, children’s behavioral self-regulation has been found to predict their work habits (Rimm-Kaufman, Curby, Grimm, Nathanson, & Brock, 2009) and their ability to benefit from independent learning activities (Kegel, van der Kooy-Hofland, & Bus, 2009). Moreover, self-regulation (and specifically the behavioral components of self-regulation) emerges as a predictor of children’s academic achievement as early as preschool (Blair & Razza, 2007; Denham et al., 2012; McClelland et al., 2007). Early behavioral self-regulation has also been found to predict academic achievement in kindergarten, and throughout elementary school (Liew, McTigue, Barrois, & Hughes, 2008; McClelland, Acoc, & Morrison, 2006; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008), and even high school and college completion (Vitaro, Brendgen, Larose, & Tremblay, 2005).

Willoughby, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, and Bryant (2011) relate two types of regulation with distinct skills to preschool children. Impulse control is related to inattentive-overactive behavior, while cognitive regulation relates to academic achievement (Willoughby et al., 2011). Self-regulation allows for children to follow and comply with rules, manage emotions and carry out problem solving tasks on their own (Bronson, 2000). These skills are of particular importance to young children entering formal schooling, as attention needs to be on the academics in order to succeed. For Dual Language Learners (DLLs) who are acquiring more than one language simultaneously, understanding the association between languages, academic competence and regulatory skills is central to their development (Oades-Sese, Esquivel, Kaliski, and Maniatis 2011; Wanless et al., 2011).

Methods
In order to further investigate the connection between self-regulation, structure and free play along with language/literacy the following hypothesis was developed:

Hypothesis: It is predicted that there will be an interaction between free or structured play, language/literacy, and self-regulation skills.

Prekindergarten children were assessed in their naturalistic setting. Data collection took place in two time periods. Time 1 of the study which was the beginning of the school year to evaluate where their regulatory skills and their language/literacy skills stood. Time 2 (after 6 months) was used to analyze growth in the areas of executive functioning and language/literacy using the same assessments.

Participants
A sample of 70 students participated in this study. Forty-two preschool children attended a state funded Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) and 28 children attended a federally funded Head Start program. The average age at Time 1 was 4.5 and at Time 2 the average age was 4.9-years-old. The ethnic composition of the final sample was approximately 56% Hispanic/Latino, 43% African American and 1% white. Of the total sample, 44 of the students were male and 26 were females. Thirty-two students were categorized as Dual Language Learners (DLLs) from the sample of participants. To determine whether the student was a DLL, surveys filled out by parents/guardians during enrollment were used along with teachers’ evaluation of the students’ language level. Teachers identified the level of English language of DLLs. This survey from the Tabors and Snow (1994) framework had five levels of language. This five stage developmental survey explicitly described each language stage as: Stage 1- home language use, Stage 2- nonverbal; child communicates with gestures and actions, Stage 3- telegraphic and formulaic speech; child communicates using one or two words or short phrases, Stage 4- productive language; child understands most of what is being said in the classroom, he/she speaks in longer phrases and complete sentences and Stage 5- fluent English user; child speaks English in most social and learning contexts. The language levels were established prior to commencing assessments. Based on the parental survey and teacher language evaluations, of the 32 DLL participants, approximately 60% of the students fell within levels 3 and 5.

Setting
Both settings were similar in SES and both curriculums allow for developments through social and academic aspects. The first setting was a state funded
universal prekindergarten program in a low income, ethnically diverse district. LIU Post served as the community-based organization for the school and district. In general, UPKs are part of local school districts that receive funding from New York State Department of Education to support Universal Pre-kindergarten services. Local school districts that can afford to ensure UPK services through a variety of classroom settings, including those operated directly by the school district and those operated by community partners that have focused on offering services for 4-year-olds. This UPK program was located in one of the elementary schools in a Long Island school district. Students who attended the UPK were local to the area and income was not a decision factor used or entrance to the program but rather who applied first and had a birth date before December first. The program offered three classes. Each class offered morning and afternoon half-day sessions. The languages spoken in the district were English, Spanish, and French Creole. The teachers in the district implemented the Tools of the Mind (TOM) curriculum and no other supplementary curriculum. The TOM program holds self-regulatory activities as the foundation of any learning activity that takes place in the classroom (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; 2008). This program allows for social interaction as a leading learning experience and the play is considered to be structured as it revolves around a monthly theme and children are placed into centers on a rotating basis. Students were allowed 30 minutes of structured playtime without outside playtime. Prior to the students going to a center to play, they had to indicate the pretend or imaginary role they would carry out in that center and were not allowed to switch roles and/or change the set pretend scenario as teachers would monitor the play centers. Both researcher and research assistant also monitored the teachers on their fidelity to the play aspect of this curriculum using a fidelity observation scale (See Appendix A).

While both curricula do have differences such as TOM focusing on the development of self-regulatory skills, while Creative Curriculum on development of the overall child and not focusing on specifics skills, they do have commonalities. The major component is that both curricula focus on the aspects of socialization and play as leading activities embedded in both. The comparison of this study is based on the type of play that is carried out in each curriculum not a comparison of the UPK or Head Start programs themselves.

**Instrumentation**

Preschool self-regulation assessment (PSRA). The Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment (PSRA) was a battery of self-regulatory tasks that were adapted from Murray and Kochanska’s (2002) effortful control tasks and executive control tasks. The tasks were developed to assess children’s (a) attention and planning skills, (b) impulse control, (c) the ability to follow directions, and (d) their emotional responses. Get ready to read (GRTR). Get Ready to Read (GRTR) screened preschool children’s development in emergent literacy skills. This test specifically measured print knowledge and phonological awareness. Vocabulary Assessments. The Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary English (EOWPVT-4) (Martin & Brownell, 2011) and Spanish were used along with the Receptive One Word Picture Vocabulary English (ROWPVT – 4) (Martin & Brownell, 2011), and Spanish for a vocabulary score. Pre-IPT oral. The Pre-Idea Proficiency Test (Pre-IPT) evaluated
students’ oral speaking proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and verbal expression. The items were grouped into levels and converted into standard scores.

Play/Fidelity Assessment.
The play/fidelity survey was used to ensure program fidelity at both settings. It was also implemented for inter-rater reliability. The reliability coefficient was .87. Teachers were monitored to see if they carried out the play segment of the program as it was intended based on each curriculum.

Results
Prior to any parametric analyses the variables used in this study were studied for skewness, kurtosis, and outliers. Based on the labeling rule, 22 cases fell outside the determined range. However, since the scores were determined to be possible scores and high variability was expected, due to the nature of the study and as pre-testing was done prior to the participants becoming fully involved in each program, no outliers were assumed going forward.

Computation of a composite impulse and cognitive control variable was vital to this study as each variable not only is distinguishable, both neutrally and behaviorally, but distinct theoretically and practically as well (Denham et al., 2012). Denham et al. (2012) classifies the pencil tap and turn task in this study as cognitive tasks, while the snack delay, tongue task, toy wrap and toy wrap wait tasks are classified as more reflexive and under stimulus control. In addition to previous research, the variables for impulse and cognitive control were correlated for Time 1 and Time 2 to ensure that these two aspects of self-regulation measured different skills. Correlation results suggest that these two variables do measure different types of self-regulation.

A paired t-test was conducted to determine if there was any significant difference between both self-regulation measures, both language and literacy measures; expressive/receptive, oral proficiency and GRTR (print/phonological awareness) for all participants between Time 1 and Time 2. The t-test for both measures of self-regulation revealed no significance in the pre and post-tests mean of impulse control (t (69) = .00, p > .05) and cognitive control (t (69) = .00, p > .05).

For the above stated hypothesis, which specifically examined the interaction between type of play and language/literacy, a MANOVA was conducted. The following MANOVA using the Wilk’s Lambda test and alpha level of .05 reveals the test is significant, Wilk’s λ = .66, F (3, 66) = 8.12, p < .001, multivariate η2 = .016.

A MANOVA was conducted using type of play curriculum (Creative Curriculum vs. TOM) as the independent variables. The dependent variables in this analysis are the variables measuring self-regulation and academics. Based on the results of the MANOVA all multivariate tests were significant at p = .02. The type of play curriculum accounted for differences in the scores of the participants for Language/Literacy F (1, 69) = 4.763, p = .03, Cognitive Control F (1, 69) = 3.943, p = .03 and Impulse Control F (1, 69) = 7.902, p = .006 variables. The inter-rater reliability yields a Cronbach’s Alpha of .82, making this Liker scale assessment a reliable measure for play (See Appendix A).

Table 1
Results of MANOVA (Structure Play versus Free Play)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play Curricula</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>4.763</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Control</td>
<td>3.943</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impulse Control</td>
<td>7.902</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
The research hypothesis sought to provide information of the gains made in self-regulation, language/literacy in comparison to the type of play in each early childhood setting. Based on the results of the MANOVA, the interaction between the time 1 and Time 2 testing with regards to the type of play, accounted for the differences between some of the self-regulation, language/literacy variables. The setting that implemented the free play among their students, showed the most gains in self-regulation as well as language/literacy measures. The free play setting implemented a child initiated play structured curriculum that focused on overall development of all domains of the child not just self-regulatory, language or literacy skills. As previously stated each setting had the researcher, and research assistant each rate the teacher’s fidelity of the program on a weekly basis for six months ensuring program fidelity with regards to play.

The current early childhood education trend, as set by educational policies such as Race to the Top and Common Core, is to push academics early on, and there is a decrease in the focus of regulatory skills. The results suggest that not embedding academics into every component such as play and allowing children the opportunity to free play has gains greater in the areas of self-regulation, language and literacy and a
Additionally, it is key that practical implications for the development of language, literacy and self-regulation skills in preschool students be taught through the implementations of allowing students to engage in games (Tominey & McClelland, 2011). These games should be the type that children can carry on their own without full participation of teachers. It is imperative that activities reinforcing the development of self-regulation, language and literacy are embedded in preschool programs. Therefore, these activities are proposed for preschool educators to implement in classrooms. However, the over involvement and instruction of teachers during games or play can hinder the gains students can potential make based on the results reported in this study. Both parents and educators need to recognize that emphasizing solely on activities that are based on academic acquisition such as literacy and language is not sufficient for children to thrive in later school years but rather those it is activities that bring out these components through medium of free play classroom that will support these academics (Ogan, 2008).

When discussing these result regarding language/literacy and self-regulation with the type of play in each setting through a sociocultural framework, these findings support the Vygotskian (1978) approach to social cultural learning. This suggests that learning does not occur solely within the learner, but in the group they partake in. Learning is a shared process which takes place through observing, working together and being part of a larger group, which includes colleagues of varying levels of experience, able to stimulate each other’s development. It is important for educators to allow for these collaborative interactions, as the academic gains from peers can be of a significant impact in later years.

While both settings made gains in self-regulation showing children do develop these skills through free play the students showed greater language, literacy and regulatory skill development. Thus, the trend of favoring structured play over free play in the classroom does seem to affect the acquisition of language, literacy, and self-regulation development.

Based on the findings, in a classroom that fosters a free play setting, where children are allowed to self-initiate a play activity that is stimulating both socially and academically as well as motivating to them, is more academically effective. The results suggest that a non-structured play setting with structured play based program. This study’s goal was to contribute a quantitative approach and results that reinforced and support the benefits of the different types of play with regards to self-regulation skills and language/literacy skills but that can support in what play setting children learn best. Implementing preschool programs that allow children to develop socially and in regulatory skills can predict academic performance in later grades (McClelland et al., 2007). Based on the results these type of executive functioning skills can be developed in a free play setting where peer tutoring and socially appropriate behaviors are learned in a socio cultural framework, which can then be reinforced and then generalized. Limiting the play by having a structured play segment is perhaps teaching children to behave and enact in specific play scenarios and the ability to generalize skills and apply them in different settings and with different caregivers may tend to get lost. Monitoring and guiding the play may also hinder the language and literacy development as over facilitating or over scaffolding has negative effects. Several important practices are suggested for early childhood teachers. While there are many aspects of free play and the development of self-regulation in preschool students that need to be further explored. This study specifically suggests that gains can be made in some academic areas through the context of free play. The present study has the potential to inform preschool curricula by emphasizing that free play can lead to self regulation, and language and literacy development which facilitate school readiness. Most importantly, skills such as self-regulation, which are not taught in school but yet are needed in upper elementary grades, can be learned through the medium of free play.

First, the present study used Vygotsky (1978) framework where executive functions, such as self-regulation, are developed through interpersonal interactions. Hence, the implementation of play can allow for the development of these skills. Yet, some preschools do not fully support the implementation of neither play-based curriculums nor free play as preschool teachers are now expected to imbed more programmatic and instructional practices (Brown, 2011). Although the New York State Prekindergarten Learning Standards (2011) acknowledges the importance of the social and emotional development of the preschool child in Domain 3, these skills are not the focus of the preschool curriculum. Domain 3 states that children are expected to regulate their responses to needs, feelings and events, yet teachers are faced with the pressures of high stakes and accountability, are not given the opportunity or provided guidance on how to foster the development of these skills (Brown, 2011).
minimal adult intervention or over scaffolding may be a more valuable method within the early childhood setting.

In conclusion, it is critical that educators implement a segment where children are allowed to choose and interact among them without being strictly guided by scripted curricula or teacher strategies as the ability for children to develop executive functions such as decision-making can be compromised and it is vital to the academic perspective. The ability for children to deal with the politics within play is important to their ability to establishing, respecting, and following rules. The ability given in a free play scenario, where children can decide and utilize their own pretend scenarios and develop their imaginary skills is in much need. Children and adults who have developed these imaginary skills have the ability to envision what they are reading. Thus, the interest in reading and reading comprehension takes on a deeper meaning. We currently are bound by the CCSS and the opportunity of self-engagement with minimal facilitation has far greater gains in the developing brain of a young child. The essences of a free play segment is therefore, crucial to early childhood programs.

References


### Appendix A

**Play Assessment Survey**

### ORGANIZATION OF DRAMATIC PLAY

1) Teacher implements good organization and flow during play activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Very Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Teacher has materials and environment prepared in advance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2)</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Very Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Dramatic play is centered on a theme per the lesson plan.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Very Rarely</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) Settings and props allow for different level of participation.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

5) Print labels are used in dramatic play areas where appropriate.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

SCAFFOLDING AND PLAY

1) Teacher and/or assistant demonstrate different roles for children during play.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

2) Teacher and/or assistant are present in the dramatic play areas.

REGULATION, LANGUAGE/LITERACY AND PLAY

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

3) Teacher and/or assistant present schemas related to the dramatic play theme.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

4) Teacher and/or assistant can recognize and scaffold within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of the student during play.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

5) Teacher and/or assistant provide adequate background information on given theme to promote higher levels of play.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

SCAFFOLDING AND SELF-REGULATION

1) Teacher and/or assistant provide too much regulating during play.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

2) Teacher and/or assistant allow for self and peer regulation.

5
Frequently
4
Occasionally
3
Rarely
2
Very Rarely
1
Never

Ruth Guirguis, Ed.D. is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Pace University School of Education. She received her Masters of Science in childhood mathematics and her Interdisciplinary Educational Doctorate at Long Island University. Her background encompasses early, elementary, special, and bilingual education. Her research focuses on self-regulation, play, and English Language in preschoolers. She has presented her research at several national conferences. E-mail: rguirguis@pace.edu
Poverty, Attendance, and Teacher Evaluations: Which Matters Most in Determining Urban High School Graduation Rates?

Kenneth Forman, Ph.D., Craig Markson, Ed.D, and Terrance O’Connor, Ed.D.
School of Professional Development, Stony Brook University, USA

Abstract
This study explored the relationships between poverty, student attendance, teacher evaluations and student achievement, as measured by the percent of high school students who graduated with a New York State Regents Diploma and Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. The setting included 59 urban high schools that were located in two of New York City’s largest school districts: Manhattan School District 2 and Staten Island School District 31. The results showed that student attendance rates had a strong positive correlation with graduation rates with the Regents Diploma, accounting for 42.25 percent of the variance. This positive correlation increased to 48.86 of the variance on graduation rates from the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. Poverty had a negative correlation with the graduation rates on the Regents Diploma and Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation, accounting for 13.03 and 22.94 percent of the variance respectively. Poverty also had a strong negative correlation with student attendance rates. All of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) teacher evaluation ratings failed to produce any statistically significant relationships with the graduation rates on both diploma designations. If the results of this study remain consistent with future studies, the New York State Education Department should consider reforming its teacher evaluation system and allocate more resources to improving student attendance rates as well as promoting programs that enhance the academic performance of students living in poverty.

Keywords: Poverty, attendance rates, teacher evaluations, APPR, student achievement and urban high school graduation rates.

I. Purpose
The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between poverty, student attendance, teacher evaluations, and high school student graduation rates. In a prior study by Forman and Markson (2016), poverty had a strong inverse relationship with student achievement in an urban setting. Student achievement was measured by performance on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics Assessments for students in grades 3 - 8. Student attendance rates had a strong positive correlation with student performance on the State assessments. Teacher evaluations, as determined by the percent of teachers rated on each category of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), had weak to conflicting correlations with student achievement.

Given the history of accountability and curriculum alignment challenges with State assessments (Polikoff, 2014), graduation rates should be considered as an alternative assessment of student achievement. As a result, the purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships between poverty, student attendance, teacher evaluations and student achievement, as measured by the percent of high school students who graduated with a New York State Regents Diploma and Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation.

II. Theoretical Framework
High School Graduation

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, high school graduation nationwide rose to an average of 83.2 percent on-time graduation for the 2014-2015 school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Note that “on-time” graduation from a high school is considered as completing four years of study from the time a student is registered in ninth grade. The on-time high school graduation rate in New York State was 79.2% for the 2014-2015 school year (New York State Education Department, 2015). The New York City on-time graduation rate for the first time registered 70.5 percent in 2014-2015 school year (New York State Education Department, 2015). Lewis and Burd-Sharps (2016) found that significant disparities in graduation rates exist by race and ethnicity, gender, language proficiency, and disability status. Examining these results, the researchers found while 85 percent of Asian students and 82 percent of white students graduated on-time in New York City in 2015, just 65.4 percent of black students and 64 percent of Latino students graduated on-time (New York State Education Department, 2015). Also significant, three-quarters of all New York City high school girls earned their diplomas in four years, compared with two-thirds of the city’s boys. Among the sub-groups, the researchers found only four in ten students who were English-language learners or who had a disability graduated on time (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2016).

In further areas of analysis, their study, commissioned by the Social Science Research Council,
May 2016, found clear evidence that graduation was linked to socio-economic status (SES). Their data demonstrated that high SES neighborhoods had high graduation rates, low SES neighborhoods has lower graduation rates (Lewis and Burd-Sharps, 2016). They also found that the higher the poverty rate in a neighborhood, the less likely a young person living in that neighborhood would graduate high school on-time.

LaTouche (2012) found several scenarios that had an effect upon high school graduation rate. The researcher found that school performance was lower in urban areas when compared to rural areas. LaTouche concluded that the individuals most at-risk for not graduating high school were those who lived in high poverty, urban areas.

Thomas E. Rivers, Jr. (2012) conducted a quantitative, five-year (2007-2011) study, Graduation Rates in South Carolina Public High Schools: The Effect of School Size and Socioeconomic Status, using data obtained from the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina High School League. The results showed that socioeconomic status was significantly correlated to graduation rates. The researcher also analyzed the impact on graduation rates when combining two variables (i.e., school size and socioeconomic status). Based on the findings, he discovered that school size and socioeconomic status contribute significantly to the prediction of graduation rates; low socio-economic status and large school size impacted high school graduation.

Peevely and Ray (2001) illustrated a positive statistically significant relationship between high school graduation rate and individuals who lived in urban areas. The multiple regression model used predicted a statistically significant inverse relationship between poverty and high school graduation rate, which several studies within the literature supported. A similar study completed by Johnson and Strange (2007) identified poverty as a limiting factor with respect to student performance.

In a national study that calculated high school graduation rates for students at different reading skill levels and with different poverty rates, Hernandez (2011) confirmed that testing was positively correlated with earning a high school diploma. Results of this longitudinal study found that those who did not read proficiently by third grade were four times more likely to leave school without a diploma. Struggling readers represented more than three-fifths of those who eventually dropped out or failed to graduate on time. The rates were highest for the low, below-basic readers: 23 percent of these students dropped out or failed to graduate from high school on time. Overall, this study found that 22 percent of students who lived in poverty did not graduate from high school which rose to 32 percent for students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty. The rate was highest for poor Black and Hispanic students, at 31 and 33 percent respectively. Hernandez found that poverty had a powerful influence on graduation rate; the combined effect of reading poorly and living in poverty put these children in double jeopardy (Hernandez, 2011).

New York State Diploma Types: Regents Diploma versus Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation

All students graduating from high schools in New York State must attain a Regents Diploma and can continue with further studies to receive a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. In New York State, the governing body for education was the New York State Board of Regents who prescribed requirements for high school graduation. The passing of five Regents examinations with a score of 65 or better was required for a Regents Diploma. These examinations included: English Language Arts (ELA); any mathematics examination (Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II/Trigonometry); two social studies examinations (Global History & Geography and U.S. History & Government); either science examination (Living Environment or Earth Science); any additional Regents examination or assessment approved by the State for this purpose (“NYSED/P-12 /Part 100 Regulations/100.5 Diploma Requirements,” n.d.).

Poverty

Futscher (2013) examined educational programs and achievement levels of high and low wealth districts and found evidence of inequity and offered poverty as a cause for poor performance. Similar studies indicated
a strong relationship between poverty and student achievement levels in schools (Kiser, 2007). The researcher presented that a student’s background (family support, resources, and socioeconomic status) have been shown to have a substantial effect on a student’s academic achievement.

Additional research established that financial factors, student factors, teacher factors, and outside factors all had a relationship to student achievement levels in school districts (Burke & Sass, 2008; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). Forman and Markson (2015, 2016) found that poverty had a strong negative correlation with performance on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments among students in grades 3-8 for students attending Long Island and two New York City school districts. As poverty went up, performance on the State assessments went down. Poverty accounted for over 60 percent of the variance on student performance on both State assessments.

Perry and McConney (2010) found that an increase in the average socioeconomic status of a school led to increasing student achievement levels. Van Ewijk and Sleegers (2010) performed a meta-analysis that looked at 30 different studies on socioeconomic status and student achievement levels and determined that while the measure of socioeconomic status varied from study to study, peer socioeconomic status had a strong correlation with student achievement levels. Essentially, the higher the socioeconomic status of a school, the higher was the student achievement levels.

Boggs (2011) found while there have been notable “pockets” of success and innovative initiatives, it was clear that most educational reforms have failed to make a noticeable dent in the academic performance of the vast majority of American school children, particularly ethnic minorities and children living in poverty.

Poverty also had a significant relationship between school completion and college enrollment (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998). Additionally, Duncan et al. (1998) found that: (a) family income levels had strong associations with achievement and ability related outcomes; (b) the stage in a child’s development when the poverty occurred was significant; and, (c) the impact of family income was significantly higher for those children in low-income families than those from high-income families.

When poverty occurred during the early years of a child’s development, it had the greatest impact on his or her achievement.

Attendance

Student attendance in school was the largest variable that was almost solely within control of students or their parental guardians. At the most basic level, when students were absent, they would not be learning in class (Lonneville, 2014). Several parallel studies reported by Lonneville (2014) have shown a relationship between student achievement and higher attendance rates: as student attendance rates decreased, student achievement levels decreased as well.

Macliver and Groginksy (2011) found that high school graduation rates depended on what happened in individual schools and classrooms. Prior attendance levels and academic readiness of the entering 9th-grade students largely determined high school graduation rates. Furthermore, the researchers determined that students who dropped out had problems in attendance, behavior, and course performance.

Nichols (2003) found a clear indicator of potential academic failure centered on the high rate of yearly school absences for students who struggle academically. A pattern of poor school attendance was evident by the sixth grade, with most failing students averaging more than ten absences per year throughout their school careers. The researcher observed that the rate of absences for these students continued to increase. There were strong correlations among poor English and mathematics achievement and high rates of school absence in early and later years which established a clear pattern of “school discontinuity” or disengagement that was predictive of future school failure. Nichols ultimately found for each graduating class, low-income students averaged three to four more absences per year than higher income students with lower income students failing to meet state proficiencies. This pattern of poor school attendance, particularly for low-income students, began early in their educational careers and in some cases, approached an average of eighteen to twenty absences per year by the tenth grade (Nichols, 2003).

Teacher Effectiveness

Past school reform efforts have focused on school programs and curricula as the means to improve student performance. More recently, school effectiveness efforts have focused on teacher accountability. Research by Mangiante, Stronge, Ward, Tucker and Hindman (2012) and Tucker and Stronge (2005) indicated that children did not overcome having an ineffective teacher for two years or more. Moreover, Rivkin, Hanushek, Markman, and Kain (2003) have revealed that having a high-quality teacher could substantially offset or even eliminate the disadvantage of low socio-economic background. Wong and Wong (2010) added that the only way to improve
student achievement was through well prepared teachers who delivered effective instruction. They defined teacher effectiveness as the ability to produce student learning, growth, and achievement.

Stronge et al. (2013) indicated that the purpose of teacher evaluation was to use data to inform instruction and to enable teachers to hone their skills. In a similar study, the evidence suggested that the ability to improve instructional practices of marginal teachers also raised levels of student achievement when implemented appropriately (Tucker & Stronge, 2005).

Teacher effectiveness has been defined by a multitude of criteria in teacher evaluation systems. These criteria most commonly included: professional teaching standards, evidence of teacher practice and student learning, an annual process, well trained and knowledgeable evaluators, informative feedback to teachers, professional development opportunities provided for improvement, clear articulated differentiation among ratings, documentation of student growth, multiple measures, transparency, resources to support implementation, collaboration with teachers’ bargaining units, and clear and rigorous expectations (Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012).

The New York State Annual Professional Performance Review, revised in 2014, has incorporated many of the above criteria. As part of the New York State teacher evaluation system, commonly referred to as APPR, teachers receive scores based on a rating scale of many of these criteria, but basically including student performance on state and/or local assessments. These scores have led to one of four rankings: highly-effective, effective, developing or ineffective (HEDI).

### III. Data Sources

The New York State Education Department’s data site (2016) was used to obtain the data for this study. The data were collected from the 2013 to 2014 school year. State reporting on the high schools from two of the most populous New York City school districts, Manhattan School District 2 and Staten Island School District 31, were used for this study (“Largest School Districts in New York - Niche,” n.d.). Out of the 70 high schools within these districts, 59 were included. The 11 that were excluded had no reporting on the graduation rates for its student populations. The 59 high schools had a total student population of 48,922 and a total teacher population of 2,739. The following data were gathered from each high school: (a) the percent of students collecting free and reduced lunch; (b) the percent of average daily student attendance; (c) the APPR teacher rating percentages; and (d) the percent of students receiving a Regents Diploma; and (e) the percent of students receiving a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation.

### IV. Method

Student achievement was identified by the high school graduation rates from the 59 high schools included in this study. The dependent variables were measured by the percent of students receiving a New York State High School Regents Diploma and Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. The graduation rates from the Regents Diploma also included those that graduated with the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. However, the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation graduation percentages only included those graduating with that distinction.

The independent variables were student poverty, attendance, and teacher evaluations. Poverty was measured by the percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Student attendance was assessed by the percent of average daily attendance for each high school. Teacher evaluations were determined by the percent of teachers rated on each category on the high school’s Annual Professional Performance Review: Level 4 which was “highly effective”; Level 3 which was “effective”; Level 2 which was “developing”; and Level 1 which was “ineffective.” Two correlation analyses were conducted to determine if poverty, student attendance, and teacher evaluation scores were related to graduation rates. A Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis, with a two-tailed test of significance with alpha set at .05, was used to analyze the relationships among the variables.

### V. Results

The results for the correlations with the percent of high school students receiving a Regents Diploma are displayed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regents Diploma</th>
<th>Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Attendance Rate</th>
<th>Highly Effective APPR</th>
<th>Effective APPR</th>
<th>Ineffective APPR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free or Reduced Lunch</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.361</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.03%</strong></td>
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<td><strong>0.95</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Attendance Rate</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.65</strong></td>
<td><strong>42.25%</strong></td>
<td><strong>28.05%</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Highly Effective APPR</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.052</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.323</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.101</strong></td>
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<td><strong>0.012</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Effective APPR</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.107</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.007</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.032</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.156</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Developing APPR</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.028</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.195</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.244</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.223</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.583</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ineffective APPR</strong></td>
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<td><strong>-0.543</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.05</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.584</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P</strong></td>
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**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
The percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch had a statistically significant relationship with the high school graduation percentages for the Regents Diploma. There was negative correlation, accounting for 13.03 percent of the variance. As the percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch increased, the percent of students achieving a Regents Diploma decreased. The high school student attendance rate also had a statistically significant relationship with the percent of students receiving a Regents Diploma. Here there was a positive correlation, accounting for 42.25 percent of the variance. As the average daily attendance percentage increased, the Regents Diploma graduation rate also increased substantially.

The percent of teachers rated “highly effective” did not have a statistically significant relationship with the Regents Diploma graduation rates, p > .05. The remaining teacher evaluation APPR ratings of “effective,” “developing,” and “ineffective” similarly did not have a statistically significant relationship with the percent of graduates obtaining a Regents Diploma, p > .05.

Table 2 illustrates the results for the correlations with the percent of high school students who received the Regents Diplomas with Advanced Designation.

### Table 2

| Correlations with the Regents Diplomas with Advanced Designation (N = 59) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation | Free or Reduced Lunch | Attendance Rate | Highly Effective APPR | Effective APPR | Ineffective APPR |
| Free or Reduced Lunch | r = -0.479** | r² = 22.94% | p = 0.001 | N = 42 |
| Attendance Rate | r = 0.699** | r² = 48.86% | p = 0.001 | N = 42 |
| Highly Effective APPR | r = 0.15 | r² = 2.25% | p = 0.34 | N = 42 |
| Effective APPR | r = 0.03 | r² = 0.03% | p = 0.922 | N = 37 |
| Developing APPR | r = -0.402 | r² = 16.16% | p = 0.064 | N = 22 |
| Ineffective APPR | r = -0.469 | r² = 22.00% | p = 0.172 | N = 10 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch had a statistically significant relationship with the percent of students obtaining the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. There was an inverse relationship, accounting for 22.94 percent of the variance. As the percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch increased, the percent of students achieving the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation decreased. Student attendance rates also had a statistically significant relationship with the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. There was a positive correlation, accounting for 48.86 percent of the variance.

As was the case with the correlation results with the Regents Diploma, the percent of teachers rated “highly effective” did not have a statistically significant relationship with the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation graduation rates, p > .05. The remaining teacher evaluation APPR ratings of “effective,” “developing,” and “ineffective” similarly did not have a statistically significant relationship with the percent of graduates obtaining the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation, p > .05.

VI. Conclusions

The variable that had the strongest correlation with graduation rates from the Regents Diploma and Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation was student attendance, accounting for 42.25 and 48.86 percent of the variance respectively. These results differed from a prior study of urban schools by Forman and Markson (2016), where poverty had the strongest relationships with student performance on the English Language Arts and Mathematics State assessments for grades 3 - 8. Poverty ranked first in the 2016 study but second in the current study in terms of the strength of the relationship it had with student achievement. Additionally, poverty had a statistically significant inverse relationship with student attendance rates, accounting for 28.09 percent of the variance. As the percent of students collecting free and reduced lunch went up, the school attendance rates went down. The strengths of the relationships that attendance and poverty had with graduation rates notably increased on the Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation. What was most surprising was that none of the APPR teacher evaluation ratings had any statistically significant relationships with graduation rates from either of the diplomas. These results differed from the Markson and Forman (2016) study, where teacher evaluations had statistically significant relationships with student achievement but those correlations were weak to conflicting.

VII. Implications of the Research

If the results of this study remain consistent with future studies, urban high schools leaders should focus on polices and strategies that improve student attendance. Furthermore, educational leaders should develop programs that relieve the negative impact that poverty has on student attendance rates and academic achievement. Finally, New York State legislators should restructure its teacher evaluation system, as it had no correlation with graduation rates.
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Dr. Kenneth Forman is the off-campus program coordinator and lecturer in the School of Professional Development/Educational Leadership Program at Stony Brook University. He served as an administrator and teacher for the New York City public schools for 27 years and as a school building leader on Long Island for 12 years. He is the author of two educational leadership books: Preparing for Educational Leadership, 2nd Edition, a guide for emerging school and district leaders to successfully complete SBL/SDL New York State licensing examinations and Diving into Data, a resource to help move schools or districts to become highly-effective data-driven organizations. Additionally, he has published a number of articles and columns on efficacy of school leadership and the teacher evaluation process. He also serves as an advisor to a New York State Regent.

Dr. Craig Markson
Dr. Craig Markson is an Assistant Dean and Lecturer with the School of Professional Development at Stony Brook University. He is responsible for off-campus graduate programs that meet the professional development needs of aspiring K-12 school leaders. His research interests include the efficacy of online learning in the context of school leadership preparation, State assessments, ISLLC Standards, gender and school leadership, teacher evaluations, and the relationships among poverty and academic achievement.

Dr. Terrance O’Connor has been involved in a number of educational leadership programs over the years. He currently teaches for Fordham and Stony Brook Universities in their Educational Leadership programs. Dr. O’Connor was a school administrator and educator in New York Public schools for 38 years. In 2005, he was selected as New York State High School Principal of the Year, and went on to represent New York at a national leadership symposium in Washington D.C. He teaches a multitude of leadership courses and works with graduate students in their internships’ journey. As part of this process, he spends time mentoring leadership candidates in schools throughout New York City and Long Island. Additionally, he is a New York State School Building Leader Assessor for the School Building Leader licensing examination.
Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between college aspirations and achievement motivation in Dominican high school students including how parental involvement potentially mediates the relationship between college aspirations and achievement motivation. The researcher sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What is the level of parental involvement for Dominican high school students in New York City? (2) What forms of parental involvement most influence student motivation for Dominican high school students in New York City? (3) What is the impact of parental involvement on student success when the following three variables are considered: (a) The effort children put into school-related tasks. (b) The motivation of children to learn the topics covered in class. (c) The work children independently spend on learning activities at home. (4) What are the barriers for Dominican Parents becoming involved with their child’s school? (5) What are the parent’s perceptions of the overall climate of their child’s school? (6) Who do parents feel is primarily responsible for their child’s success?

Parental involvement was defined as parents who were academically involved, were motivated to support their children and were present and active at school events. Participants of the study were Dominican parents of students from four high schools in the Bronx and Manhattan. Data from participants were collected through a Likert-type survey. The survey results indicated that the majority of respondents believe that there are many barriers keeping them from being active in their child’s education. Many of the parents surveyed felt that they were actively involved in their child’s education, regardless of the fact that they were not present at the school functions. Parents felt that their parental involvement came through interaction with their child out of school, about their school progress. The results also indicate that parents who put an emphasis on the work children do at home, the effort children put into school-related tasks, and the motivation children have to learn what being taught in class; are the types of parents who have the most positive impact on student success.

Background

Hispanics are the fastest growing people group of the United States. According to the United States Census Bureau, of the total 308.7 million people who resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, 50.5 million (or 16 percent) were of Hispanic or Latino origin (U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2010). Furthermore, the Census (2010) showed that the Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010 and accounted for more than half of the total U.S. population increase of 27.3 million. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, or four times the nation’s 9.7 percent growth rate. By 2060, Latinos are projected to represent more than one-third of all U.S. children. Of all the students entering high school, Latinos will represent 38%, compared to Whites (33%), Blacks (13%), and Asians (7%).

According to the most recent Census data, in 2013, Hispanics were the second largest group enrolled in secondary education. Hispanics represented 22% of high school students, while Whites represented 53%, Blacks 16%, and Asians 5%. Additionally, Hispanic representation in high schools is projected to increase. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2012), within the next five years, the number of Hispanic public high school graduates is projected to increase 41%, compared to Asians (30%), Blacks (9%), and American Indian/Alaska Natives (2%).

Data suggests there is no debate that the academic underperformance of Hispanic students; under representation of minorities in higher education has been a national concern for decades (Marrero, 2007). According to the Census Statistics (2002), only 57% of Hispanics 16-24-year olds had obtained a high school education or more by the year 2000 in contrast with 78.5% of Blacks, and 84.9% of Whites. The disproportion is greater for attainment of higher education, where only 10.6% of Hispanics 25 years old and over held a bachelor’s degree or more, in contrast with 78.5% of Blacks, and 84.9% of Whites. The disproportion is greater for attainment of higher education, where only 10.6% of Hispanics 25 years old and over held a bachelor’s degree or more, in contrast with 16.5% of Blacks and 26.1% of Whites. Only 3.3% of Hispanics held an advanced degree, in contrast with 5.1% of Blacks and 8.8% of Whites.
This pattern of declining levels of educational attainment over time among Hispanics as they move from secondary school to higher education has been characterized as the “academic pipeline problem” (Cooper, et al., 2002). The number of minority students in classrooms decreases as they move along the educational “pipeline.” (Yowell, 2002). Yowell (2002) reports that although there has been a recent decline in school dropouts for Blacks and Whites, the numbers have remained unchanged for Hispanics over the last 30 years.

A study by Marrero (2007), investigated how parental involvement potentially mediates the relation between generational status and achievement motivation of Puerto Rican students. It is important to note that there are differences among Hispanic groups. Puerto Ricans, for instance, are different from other Hispanic groups, in that they are not immigrants. Additionally, Puerto Ricans in the United States are dissimilar from other Hispanic groups in that they are U.S. citizens and they are privy to educational opportunities that are the reason for other groups’ decisions to immigrate to the U.S (Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995).

Previous researchers on patterns of educational achievement among Hispanics have neglected to differentiate among Hispanic subgroups. This is relevant to note since student achievement has not been the same for all subgroups. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2012), the percentage of high school graduates for Cubans is 77.7%, whereas, the percentage of high school graduates for Puerto Ricans is 54.9%. Recent analyses of nationally representative data demonstrate that Latino children are among lowest academic performers (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Reardon and Galindo (2009), focused on Mexican American children, however, the patterns amongst several of the Hispanic subgroups have not shown much variation. Many of the studies have been conducted in the west and southern coast with few in the north east of the United States. Furthermore, there has not been research conducted that focuses on the rapidly growing Dominican American population of New York City.

The Problem

Congruous with previous research findings, parental involvement was identified as the main predictor for more education, increased GPA, and higher education goals (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Steinberg et al., 1992; Ginsburg and Bronstein, 1993; Grolnick et al., 1991; Ballantine, 1999; Gonzalez-Pienda et al., 2002; Zellman & Waterman, 1998).

Current disparities among Hispanics may also be associated with parents’ influence and involvement in their child’s education (Marrero, 2007). Several researchers (Espinosa, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999) have found that Hispanic parents and families may be very involved in their children’s educational lives, although they may not participate in their children’s schooling in ways expected by school personnel. Drawing on this research, the current study investigated the relationship of college aspirations and achievement motivation in Hispanics including how parental involvement potentially mediates the relationship between college aspirations and achievement motivation. The focus was on one group, Dominicans, in part because they are the largest growing group in New York City (U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2010).

Immigration, governmental and legal changes in the United States as well as in their native Dominican Republic have led to a massive influx of Dominican immigrants to the United States since the 1960s (Torres-Saillant & Hernández, 1998). Many of the immigrants are grade level students who are enrolled into the New York City public schools. The greater majority of enrollments are from the children of Dominican immigrants. Those students enter as English Language Learners (ELLs), but since they are often U.S.-born, the New York City Department of Education does not group these children with Dominican-born children (Rodriguez, 2009). They, along with all other Hispanics are then listed as native-born Hispanics and as an ethnic group that makes up forty percent of the public school population (New York City Department of Education Office of English Language Learners, 2008). According to Census data (U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2000), the Dominican community is much younger than the overall U.S. population. New York City is still home to the largest Dominican community outside of the Dominican Republic with fifty-four percent of all Dominicans living in the U.S. making their homes in New York City (New York City Department of City Planning, 2000).

Significance of the Study

In an effort to explore the existence of the growing population of Hispanics in the United States and their desire to reach high levels of education, this
research examined the influence of Dominican parents on their children’s academic performance and achievement. Successful K-12 academic achievement potentially opens door for higher education and gainful employment. The types and amount of degrees earned through an individual’s lifetime have a positive correlation to salary earnings. “The data are clear: a college degree is key to economic opportunity, conferring substantially higher earnings on those with credentials than those without” (Carnevale, 2011, p. 32). A 2002 Census Bureau study estimated that in 1999, the average lifetime earnings of a Bachelor’s degree holder was $2.7 million, 75% more than that earned by high school graduates in 1999.

As the Hispanic population continues to grow, the numbers of Hispanics that earn high school diplomas remain extremely low (U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2010). In 2009, more than 4 out of 5 (85%) adults age 25 and over reported having at least a high school diploma or its equivalent, while over 1 in 4 (25%) reported a bachelor’s degree or higher. Although the U.S. high school dropout rates are declining across all populations, Hispanics still have the highest dropout rate among all major racial and ethnic groups. The figure bellows illustrates the downward trend that the major racial and ethnic groups are following in regards to high school dropout rates; with the prevalent decline being within the Hispanic population: Figure 1.

Hispanic, Black High School Dropout Rates

![Hispanic, Black High School Dropout Rates](image)

Drawing on these researchers, there is a need for research to investigate the relationship of college aspirations and achievement motivation in Hispanics including how parental involvement potentially mediates the relationship between college aspirations and achievement motivation. The focus should be on one group, Dominicans; in part because they are the largest growing group in New York City (U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2010).

This research has important implications for education given the dramatic achievement gaps of Latino children, as illustrated above. By identifying what forms of parental involvement most influence the academic achievement and motivation of Dominican students, educators will be able to help neutralize their educational disadvantages. Future studies on parental involvement also will benefit from taking into account the diversity of the Dominican American minority population, a longitudinal approach, and other key school-relevant variables (i.e., teacher quality, curricular richness, school characteristics, school segregation, student behavior, and family involvement) that affect students’ educational experiences.

**Instrumentation**

In order to test if parental involvement has an impact on education, a Parent Survey for K-12 Schools was administered to parents of Dominican high school students. The survey is a Likert-type scale consisting of 84 questions divided into four scales. The survey takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and was available to parents in English and in Spanish. The survey was developed through a rigorous process conducted by a team of researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, led by Professors Hunter Gehlbach, Karen Mapp and Richard Weissbourd.

- Parental support: How much help are students getting at home?
- Parent self-efficacy: How confident are parents in supporting their child’s schooling?
- School fit: How well do a school’s academic program, social climate, and organizational structure match a student’s needs?
- Child behaviors: What habits have students developed that shape their success in school?
- Parent engagement: How engaged are parents in their child’s schooling?
• Barriers: What barriers do parents perceive as preventing them from engaging with the school?
• School climate: How do parents view their school’s academic and social environment?
• Roles and responsibilities: How do parents view their roles as well as teachers’ roles in different aspects of their child’s learning?

Summary of Findings

Knowing that parent involvement significantly affects student success is not new information; understanding how to create effective family-school partnerships to increase parent involvement, however, is still a work in progress. “Many years of research show that involving families and the community contributes to children’s academic and social success” (Henderson et al., 2012, p. 2). This research supports this claim and contributes to the literature on parental involvement.

The majority of the participants surveyed indicated that they possess at least a high school diploma 89% (32). This is a valuable piece of information because it leads one to believe that the students in the respective household are expected to attend college. As discussed in chapter two, parental education is strongly related to a child’s likelihood of enrolling in college immediately after high school (A Shared Agenda, 2004). The likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education is strongly related to parents’ education even when other factors are taken into account. This piece of data is in direct contrast to the research reported by Reyes & Nora (2012), that only 37 percent of Latino high school completers between the ages of eighteen and 24 are enrolled in college and that one in ten Hispanic adults between the ages of 18 and 24 holds a college degree (Brindis, Driscoll, Biggs, & Valderrama, 2002). According to those reports, the preparation of Hispanics is lacking. However, family surveys conducted by the U.S. Education Department show that more than 9 out of 10 Hispanic parents expect their children to attend college (Schmidt, 2003). This figure is in line with results for both black and white parents; however, Hispanic children are much less likely than white children to have a parent who attended college. More than two out of five Hispanic freshmen at four-year colleges are the first in their family to attend college, compared with about one out of five white freshmen (Schmidt, 2003).

Given that parents can influence children’s attitudes about school, the level and quality of family-school engagement, and families’ decisions about school, the Harvard Parent Survey for K-12 schools was used in this study to because it was designed to accurately measure families’ perceptions of their children’s school environments. The survey results indicated that the majority of respondents do not feel that there are many barriers keeping them from being active in their child’s education. In fact, many of the parents who were surveyed felt that they were actively involved in their child’s education, regardless of the fact that they were not present at the school functions. Parents felt that their parental involvement came through interaction with their child out of school, about their school progress. Close to 80% of the respondents indicated that they feel that their child puts either a tremendous amount of effort (39.58%) or quite of bit of effort (39.58%) into school related tasks. Less than 5% of the respondents felt that their child was not motivated to learn the topics covered in class. The majority of the respondents (37.50%) felt that their child was quite motivated to learn the topics covered in class. Additionally, the majority of parents felt that their child works well independently on learning activities at home.

Research question one. The first research question investigated the level of parental involvement for Dominican high school students in New York City. Results showed that Dominican parents are involved in their children’s education. The participants feel their children are motivated to succeed in school and that they, as parents, remain supportive through the conversations they have about school. Parents feel that they are connected with their child’s academics, even though they have not participated in school events. Parents feel confident that they can help and motivate their child through the relationship that they have developed with their child. The results showed that Dominican parents do not feel that visiting their child’s school is the primary or sole form of being involved as a parent. Dominican parents consider being involved in their child’s education involves more than visiting the school itself. When analyzing the data from this research question, three groups emerged. The three groups were categorized as Parent Confidence (Group 1), Parent Communication (Group 2), and School Participation (Group 3). On the one-sample statistics test, all three groups showed an average response of over 3.0 on a Likert-type scale of 1 – 5 with a standard deviation ranging from 0.78 to 1.16. The
standard deviation provides some idea about the distribution of scores around the mean. Considering the narrow range between the lowest and highest scores of the standard deviations, the scores indicate that the responses are clustered closely to the average score. It is important to note that the Parent Confidence and Parent Communication groups showed an average response of over 3.5 on a Likert-type scale of 1 – 5 with a standard deviation ranging from 0.78 to 1.02.

The School Participation group was the only group with a mean under 3.5. This is congruent with the descriptive analysis that showed that parents do not feel that visiting their child’s school is the primary or sole form of being involved as a parent. Dominican parents consider being involved in their child’s education involves more than visiting the school itself.

Research question two. The second research question examined what forms of parental involvement most influence student motivation for Dominican high school students. In order to find which forms of parental involvement most influence student motivation for Dominican students, a correlation analysis was conducted. Two sets of questions were identified that were most related to parental involvement and student motivation. The correlation analysis conducted showed that there were three questions from the student motivation set, which were highly correlated to the set of questions about parental involvement. The three questions that were most correlated with the questions about parental involvement were:

Question 23: On average, how well does your child work independently on learning activities at home?

Question 27: How much effort does your child put into school-related tasks?

Question 33: How motivated is your child to learn the topics covered in class?

The results of this analysis indicate that parents who put an emphasis on the work children do at home, the effort children put into school-related tasks, and the motivation children have to learn what being taught in class; are the types of parents who have the most positive impact on student motivation.

Research question three. The third research question investigated the impact of parental involvement on student success when the following three variables are considered:
1) The effort children put into school-related tasks?
2) The motivation of children to learn the topics covered in class
3) The work children independently spend on learning activities at home?

A logistic regression analysis was run to test whether parental involvement impacts the effort children put into school-related tasks. The results showed that over 70% of the variability of parental involvement could be predicted by the variability of the effort children put into school-related tasks.

A logistic regression analysis was run to test whether parental involvement impacts the motivation of children to learn the topics covered in class. The results showed that over 61% of the variability of parental involvement could be predicted by the variability of the motivation of children to learn the topics covered in class.

A logistic regression analysis was run to test whether parental involvement impacts the work children independently spend on learning activities at home.

Research question four. The fourth research question investigated the barriers for Dominican Parents becoming involved with their child’s school.

A descriptive statistical analysis was run and the results indicate that the majority of respondents do not feel that there are many barriers keeping them from being active in their child’s education. This research also identified several contributing factors that impede parents’ willingness to be active participants in their child’s school, like work commitments and transportation. Although the majority of the respondents indicated that they do not feel that there are many barriers keeping them from being active in their child’s education, there was some evidence that indicated that their busy schedules and transportation issues where barriers to visit their child’s schools.

Another interesting fact to note was that 72.7% of parents do not feel that their child not wanting them to contact the school prevents them from contacting the school. The survey did not ask whether parents feel that their child does not want them to contact the school,
rather if they felt it prevented them from doing so. The majority of parents (89.1%) did not feel that their memories from their own school experience prevented them from becoming involved with their child’s current school. One can draw a conclusion that many of the participants did not have bad memories from their own school experiences.

Research question five. The fifth research question examined parent’s perceptions of the overall climate of their child’s school.

The descriptive statistical analysis indicated that many of the respondents felt their child’s learning environment was warm and nurturing. Many of the participant’s answers were positive on the Likert-type scale with answers of tremendous amount of respect or quite a bit of respect. It is important to note that the question that asked parents to identify how much respect they thought the children at their child’s school have for the staff yielded 67.3%. The second question, which asked how well the administrators at their child’s school create a school environment that helps children learn, yielded 71.4%. Question three which asked how much respect do parents think the teachers have for the children, yielded 73.5%. Question four, which asked parents about the fairness of the evaluating system yielded 57.1%. One might conclude that the fairness of the evaluating system was the weakest of the four. However, this comparison is complicated by the fact that it had seven response choices while the others had only five response choices. Nonetheless, fairness of the evaluating system might have been of most concern to parents.

Research question six. The sixth research question asked who do parents feel is primarily responsible for their child’s success.

A descriptive statistical analysis indicated that parents feel that they, as parents, are the ones most responsible for their child’s success. On average, 75.6% of the respondents felt that parents were the most responsible for their child’s success. The question: ‘Who is primarily responsible for identifying what a child is most interested in learning?’ was on the low end of the spectrum with 58.3% feeling it was the parent’s responsibility. The question: ‘Who is primarily responsible for making sure that a child engages in fun activities that are unrelated to schoolwork?’ was on the high end of the spectrum with 85.4% feeling it was the parents responsibility.

Parents hold themselves accountable. The results of this study indicated that the majority of parents feel that it is their responsibility as parents to educate their children. Parents feel that they are the primary ones responsible for identifying their child’s interest, learning needs, and for identifying their areas of support. This sense of responsibility may be attributed to the Dominican culture. In the Dominican Republic, students do not spend as much time at school as they do in the United States and in many places, they are excused mid-day for lunch, siesta. During siesta, students come home to eat lunch and the breadwinner of the family, usually, the father, comes home for lunch as well. The family eats lunch together, rests, then parents head back to work and students head back to school. This fosters interdependence amongst family members. The notion of family time is deeply rooted in the Dominican culture.

Additionally, as indicated in the previous chapter, the majority of the participants surveyed indicated that they possess at least a high school diploma (89%). This is a valuable piece of information because it lends to the belief that the students in those respective households are expected to attend college. Children of parents who have degrees are raised with the expectation that they are going to college. Other socioeconom-ic factors including parenting styles and how parents and their children interact (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2000; Cooper et al., 2000), parents’ sense of their effectiveness as a parent (Bandura, 1989, as cited in Shumow & Lomax, 2001), parents’ idea of their appropriate role in their children’s education (Cooper et al., 2000), and parents’ own school experiences (Shumow, 2001) play a part in a child’s motivation to attend college. Moreover, in a study conducted by Postsecondary Education Opportunity (1998), only about 30 percent of 18 to 24 year olds whose parents did not graduate from high school enrolled in college, compared to about 85 percent of 18 to 24 year olds where the householder has a bachelor’s degree or more from college.

Conclusion

Increasing parental involvement has been shown to have positive outcomes, both academically and socially that can lead to increased student achievement. The myriad of research in this area provides evidence to this claim. Epstein (1995) and other researchers have delineated parent behaviors that lead
to these positive outcomes. Others have reported how and why parental involvement changes as a child matures and whether these changes have an effect on student performance. Epstein (2009) states that schools cannot assume that one type of involvement or a single activity will affect student achievement positively in all subjects.

Research has shown that parental expectations for children’s academic achievement predict educational outcomes more than do other measures of parental involvement, such as attending school events. The results of this survey show that parents consider themselves involved in their child’s academic achievement and motivation, even though they are not physically present at the school for events.

The data also suggests that there may be a correlation between educational attainment and willingness/motivation to complete the survey. One can infer that the participants choosing to take the 84-question survey about their child showed how involved they are as a parent.

It is important to note that the correlation analysis ran for research question two showed that there were three questions from the student motivation set, which were highly correlated to the set of questions about parental involvement. Those three questions were the same questions that were selected by the researcher for research question three. Those three questions were used as the three variables, which were examined to see if they were impacted by parental involvement. All three questions were proved to be impacted by the types of parental involvement characterized in the survey.

Another critical observation to note is that parents feel that the communication they maintain with students and the effort their children make to do work at home is most imperative. A large percentage of respondents felt it was the school’s responsibility to make sure that a child understands what is being taught in school and that a child has an adult to talk to at school.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation 1: The researcher suspects there are many school and family partnerships that can be identified, but how many of them are really real partnerships? It might behoove us, as educators, to give the concept of ‘real partnerships’ some thought if we want our work to be authentic and if we want to create family-school partnership programs that can effectively support students’ academic and social growth.

There are Community Based Organizations (CBO) that would be an ideal fit for schools that cater to a Dominican population. The Community Association of Progressive Dominicans (ACDP) is an organization providing services to students in New York City which is focused on the needs of New Yorks Dominican immigrants and community. ACDP has developed high quality programs providing direct assistance to students and families.

Recommendation 2: The Dominican parents who were surveyed in this study are similar to that of many Hispanic parents in that they differ in terms of communication styles and socialization practices when compared to other groups. Therefore the researcher recommends involving Hispanic parents through personalized face-to-face communication rather than written communication, even when translated into Spanish. Another anecdote would be to initiate nonjudgmental communication that supports parents for their strengths, rather than judging their “perceived failings”; perseverance in maintaining involvement; bilingual support for both written and oral communication; strong leadership and administrative support, including flexible policies, a welcoming environment, and a collegial atmosphere.

Recommendation 3: The researcher suggests that schools offer staff development focused on Hispanic culture to foster understanding; and community outreach, including family literacy programs, cultural awareness, and vocational training.

Recommendation 4: The researcher suggests for schools to create a Parent Academy with English as a second language programs, child-care and health services, and other community-based social services and activities.

Recommendation 5: Based on the results of this study, Dominican parent’s perception of parent involvement differs from traditional American views of parent involvement. Parents reported that they are involved with their child’s education, although they were not present at their child’s school. The researcher recommends that schools make a greater effort to effectively ‘partner’ with parents on the parents’ own terms and availability, to identify the unique ways that marginalized parents are already involved in their children’s education, and search for creative ways to capitalize on these and other subjugated forms of involvement.
adopting this strategy, schools will recognize and validate the culture of the home of their students. Recommendations for Further Study

For this research, the researcher focused on urban public school settings in New York City. Additionally, participants needed to be from the Dominican Republic or from Dominican Republic decent. Considering that the Dominican population is so dense in the New York City Department of Education, further consideration may be given to the other high schools in the other three boroughs. Further studies may also consider other participants with dissimilar demographics and ethnicities. Researchers could compare the results of this study with those of other Hispanic populations that are populous in New York City, like Cubans, Columbians, Ecuadorian, and Salvadorians.

Further studies may study Dominican-American students. This will identify any similarities or differences between what parent perceive is motivating students and what they feel is motivating them. Firsthand testimony would be interesting to obtain, especially if collected qualitatively through interviews.

Closing Remarks
The conclusions and recommendations of this study are intended to provide system leaders and parents with information to consider as they continue to work in this collaborative effort. The challenges faced by students in public schools cannot be solved independently by parents or educators. More collaboration between the school and home is needed.

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Dr. Alex Marrero

Alex is a Middle School Principal in the Bronx, NY. In less than two years, he has moved the school from a Local Assistance Plan to a School in Good Standing. He is also an adjunct professor for School Building Leadership at Manhattan College where he sits on the Board of Consultants in the School of Education.
Abstract
Understanding and providing the appropriate supports for African-American male high school students is critical to their academic success. This study provided the opportunity to examine how principals and school counselors perceive the support given to African-American male high school students in New York City. Principals utilize school counselors in several ways to move the vision and mission of the school but they are viewed and utilized in ways that may not allow them to demonstrate their expertise and provide support to vulnerable populations such as African American male high school students. The method of inquiry was interviews of the ten high school principals and the ten school counselors to determine how similar or different the perceptions of the school counselors’ role are in supporting African American male high school students. Overall, this study revealed several key findings, including the need of clarification of the roles and responsibilities of school counselors and providing good and relevant professional development for their professional growth. In addition, school counselors need support and resources to ensure the success of African-American male high school students.

I. Purpose
The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how principals and school counselors perceive the supports provided to African American male high school students in 10 high schools in New York City. Interviews were the method of inquiry that was used to collect data from 10 high school principals and the 10 school counselors of these schools. The interviews also provided information to determine similarities or differences between the perceptions of the school counselors’ role in supporting African American male high school students. Since the researcher’s intent was to collect data from participants in 10 different schools within New York City and compared these data to identify trends and provide insight, this is considered a collective case study (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected through 20 interviews.

Conceptual Framework
The relationship between principals and school counselors has not been clearly defined. Although the profession of school counseling has been present in educational settings since the early 1900s, the roles and responsibilities have continuously evolved (ASCA, 2005; Dahir, 2001; Gysbers, 2001). Correspondingly, principals are not provided with an understanding of the parameters in which to engage counselor in the work with students (Dahir, Burnham, Stone & Cobb, 2010). The American School Counselors Association provides a basic understanding in that school counselors are needed in a school building to support students, in particular, African American students, but the roles are not clearly defined. School counselors are utilized in several ways to fulfill the vision and mission of the school, but are they viewed and utilized in ways that allow them to demonstrate their expertise and provide support to vulnerable populations such as African American male high school students? The American School Counselors Association national model provides a framework of the expected roles and responsibilities for school counselors. According to the national model, the role and responsibility of school counselors is to support students in the areas of academic planning, personal and social development and postsecondary planning (ASCA, 2012; Cinotti, 2014; Dahir et al., 2010).

Significance of the Study
There is some research available on the history and roles of school counselors, as well as principals and their perceptions on school counselors. Likewise, there is research on African American males and the many layers to the education, social and emotional supports needed to ensure their success. However, there is limited research regarding how principals perceive the role of school counselors and their engagement with African American male high school students. Since the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Educa-
tion Act with No Child Left Behind in 2001 and the more recent Every Student Succeed Act in 2014, the emphasis on the achievement gap and how to close it has increased (US Department of Education, 2014).

Due to the need to ensure that all students succeed, it is imperative to research all aspects of the academic arena of African American male high school students. This study explored the importance of perceptions as they pertain to the role of school counselors. It also examined how these perceptions help or hinder the supports that are provided to African American male high school students. The research findings and outcomes of this study will provide systems leaders with possible ways educators can engage African American students and how school counselors are incorporated leadership of the school.

II. Theoretical Framework

Comprehensive Guidance Programs

Since its inception in 1952, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) organized and provided structure and support for school counselors. As this organization continued to evolve and gain recognition throughout the country, so did the frameworks, models and standards it advanced. However, as ASCA grew, its own understanding of the role of the school counselor became less clear and more confusing. ASCA’s primary goal of the incorporation of the frameworks, models, and standards was to enhance student achievement and enrich the school community (Education Trust, 1997; Gysbers, 2001; Martin, 2002). In an effort to bring some uniformity to the profession, ASCA began to introduce comprehensive guidance and counseling plans in the 1970s and 1980s (ASCA, 2005).

Prior to the implementation of national standards for school counselors by the American School Counselors Association, the Educational Trust established the Transforming School Counselors Initiative (TSCI) (Baker 2001; Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008; Education Trust, 2009; House & Martin, 1998; Martin 2002). The Educational Trust is a national non-profit organization that advocates for high academic achievement and educational justice for all students, but in particular for low-income students and students of color (Educational Trust, 2013). The formation of the Transforming School Counselor Initiative was a result of a five-year study conducted by the Educational Trust in the late 1990s to evaluate the profession of school counseling (Education Trust, 2009; House & Martin, 1998; Martin 2002). The study found no significant correlation between the training programs that school counselors completed and the direct and indirect services they provide to students in schools. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative, based on the outcomes of this study, focused primarily on preparing school counselors as educational advocates to close the achievement and opportunity gaps for all students. The Initiative attempted to alter how counselors were trained and what they were taught in graduate counseling programs, in tandem with changing how school counselors deliver prevention and intervention services to students (Educational Trust, 2009). This approach of assessment, evaluation, and thoughtful implementation based on outcomes greatly impacted the future of the school counseling profession. The National Transforming School Counseling Initiative recommended that school counseling programs include leadership development, advocacy, collaboration and the use of data to impact systemic change (Educational Trust, 2009).

As part of their work with the National Transformation School Counseling Initiative, and the oversight of including school counselors in the education reformed through No Child Left Behind, ASCA (2013) looked to compile and streamline the models developed by Myrick (2003), Johnson, Johnson and Downs (2006) and Gysbers and Henderson (2006) as well as include the school counseling profession in the education reform. This compilation was the first edition of the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs published in 2003 (ASCA, 2012; Dahir, 2001). The intention of the national model was to unify the school counseling profession by providing a blueprint for program development along with the flexibility to individualize the program to be suitable for each school counseling program. The ASCA National Model was designed with the purpose of being incorporated in conjunction with the goals and missions of the school and districts (ASCA, 2012; Dahir, 2001). As a proponent of this, Dahir (2001) discussed the need for the development and implementation of nationals standards for school counseling programs. The purpose of this was to motivate school counselors to align their practices with student outcomes which would highlight the contributions counselors make to student success. Dahir (2001) argued that school counseling programs
aligned with the schools’ missions and based on the national standards would serve to support and improve student success.

Brown and Trusty (2005) challenged the research that focuses primarily on the school counseling programs such as the ASCA National Model. These researchers argued that the basis of research on school counseling should be on the causal link between the interventions provided by school counselors and student outcomes. Eschenauer and Chen-Hayes (2005) also challenged the American School Counselor Association National Model by suggesting that school counselors move from a focus on individual counseling to advocacy and accountability for all students. These authors argued that the use of the functional behavioral assessment helps to better define students needs, identify trends, and develop interventions that may provide a system change.

This suggested approach can be used by all school counselors for all students regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status and/or sexual orientation (Eschenauer & Chen-Hayes, 2005).

School Counselor
Role of the school counselor

Although there is documentation of the school counselor profession within educational settings since the late 1800s, researchers and practitioners continued to discuss and interpret the roles and responsibilities of the profession in numerous ways (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Dahir, 2001; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). As education has undergone multiple stages of reforms and the educational system continued to change, so has the role of the school counselors (ASCA, 2012; Dahir, 2001; Dahir et al., 2009; Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007). From its inception, where it was necessary for school counselors to take a vocational-centered approach to supporting students through a shift to a non-directive or client centered counseling in the 1950s, to the present, the profession has experienced variations in the roles and responsibilities of school counselors (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Johnson et al., 2006; Myrick, 2003; Perusse et al., 2004).

According to the American School Counselor Association, the role and identity of the school counselor can be described as the following:

School counselors have a minimum of a master’s degree in school counseling, meet the state certification/licensure standards and abide by the laws of the states in which they are employed. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and other applicable professional counseling associations and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: foundation, delivery, management and accountability. (“The role of the school counselor,” n.d., para. 3)

The New York City Department of Education incorporated the ASCA model into its description of the role of the school counselor. It describes the role of the school counselor as:

School counselors work in collaboration with the entire school community and are committed to the education and whole development of all students. The school counselor is a key “go to” student and staff support services professional. Services provided by school counselors address the three domains of the ASCA model. (“Role of the school counselor,” n.d., para. 1)

The ASCA model clearly defined the role of the school counselor (ASCA, 2012; Dahir, 2001; Dahir et al., 2009; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008). The subsequent description created by the New York City Department of Education based on this description sought to add clarity to the role of school counselors. However, Lambie and Williamson (2004) observed that “school counseling roles have been vast and ever-changing, making it understandable that many school counselors struggle with role ambiguity and incongruence while feeling overwhelmed” (p. 127). Correspondingly, Cinotti (2014) stated that, as the profession of school counseling moved through three stages of development from vocational guidance to guidance and counseling then expanding to comprehensive school counseling, the responsibilities have also expanded. The expansion of responsibilities of school counselors included the assignments of inappropriate duties by the administrators that directly supervise the counselors.

Role confusion

Although the role of school counselor has been clearly defined, the literature presents the issue of school counselors completing duties that are not related to their roles or inappropriate as the cause of role confusion, duties commonly assigned by administrators (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir, 2001; Lambie & Williamson,
The literature also identifies that administrators are generally not knowledgeable of the ASCA model and lack understanding of the role of the school counselor. Therefore, they do not rely on the model when assigning tasks to and determining responsibilities for school counselors (Dahir et al., 2010; DeVoss & Andrews, 2006; Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008; Paisley & Borders, 1995). According to Stone and Clark (2001), school counselors “are often viewed as peripheral to the main function of schooling and academic achievement” (p. 46). House and Hayes (2002) support this argument, adding that the undefined school counselors’ role means that the agenda of the school administrators will take priority and shape how the school counselor is utilized in the school.

To add to this ambiguity and role confusion, school counselors struggle between what they have learned and what they are asked to do (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Clemens, Milsom, and Cashwell (2009) noted that school counselors face a conflicting set of expectations. The first set of expectations is from the counseling training programs which must employ the ASCA national model. New York State programs are aligned with the ASCA model. According to The New York State Model for Comprehensive K-12 School Programs (NYSSCA, 2005), “As leaders and advocates, school counselors work as collaborative members of the educational team to examine the changes in educational policies and regulations and seek solutions to help each child maximize his or her educational experience” (p. ix). The second set of expectations is imposed upon entering the profession by the principals of the schools (Clemens et al., 2009). Due to principals’ limited knowledge of the ASCA model and limited understanding of the school counselors’ role, the duties and tasks assigned are often not aligned with the national model (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Clemens et al., 2009; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In order to drive the mission and vision of their schools, principals must be strategic in identifying and effectively using all of their staff members to ensure the educational success of all their students (Lieberman, 2004).

**Principals’ Perceptions**

The literature reveals significant differences between the principals and the school counselors’ perceptions of the role of the school counselor (Chata & Loesch, 2007). Throughout the history of the school counseling profession, the role of the school counselors has been directly influenced by the principal regardless of the principals’ level of understanding of the ASCA national model (Perusse et al., 2004). According to Fitch, Newby, Ballester, and Marshall (2001), the majority of the principals had no orientation or training in the ASCA national model or how to effectively supervise school counselors. Consequently, school counselors become wedged between being viewed as pedagogues and mental health providers. Because school counselors are not assigned to classrooms and are often connected to every aspect of the school community, principals consider them quasi-administrators (Cinotti, 2014).

In the mid-1920s, Myers (1924) expressed concern regarding school counselors being inundated with administrative duties during the early stages of the profession. In order to combat this, Myers suggested the implementation of three strategies. The first strategy suggests that school counselors are well trained. Not only should school counselors be trained in counseling techniques, they should become skilled advocates for the students as well as for themselves (Cinotti, 2014; Dahir et al., 2010).

For the second strategy, Myers (1924) suggested that “principals shall understand clearly what counseling involves” (p. 141). According to Cinotti (2014), principals should be knowledgeable of the role of school counselors and clearly understand that school counselors are not educators but are committed to addressing the academic issues, social-emotional needs and career planning for students. Knowledge of the ASCA national model would prevent principals from assigning inappropriate tasks to school counselors and allow the implementation of comprehensive guidance plans that would serve all students (Dahir et al., 2010; Fitch et al., 2001; Cinotti, 2014; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Clemens et al., 2009).

Myers’ (1924) third suggestion includes efficacious supervision of school counselors. Direct supervision should be provided by the principal. Supervision of the comprehensive school counseling program would be provided by appropriate staff members from the district or central offices. This would help build capacity of the school counselors and school administrators...
as well, reducing the possibility of inappropriate task assignments (Cinotti, 2014; Clemens et al., 2009; Dahir et al., 2010; Fitch et al., 2001; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

According to Dahir (2001), the success of a comprehensive guidance program depends upon the support of the principal. The literature shows that, without an understanding of the role of the school counselor and the support of the counseling program, school counselors are given tasks that conflict with their roles (Dollarhide et al., 2007). Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan and Jones (2004) discovered that comparatively, the “exact same tasks that were also the most highly endorsed by school principals at the secondary level were also the most frequently performed inappropriate tasks by school counselors” (p. 159). One of the many inappropriate tasks included participation in disciplinary actions, which conflicts with their ability to establish productive and trusting counseling relationships with students (Dahir et al., 2010; Fitch et al., 2001). Other inappropriate tasks included programming class schedules, teaching and other non-counseling duties that distracted school counselor, preventing them from addressing critical student and school issues such as student academic achievement.

Dahir et al. (2010) examined the differences in the priorities of principals and school counselors and the need for enhanced collaboration among the two in order to better support students. The study revealed there were significant discrepancies in what the principal and school counselors deem as priorities in the role of school counselor. The study also offered recommendations which included improving the principal and school counselor relationship as well as developing stronger collaboration between the two. According to the authors, these recommendations would increase the alignment of the goals for academic success of all students.

**African American Males in High School**

There is extensive research in the area of African American male high school students and the adverse effect that institutional conditions have on their academic achievement. African American male high school students, particularly in urban settings, face a multitude of barriers which impedes their academic success. These barriers include higher suspension rates, underrepresentation in gifted or advanced courses, and disproportionate placement in remedial classes and special education (Fusick & Bordeau, 2004; Harper & Wood, 2016; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Owens, Simmons, Bryant & Henfield, 2011; Tucker, Dixon & Griddine, 2010). In regards to the dilemma of African American males, the findings in the national report by the Council for the Great City Schools conclude:

The nation’s young Black males are in a state of crisis. They do not have the same opportunities as their male or female counterparts across the country. Their infant mortality rates are higher, and their access to health care is more limited. They are more likely to live in single-parent homes and less likely to participate in early childcare programs. They are less likely to be raised in a household with a fully employed adult, and they are more likely to live in poverty. As adults, Black males are less likely than their peers to be employed. At almost every juncture, the odds are stacked against these young men in ways that result in too much unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives. (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010, p. iii)

Moreover, African American male high school students, historically, have been viewed with disdain and fear by society. Schools are a microcosm of the larger society and often promote the message of fear and disdain (Spencer, 2001). Whether it is blatant or subconscious, the failure to acknowledge this affects the academic success of African American male high school students (Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Ogbu, 1994; Owen et al., Spencer, 2001).

Duncan and Jackson (2007) stated that the inundation of these negative views on African American male high school students may cause them to adopt and internalize behaviors such as being uninterested, indolent, disruptive, angry and incompetent (Steele, 2003). In addition, Steele (2003) stated that the internalization of these negative stereotypes may cause some African American male students to fail academically. Conversely, the stress of combating stereotype threats or working to dispel the negative stereotypes also may negatively impact the academic success of African American male high school students (Steele, 2003).

Achievement gap vs. opportunity gap.

The National Assessment of Educational Prog-
ress (NAEP) defines the achievement gap as when “one group of students (such as, students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant” (NAEP, 2016). Smith (2005) reviewed this definition and added that the achievement gap refers to differences in performance (e.g., test scores and graduation rates) between children of color and middle class, White children. While poverty is strongly associated with low academic achievement, the gap breaks down along both racial and ethnic lines. (p. 22)

Unlike NAEP, Smith (2005) emphasized the importance of including socio-economic and racial factors in the definition. These factors are important to note because they contribute to the ongoing disparity of the achievement gap. Access to resources and opportunities are mitigating factors in addressing the achievement gap between African American impoverished students and White middle class students (Tienken & Zhao, 2013).

According to Darling-Hammond (2013), there is a need to prioritize addressing the opportunity gap: much less attention, however, is paid to the opportunity gap, the cumulative differences in access to key educational resources that support learning at home and at school: expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information resources. (p. 77)

The opportunity gaps limits the futures of at-risk students, particularly African American students. In order to close the achievement gap and allow all students to reach their potential, efforts must be made to close the opportunity gap (Barnett & Lamy, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Tienken & Zhao, 2013).

African American high school male students and school counseling.

There is extensive research on the achievement gap, but only some research on the opportunity gap, and limited research on the impact of school counseling on closing these gaps. As the demand for accountability for Educators has strengthened, so has the need for school counselors to show their impact on student achievement. Smith (2005) examined the inequities that impede the academic achievement of African American and Latino students as well as economically disadvantaged students. Smith (2005) explored the achievement and access gap as well as the role of privilege and entitlement in helping and hindering academic outcomes for these populations of students. Correspondingly, Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) asserted that the need to deliver specific supports to students in high-poverty schools. This research highlights the need for counselors to assume leadership roles such as being cultural ambassadors, educational partners with teachers and administrators, and an integral part of shaping a family-friendly environment within schools. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) provided a context for the need to provide the support of students as they matriculate from middle school to high school, noting that significant process if needed of all students but a greater process is needed for African American students, particularly African American male students. These students face and must learn to counter stereotyping, the lack of positive role models, and culturally incompetent high schools (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Similarly, Fusick and Bordeau, (2004) provided a clear and concise examination of the issues facing African American, at-risk students and the unique needs that counselors should address when providing support to them in a school setting. Along with the unique needs, these authors also explore the need both for counselors of the same race and for those of different races to examine their own biases and to appreciate how these biases could affect how they counsel these students.

Holcomb-McCoy (2007), Fusick and Bordeau (2004), and Tolson (2008) suggested that counselors should factor in gender roles, identity formation and the cultural community when engaging in intervention and prevention supports for African American male students. Tolson (2008) challenged the deficit model utilized by most researchers with a focus on the deficits of the educational systems in the effort to educate African American males. This report which explores factors that improve educational outcomes and provides concrete and feasible factors that educational systems can adapt as well as addressing political implications for each factor.

In another report, Tolson and Lewis (2012) introduced practices and policies that addressed the need for equitable and fair practices and resources for African American male students, challenging the current approach to how African American male students are educated and offering a new approach for improve-
Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010) also challenged the deficit model, focusing their research on African American male high school students who are academically successful. Their research found that African American males who believed that their presence mattered in their high schools were academically more successful than those who did not. Hence, interpersonal relationships with other students and school staff are contributing factors to those students’ academic success, particularly their feeling as though they matter and contribute to the school community.

With the continuously changing role of the school counselor and the growing needs of the student population, specifically African American high school males, there is a demand for school counselors to provide targeted and specific support to this population of students (Washington, 2010). Washington (2010) further argued that this type of support by school counselors can positively affect the academic development of African American male students. As the school counselors’ role shift, there is an increasing need for them to be pedagogue partners as well as advocates for students.

The implementation of a comprehensive guidance plan aligned with the ASCA model would provide activities that affect all students and provide targeted interventions and supports for African American high school students (ASCA, 2012; Dahir et al., 2010). This approach provides school counselors with a better understanding of the needs of students and can help students to achieve academically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically. This approach to school counseling improves the equity and access of all students to educational services specifically designed to help them to achieve appropriate tasks (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007).

Since school counselors are not in classrooms like teachers and have more flexibility to interact and engage students, they are in the best positions to advocate and support the academic success of students (ASCA, 2012). This includes advocating and supporting the academic success of African American male students (Washington, 2010). The research presented by Washington (2010) includes several suggestions for school counselors to support African American male students. Although all suggestions are significant, one important suggestion was the need for school counseling to acknowledge racism and the impact it has on African American male students and their academic progression (Washington, 2010). Bonilla-Silva (2006) stated that a color-blind ideology negates the serious impact that racism has on African American students as individuals and institutionally.

III. Methodology

The populations used for this study were high school principals and school counselors in New York City public schools. This public school system has over 400 high schools. The sample for this study was 10 high school principals and 10 high school counselors from New York City public high schools. New York City was purposely selected due to the number of high schools with significant populations of African American students. For the purpose of this study, significant population is defined as a population of 51 percent or higher of African American student enrollment. In the same manner, the principals and school counselors selected for this study work in high schools with at least an enrollment of 51 percent of African American students. This enrollment data was retrieved from each school’s registrar report that is publicly available on the New York City Department of Education website.

VI. Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Summary of Findings

The analysis of the data produced several results and six themes emerged. The first theme that emerged was the perception of how school counselors are utilized in schools. The results indicated that there were some discrepancies between the principals’ and the school counselors’ perceptions of how school counselors are utilized in schools. Of the 10 school included in this study, the principals and school counselors in nine of the schools had similar perceptions of how school counselors were utilized. In the one school where the perceptions of the school counselors contradicted that of the principal, both the principal and the school counselor had fewer than three years of experience in their roles. This study found that, although the principals’ and school counselors’ perceptions of the utilization of school counselors were similar within the school, the perceptions varied between the schools. All of the schools confirmed the use of counselors to support the academic needs of students but that support included evaluating transcriptions, providing instruction, and ad-
dressing disciplinary issues with students. The second theme that emerged was the perceptions of the needs and support for African American high school male students. All 10 schools agreed that African American male high school students have needs and require support. However, seven of the 10 schools were not in agreement with the perception of the needs and support essential to support at-risk populations such as African American male high school students. One of the principals shifted from adamantly stating that these students do not need additional support to confirming that they do require support specifically for them. The perceptions of the needs and support for this population of students were considered to be internal by seven of the 10 principals and seven of the 10 school counselors. These internal factors included concern for the social and emotional needs of these students which contributes to increased disciplinary issues. Four of the 10 principals as well as three of the 10 school counselors emphasized the importance of culturally relevant supports and the need for male empowerment programs in school. External factors such as poverty, community concerns, and family issues were raised by three of the 10 principals and three of the 10 school counselors.

The third theme that emerged was obstacles. All the schools agreed that there were obstacles hindering the provision of support to African American male high school students; however, nine of the 10 schools had different views of the obstacles that hinder support to African American male high school students. Two of the 10 counselors stated that they believe that African American male high school students struggle with relating to female school counselors. Two of the 10 principals stated that trust was an obstacle while four of the 10 emphasized the negative views and low expectations of teachers as significant obstacles. Three of the 10 school counselors highlighted family-related issues as significant obstacles. In one school, both the principal and the school counselor perceived teachers’ negative misconceptions of African American male high school students as a substantial obstacle.

The fourth theme that emerged included the roles and responsibilities of the school counselors. The role and responsibilities of the school counselor were not clearly defined. The data analysis indicated that six of the 10 principals and school counselors were not in agreement regarding the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. The principals expressed concern for the lack of understanding and the need to interpret the roles and responsibilities based on the mission and vision of their schools. The interpretation of the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor included addressing disciplinary issues, providing social-emotional support, and holding the students to high expectations. Conversely, the school counselors emphasized the importance of developing students’ soft skills. Five of 10 school counselors were in agreement that this was a significant aspect of their role. Two of the 10 school counselors added that demonstrating love while engaging in responsibilities was also a significant aspect of their role.

The fifth theme that emerged was the resources needed and/or were available for African American high school male students. The data indicated that five of the 10 principals and school counselors agreed that the resources needed and/or were available for African American high school males. Five of the 10 principals expressed the importance of a male empowerment class or rites of passage program. Three of the 10 principals included the lack of adequate funding prevented them from offering additional resources. However, two of the 10 principals were able to provide the needed resources for African American male high school students because they had the adequate funding to do so. All of the school counselors expressed similar views on the resources needed for African American male high school students. However, three of the 10 school counselors included resources such as afterschool programs and accessing community resources as important.

The sixth theme that emerged was professional development. All of the principals and school counselors agreed that professional development for school counselors was important in supporting African American male high school students. Principals and school counselors from eight of 10 of the schools focused exclusively on professional development for school counselors while two of the 10 required the school counselors to conduct professional development trainings for other school staff. Four of 10 school counselors considered the opportunity to network as a valued aspect of attending professional development events. One principal and one school counselor from different schools suggested the need for school counselors to receive mental health supports or self-care.
Conclusions

The first conclusion was that principals and counselors were in agreement in the way that school counselors are utilized to provide support to all students. These supports included, but are not limited to, reviewing and analyzing transcripts, advocating for students, and lowering the suspension rates. This finding is related to the literature that examines the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. The American School Counselors Association (2013) developed a national model for school counseling programs which included information on expected roles and responsibilities of the school counselor. Although principals and counselors were in agreement, the roles differed between schools. In one school, the school counselor was utilized by the administration to provide instruction to students as well as to be the liaison between the students, staff, and parents. Conversely, the utilization of the school counselor in another school included addressing disciplinary issues with students as well as supporting the students’ social and emotional needs. The research presented prevalent inconsistencies on how school counselors were utilized in schools. According to Amatea and Clark (2005), for example, the school administrators’ perceptions of school counselors’ roles and responsibilities were not aligned with the roles and responsibilities purported by the American School Counselors Association.

The second conclusion was that the majority of principals were not in agreement with the needs or types of support that should be provided to African American male high school students. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) emphasized the need to provide support to help these students to counter stereotyping, the lack of positive role models, and culturally incompetent high schools. Fusick and Bordeau (2004) and Toldson (2008) suggested that schools should consider the importance of gender roles, the need of identity formation, and the cultural community when engaging in intervention and prevention support for African American male students. The research presented a variation of the perceptions of the needs of and supports for African American male high school students. A substantial number of principals expressed the importance of providing culturally relevant support. In addition, the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of African American high school male students was noted by a significant number of principals. The development of a conclusive statement was problematic due to the deviation in findings coupled with the range of suggestions provided in the literature.

The third conclusion was the discrepancy between the roles and responsibilities of the school counselors was prevalent in the schools included in this study. The perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of school counselors by principals and school counselors were inconsistent. The ASCA national model was designed to provide a framework for the roles and responsibilities of the school counselors with the expectation that they be aligned with the goals and visions of the schools (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Dahir et al., 2010; NYSSCA, 2005). The researcher concluded that, although the ASCA model is the national model, it was not referenced when determining or understanding the roles and responsibilities of school counselors (Dahir et al., 2010).

This research also concluded that all the participants were in agreement that obstacles are hindering the provision of support to African American high school male students. African American males, particularly those in high schools, have a significant need for specialized support due to social, emotional and societal conceptions and misconceptions (Kunjufu, 2013; Noguera, 2008; Washington, 2010). Participants identified internal obstacles presented within the school community such as teachers’ low expectations as well as limited funding to provide additional resources. Participants also included external obstacles such as poverty, family issues and lack of community safety.

The other conclusion is that schools agreed that resources to support African American male high school students were needed; however, the categories of the resources vary between the schools and among principals and school counselors. A significant number of schools highlighted the need for gender-specific approaches such as Rites of Passage programs and/or male empowerment classes.

The final conclusion was that schools concurred that professional development for school counselors was important in supporting African American high school male students. Both principals and school counselors emphasized the importance of school counselors attending professional development opportunities. All of the principals allowed for their school counselors to attend professional development meetings and events provided within and out of New York City.

V. Recommendations
The first recommendation is that the New York City Department of Education should develop a comprehensive description that clarifies the appropriate utilization of school counselors based on the ASCA model. Currently, there is a variation of the model available on the DOE website, but the description is vague and unclear. Moreover, system leaders should be provided with training regarding how to incorporate the ASCA (2013) model so that the comprehensive guidance plan implemented is aligned with the mission and vision of the school.

Another recommendation is that the New York City Department of Education should develop comprehensive support strategies for at-risk populations such as African American male high school students. These strategies should be based on the ASCA (2013) model and made available to system leaders, school counselors, and other stakeholders.

Although the majority of participants were in agreement that African American male high school students were in need of support by school counselors, there was no consensus as to what such support should be and how it should be provided. To address this issue, the New York City Department of Education should provide principals and school counselors with the same information as to the roles and responsibilities of school counselors to best support African American male high school students. Another recommendation is that the New York City Department of Education with the Mayor’s Office, local politicians, and community leaders should work collaboratively to provide supports and resources to system leaders and communities to address the internal and external obstacles that hinder providing support to African American male high school students. This would require the coordination between the school and community resources that could help schools limit the obstacles to better support the African American male high school students.

The researcher concluded that the schools agreed that resources and professional development for school counselors were needed to provide supports to African American male high school students. The recommendation should be that the New York City Department of Education identify and coordinate with organizations that provide resources for African American male high school students. These organizations should be encouraged to collaborate with system leaders to provide relevant resources to this population of students. Furthermore, school counselors should be required and allowed to attend relevant professional development meetings and conferences with the full support of system leaders.

VI. Recommendations for Further Study

This study examined how principals and school counselors perceive the support provided to African American high school male students. Future studies could include the use of a different data collection method to examine principals’ and school counselors’ perceptions of counseling support for African American male students. Addressing the educational needs of African American high school males as well as examining the approaches system leaders utilize to support this population of students may be an area of research that would be beneficial.

The use of a quantitative method to examine the principals’ and school counselors’ perceptions of supporting African American male high school students is recommended for future study. This approach would allow the gathering of data from a larger pool of participants, allowing the opportunity to disaggregate the data to expand the understanding in other areas. The outcomes of this type of study may provide information as to the correlation between perceptions and execution of support provided to African American male high school students.

Another recommendation for a future study is the use of a mixed-method approach to examine quantitative and qualitative data that would provide information on the needs and support of African American male high school students within the five largest public school systems in New York State: New York City, Rochester, Yonkers, Buffalo, and Syracuse.

An additional future study may consider a comparative analysis of the needs and support of African American high school males and African American high school females. This study could provide data on whether there is a need to differentiate support based on gender. The outcomes of this study could affect system leaders’ understanding of the needs of these populations of students as well as highlight significant strategies that system leaders could implement to increase the educational success of these students.
References


Dr. Stacey J. Haley is a dedicated educator and social worker who has worked with children, teens and families for over 15 years. She currently serves as the Director of High School Guidance and Postsecondary Planning for the Brooklyn North Field Support Center of the New York City Department of Education. She earned her Educational Administration and Supervision certification from The College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York and recently completed her doctoral studies in Educational Leadership from The Sage Colleges in Albany, New York. She is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
School Governance: How do principals involve parents in selected African-American Title I high schools in New York City?
Christopher Smith, Ed.D
Esteves School of Education, The Sage Colleges, Albany, NY

Abstract
This study examined how principals involve parents in school governance at the local level to impact school success. To address decision-making authority, the researcher explored School Based Management (SBM) as one reform of strategy designed to bring administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders together to collaborate as a team, to create and monitor school policies, develop school budgets, examine and select curriculum, and participate in the staffing process. Using Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement and Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Leadership, the researcher concluded that SBM teams provide parents with voice, but parents do not engage in school budgeting, staffing, or high school curricular decisions. Instead, there was evidence that in New York City, parents are instrumental in voicing their concerns and developing school policies. One significant finding was that principals require training to develop school governance structures that empower parents to be informed decision-makers. In this qualitative case study, data was collected to determine parent involvement in school governance through interviews with five principals, three School Leadership Team parent representatives, four Parent Teacher Association parent representatives, and two parent coordinators (Creswell, 2015; Mason, 2002). The researcher analyzed the information gathered from five predominantly African-American Title I high schools in New York City to obtain insight and compare practices about parent involvement in school governance. Also, the researcher conducted a document analysis and observed SLT/PTA meetings to find support for the information provided in the interviews.

I. Purpose
The purpose of this study was to examine how principals, in predominately African American high schools in New York City, facilitate parental involvement in school governance. In this study, the researcher used Epstein’s (1995) Six Types of Parent Involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. In addition to Epstein, Bolman and Deal’s (2013) Four-Frame model was utilized to understand the principals’ leadership characteristics in relation to parent involvement. This qualitative study analyzed practices of principals that empower parents to be active parent leaders in school governance (Epstein, 1995). In this collective case study, qualitative data was used to provide meaning to the phrase, “parent involvement,” in school governance through interviews with parents on PTAs, parent coordinators, and principals (Creswell, 2015; Mason, 2002). The researcher analyzed the information from five different high schools in New York City to obtain insight and compare practices about parent involvement in school governance. Also, the researcher conducted a document analysis and observed SLT/PTA meetings to find support for the information provided in the interviews.

II. Conceptual Framework
Research has shown that leadership makes a difference in successful schools (Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008). It is essential for school leaders to develop school communities with a shared vision, trust, and the belief that all stakeholders have a role in the process of educating children (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 2007). Also, successful principals set high expectations, empower people, build coalitions and teams, and manage internal and external relationships to support teaching and learning (Bolman & Deal, 2013). It is paramount that principals engage all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process because it truly takes a village to educate children and develop successful schools (Adams, 2014; Creasia, 2014; Jarrett, Wasonga, & Murphy, 2010; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Several studies suggest that parent involvement impacts student success (Heard, 2007; Jeynes, 2003, 2014).
School governance is a critical component for principals to develop family, school, and community partnerships (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 2003). Principals must value the thoughts, ideas, and interests of all stakeholders. Through informed decision-making, leadership, and parental involvement, principals can organize their communities to create a systematic process that supports conflict resolution and builds school and community collaborations (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Gauch, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 2003).

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement should foster a partnership between the home and school (Trotman, 2001). Schools benefit from parent involvement. It facilitates understanding and provides an opportunity to appreciate the values and cultures of families to meet the needs of the students they serve (Hichman, Greenwood & Miller, 1995; Montesinos, 2004). Parent involvement is an essential element in the success of students at all educational levels (Comer 1986; Connors & Epstein, 1994; Constantino, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Epstein (1995) noted that parent involvement leads to improved attendance, behavior, student achievement, and motivation. Also, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) suggested that parent involvement impacts positive attitudes about school, while Lee and Shute (2010) identified twelve variables to support academic success. Of the twelve variables, parents having high expectations for their children, participating in school activities, and being involved in the educational process between the home and school were key factors to success in academics (2010).

Developing partnerships with parents to create school communities that value parent involvement, ensuring student success (Trotman, 2001), is a necessary component of school governance and leadership. It has been noted that parent involvement impacts student success and drives learning at all educational levels (Comer 1986; Connors & Epstein, 1994; Constantino, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The federal government recognized the importance of parental involvement, and inevitably legislation was passed to require Title I schools to develop school governance structures that would include administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders (Spring, 1988). The accumulated effort of these stakeholders is thought to result in improved communication between parents and school structures, infusing the enthusiasm of the school community, and empowering students. In an effort to support the federal legislation, Epstein (1995) established a framework to examine parent involvement in education. In 1997, the National Parent Teacher Association (NTPA) adopted Epstein’s six types of parent involvement (National Parent Teacher Association, 2016).

Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement

Epstein (1995) outlined a comprehensive framework, Six Types of Parent Involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. These six types were developed to help school leaders create strong school-family partnerships to meet the needs of the school community. While Epstein believed that the six steps of parent involvement are necessary, Kochanek, Wraight, Wan, Nylen, and Rodriguez (2011) reported that only 23% of parents felt that their contributions to the school community were valued. The first parent involvement type is parenting. Epstein (1995) stated that schools must help all families establish supportive home environments for their children. According to Epstein (2002), a supportive home environment is one where children are safe and healthy. In addition, children are provided the necessary tools to develop personally, socially, and academically. Providing parents with workshops, support services, and conducting home visits are examples of ways schools can help inaugurate a community that cares about parenting. Engaging parents in their children’s education reduces absenteeism and behavior problems, improves student achievement and attendance, and improves students’ attitudes about school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Trotman, 2001). The second parent involvement type is communication. In order to build a strong partnership with parents, communication is critical (Epstein, 1995). Lasky (2000) argued that active listening and communication are key to building trust, respect, and an understanding of purpose in a school community. Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, and Van Voorhis, (2009) indi-
cated that communication is reciprocal. Schools must communicate with their families, and families must communicate with schools in ways that are open, honest, and frequent to build a trusting relationship with families, schools, and communities. This approach reduces the miscommunication and information gaps that all too often cause confusion and frustration to all stakeholders in this process (Epstein et al., 2009). School leaders and parents may feel discouraged by poor communication (Price, 2009), which directly impacts the level of comfort between families and school communities. This may speak to the lack of parent involvement in high schools. Ensuring the dissemination of information to stakeholders involved in the school community helps build trust and a sense of understanding.

The third parent involvement type is volunteering. This type of involvement provides parents opportunities to participate in the school community (Epstein, 1995). Epstein et al. (2009) believed that creating meaningful activities for parents, as well as recruiting and organizing parent assistance to support the school community, strengthened the community and improved students’ achievement. Epstein (1995) indicated that schools must help families maintain and sustain healthy home environments that support their children’s success. Parent assistance, such as providing support to teachers in the classroom or helping to disseminate information to other stakeholders, can help to build awareness and improve parent’s confidence to help their children. Mapp (2003) added that volunteerism could happen outside the school building. Noel, Stark and Redford (2015) stated that 28% of parents served as volunteers in their child’s classrooms or other places within the school community. In addition, 47% of parents participated in school fundraising efforts. It is essential to ensure that parents gain specific skills to engage actively in volunteering for, or on behalf of, their children’s school. When parents are actively vested into the structure and culture of a child’s school, there is a communal effort of solidarity that results in increased learning (Epstein, 2001). The skills enhanced by the internal and external school community helps support the home environment (Epstein, 1995).

The fourth parent involvement type is learning at home. Epstein (1995) argued that schools must provide information and strategies to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-based activities, decisions, and planning. Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005) agreed that providing opportunities for parents to volunteer in the development and creation of school curriculum equips parents to support their children academically. These opportunities provide a clear understanding of the content to help their children in a safe and nurturing home environment. Henderson & Mapp (2002) believed that learning begins at home. Although parents are not expected to know the answers, Constantino (2006) stated that they should develop a relationship with their children’s teachers. Additionally, Constantino (2007) indicated that building an open relationship is essential for schools to be successful. Epstein (1995) suggested that creating a two-way communication system would help to build and sustain this relationship. In the event that these structures are not in place, parents must be involved in the school community with an active voice to impact change.

The fifth parent involvement type is decision-making. Epstein (1995) stated that schools should include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives to support school success. Lareau and Munoz (2012) argued that parents want to be a part of the school governance process to impact change in the school building. Comer and Haynes (1991) also concluded that schools involving parents in the decision-making process had positive effects in developing strong home-school partnerships. Epstein (1995) stated that collaborating with the community completes the six types of parent involvement.

The sixth parent involvement type is collaborating with the community to identify and integrate resources and services to help form strong and viable community bonds which strengthen school programs, family practices, student learning and development, and assist in the process of supporting families and their children (Epstein, 1995). Noel et al. (2015) reported that 66% of parents attended a school or class event such as a play, dance, sports event, or science fair because of their child as one indicator of community involvement. The National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) adopted the Epstein framework as a model to improve parent involvement in the late 1990s (National PTA, 1997).
High Poverty and Minority Populations

Brandon, Higgins, Pierce and Brandon (2010) suggested that socioeconomic status is a contributing factor to low parental involvement. This study was conducted to determine the degree of alienation African-American parents feel towards the public education system. Questionnaires were administered to four hundred twenty-one (421) African American parents. Contrary to the argument regarding socioeconomic status, Comer and Haynes (1991) indicated that a strong home-school relationship is essential for students from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Comer (1980) stated the need for parental participation in schools is greatest in low-income minority communities or where parents feel a sense of exclusion, low self-esteem, and hopelessness (p. 126)

Parent Involvement Significance to Study

The report, A Nation at Risk (1983), highlighted the failures of public education in the United States. Schools were not preparing children to compete in the global economy despite the enormous amount of taxpayer dollars being invested (Gardner, 1983). The contributors suggested that decision-making authority is given to the local school to make decisions that meet the needs of their children. The federal government recognized the importance of developing legislation to ensure parents are involved in the Title I schools’ decision-making process (Hiatt, 1994). The Every Student Succeeds Act, and previously the No Child Left Behind Act mandated that parents be involved and made partners in the school governance structures (Epstein, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Parent involvement is significant to this study because countless researchers have examined its benefits relating to improved attendance, self-esteem, graduation rates, positive attitude, and student achievement (Comer, 1986; Connors & Epstein, 1994; Constantino, 2006; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Smylie, Wenzel, and Fendt (2003) emphasized that good leadership can promote meaningful parent involvement, improving the educational experiences for children.

Principal’s Leadership

In order to use parent involvement effectively to increase student achievement, an effective sense of leadership is very important. Bolman and Deal (2013) provided four ways to look at the leader within organizations. The Four-Frame model includes structural, political, human resources, and symbolic frames. These frames allow leaders to examine their personal leadership within an organization, and they provided examples to describe the types of leaders in each of the four frames. Bolman and Deal’s leadership orientation framework (2003) was developed as a tool for leaders to be able to change their perspective, or lens, quickly in order to view different situations that arise in organizations. It was their belief that effective leaders fit into all four categories. Similar to other situational leadership theories, this framework provides a mechanism for leaders to diagnose situations, solve problems, and work through the complex issues often associated with organizations. The four frames consist of the “structural frame (rules, roles, goals, policies); the human resource frame (needs, skills, relationships); the political frame (power, conflict, competition, organizational politics); and the symbolic frame (culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes)” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 16). The creation of each frame was influenced by the leadership research conducted in the middle to late twentieth century and from a variety of studies conducted by researchers in other disciplines as well.

Bolman and Deal (2013) provided these four ways to enable leaders to examine their personal leadership within an organization. In the structural frame, the leader knows how to organize and structure groups to achieve desired results. Under the human resource frame, the leaders know how to build strong cohesive teams to meet the organizational vision. In the political category, the leader knows how to build coalitions internally and externally; and finally, in the symbolic frame, the leader knows how to create a culture that provides purpose, and how to build teams with rituals and ceremonies. Bolman and Deal believed that effective leaders fit into all four categories. The researchers argued that school leadership is about developing a relationship with the school community that supports and values people. They believed that transforming education requires leaders to view school-wide issues from multiple perspectives and create a community of
learners and doers.

Distributed leadership appears to be a more current hybrid of the reform effort of School-Based Management (SBM). Distributed leadership is focused on people, enabling collaborative action towards goals, and allowing leadership to arise naturally (Kayrooz & Fleming, 2008). It also promotes the exchange of leadership as the need arises. This means having the right people in the right place at the right time. Distributed leadership recognizes diversity in education by bringing in multiple perspectives to make informed decisions (Kayrooz & Fleming, 2008). Similar to SBM, distributed leadership is a form of participatory democracy. Distributed leadership assembles the collective effort of a group of people, encouraging a commitment to decision-making, and it works to promote a balance between central control and local discretion by giving a voice to those who acknowledge or go against power holders (Kayrooz & Fleming, 2008). It is a multi-layered blending of expertise, ideas, and effort. Distributive leadership promotes shared responsibility, encouraging open-ended and emergent leadership.

Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) concluded that principals must be managers and change agents in SBM. The role of leadership should be shared with all stakeholders to create a community of vested individuals working towards meeting a shared vision deeply rooted in teaching and learning. In an SBM environment, “principals were likely to be focused on distributing power, generating agreement around school goals . . . collecting information . . . to create opportunities and remove barriers so that others could assume leadership positions” (p. 365). When principals distribute power and provide information to parents, aligned to the school’s goals, trust is developed. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) also concluded that parents tend to rely on the expertise of the principal to ensure appropriate curriculums, instructional practices, and assessments are created, designed, and evaluated to meet the needs of all children. Leadership must be shared to “help sustain attention and provide substantial support for improvements in classroom instruction and students learning” (p. 365).

School Governance

The notion of “taking responsibility for every child” must transition from a slogan or rallying call to a unified priority of every school district to galvanize action across every sector, race, and circumstance in order to transform the educational journey of families across America. The significant challenges facing school boards whose agendas include declining funds, rising employment costs, stagnant performance, and persistent achievement gaps have directed a new spotlight on the importance of school governance.

Successful School Governance

Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) concluded that there are eight elements of a successful SBM. The first element is to develop a shared vision deeply rooted in teaching and learning aligned to the district standards. This vision must be created as a blueprint that sets the direction of a school with a clear set of high expectations for all stakeholders, including parents.

The second element Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) developed was that SBM schools have true decision-making authority. The body must create decisions designed to impact teaching and learning aligned in budgeting, curriculum, and personnel. By providing an SBM team with authority to make decisions that impact student achievement, stakeholders are more likely to participate because they are official change agents. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) concluded that successful SBM schools had high levels of authority to act, both regarding autonomy from the district and teacher influence.

The third element was to spread the decision-making powers throughout the school to empower others to become a part of the decision-making process. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) reviewed the literature of the Consortium for Policy and Research in Education and discovered successful SBM schools distributed power and involved many stakeholders in the decision-making process by developing various teams. These teams did not just focus on governance, but also curriculum, even though many teams created successful schools and made sure their work was aligned with the shared vision of the school. In struggling schools, “power not only overburdened council members with excessive demands on their time but also generated conflict and distrust. . . . Parent participation . . . was largely symbolic with parents exerting little influence over decisions” (p. 360).
The fourth element was the development and use of knowledge and skills to build capacity to create a knowledgeable school community. In successful SBM schools, professional development was an essential component of the learning process for all stakeholders. These schools conducted or solicited on-going professional development sessions on shared decision-making, interpersonal and management skills, strategies, and support to improve student performance. It was important for all stakeholders to be informed. This was very different in struggling schools that “lacked a plan for professional development” (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003, p. 361).

“Successful SBM schools have multiple mechanisms for collecting information related to school priorities and for communicating to all school stakeholders” (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003, p. 362). These schools strongly believe that disseminating information to all stakeholders is essential for the schools to be successful. The diversity of information includes but is not limited to budget, curriculum, and student performance. They found that when information is provided to parents, they could participate in discussions and make informed decisions about matters that impact the school community. Struggling schools did not tap into the successes of other successful schools, in part because they worked in isolation. Information is so important that “successful SBM schools also shared data with the community through frequent public reporting events that helped schools evaluate their progress on an ongoing basis; in other words, they learned from their experiences” (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003, p. 363).

Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) stated that rewarding people also supports the work of developing successful SBM schools while Odden and Busch (1998) concluded rewards help schools to create a “well-designed system . . . to define their focus” (p. 364). This supports the next element of creating a community that supports shared leadership. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) stated the principal’s role in SBM is to orchestrate decision-making, often through teams and interacting with a wider range of individuals, including community members and other stakeholders. “Leadership is no longer the sole responsibility of the principal” (p. 365). Additionally, they found that principals in struggling schools did not have the skills needed to work in a decentralized environment (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003). Their management style conflicted with the norms of decision-making. Cuttler (2000) agreed that shared leadership and decision-making must be grounded in trust. This relationship must be viewed as contributing partners in the process. The final element of Briggs and Wohlstetter’s (2003) keys to successful SBM schools is the concept of cultivating resources. According to the National Education Reform Act (1991), the decisions that transpired at the school level were the closest agents to their community schools. This decision-making body included school leaders, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Berthelsen and Walker (2008) stated that parents are essential in the decision-making process in school governance. Gordon and Nocon (2008) affirmed the importance of parents in the decision-making process.

After conducting an extensive review of the literature, the researcher found that many of the studies were dated and did not specifically address how principals in predominately African-American Title I schools involved parents in schools to participate in activities and school governance in New York City. Much of the literature focused on elementary and middle schools. The researcher provided information from the studies used in study to examine practices implemented by current high school principals to discover best practices to support improving the overall graduation rate of African-American students.

III. Methods
The researcher collected documents from each site, such as Comprehensive Educational Plans, Title I Parent Compact, School Quality Reports, and School Quality Snapshots, which helped the researcher collect supporting evidence (Creswell, 2015). Finally, the researcher received approval to observe three schools SLT and/or PTA meetings to understand how principals facilitate parental involvement in school governance. The purpose of these observations was to collect data to understand and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2015). Through these methods, the researcher was able to understand how the leadership characteristics of principals support parent leadership and involvement in school governance in New York City; additionally, the data was used to understand how schools incorporated Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement to help develop parent leadership and involvement at
the school level. Finally, the researcher sought an answer to the question, how do school governance structures empower parents to be informed decision-makers in school governance at the schools being researched?

IV. Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The analysis of the data produced the following results, which are introduced as they relate to the three research questions and the ten themes that emerged. The five themes that emerged for research question one were shared vision; principals set high expectations, principal as a risk-taker, trust and transparency, and leadership. Research question two had two themes that emerged from the data collection, communication, and decision-making. The third research question had three themes that emerged: parents’ voice matters, parent impact, and principal training.

Research Question One

Research Question One was as follows: What are the leadership behaviors of principals who support meaningful parent involvement and leadership in New York City? Five findings were supported by this study. The first finding revealed that three of five principals believed that the school’s vision for parent involvement should be shared among all stakeholders. From the study’s participants, principals indicated that the school’s vision was achieved through the thoughts, ideas, and actions of the entire school community to support parent involvement and leadership in the decision-making process.

The second finding revealed that three of five principals set high expectations for staff to support parent involvement. The researcher concluded that most principals demonstrated the importance of working with parents to develop a community that respects parents. Three of the five principals strongly believed that local community, parent, and political support were essential factors to assist principals in achieving their school’s mission and vision. This provided the principals with leverage to accomplish unconventional and creative solution to problems. These principals described the setting of high expectations as creating opportunities to discuss issues that ensure student success, participating in the decision-making process as partners, and collaborating with the entire community to engage parents in the educational development of their children.

The third finding revealed that four of five principals made decisions that had an impact on their job status. The researcher concluded that leading an educational institution with a population of predominately high poverty children requires leaders who do not fear to lose their jobs to do what is right for their school community. Four of the five principals were collaborative leaders but seemed nervous about connecting with local politicians, parents, and other officials to influence change to support the school community. While they created structures to listen and communicate with parents, principals also recognized that the ultimate decision was theirs as school building leaders.

The fourth finding indicated that the majority of parents in predominately African-American Title I high schools trusted principals and believed they were transparent leaders. Lasky (2000) argued that active listening and communication are keys to building trust, respect, and an understanding of purpose in a school community. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) stated that principals who distribute power and provide information aligned to the school’s goals to parents develop trust among their stakeholders. LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) suggested that one barrier for African-American parents was that their prior experiences with the school might influence their level of participation in their children’s educational experience. This mistrust with the school system impacts their ability to engage with the school community. Hence, trust is very important to encourage parental participation; as Bryk and Schneider (2002) argued, trust must be at the core of school improvement efforts. Based on the research, the researcher concluded that these principals in high-poverty schools developed trusting relationships with parents and is seen as transparent leaders.

Finally, the fifth finding revealed that three of five principals were able to lead according to the framework of Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Leadership. The researcher concluded that the majority of principals in predominately Title I African-American high schools could lead despite their challenging task to educate and graduate students with the most need. Three of the five principals demonstrated that they were able to lead in all four frames of Bolman and Deal’s
(2006) conception of leadership. These principals developed systems and structures that created a culture that supported parent involvement and leadership in school governance. Personal contact was at the center of their leadership as they listened to the thoughts and experiences of parents. Also, they each met with parents and empowered parents to be active partners in the school community. Additionally, these principals were able to build coalitions internally and externally that met the needs of their school.

Research Question Two

Research Question Two was as follows: Are schools using Epstein’s six-parent involvement types? If so, how do schools incorporate Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement to help them develop parent leadership and involvement at the school level? Five findings emerged from the two themes of communication, and decision-making. There were two findings for the theme of communication. The first was predominately African-American Title 1 high schools in good standing have adopted Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement. The second finding was all principals communicated with parents and families. The theme of decision-making presented three findings. The first finding was four of seven parents were on paper as decision-makers but did not participate in the development of the CEP. The second finding revealed that school leaders decide how school budgets are used. The third finding for decision-making indicated that three of five schools were out of compliance with equal representation of parents and staff on the SLT, which is the decision-making body in New York City schools.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three was as follows: Do school governance structures empower parents to be informed decision-makers in school governance, and, if so, how? The following three themes emerged from research question three; parent voice matters, parent impact, and principal training. Four findings materialized around the themes related to the third question. The first finding related to the theme of parent voice matters is four out of five principals had two-way communication systems in place with parents. The second finding for this theme was one hundred percent of principals informed their parents about the Title 1 policy. The third finding related to the theme of parent impact was six of seven parents involved in school activities recognize the importance of participating in school governance and are empowered to be a part of the decision-making process. The fourth finding surfaced around the theme of principal training revealed that two of five principals were trained to support parent involvement and leadership in school governance.

V. Summary

This study has changed the researcher’s perceptions about parent involvement. The researcher never considered parent involvement outside the school building. As an educator for over thirteen years, I always gauged parent involvement based on their participation in school bake sales, PTA and SLT meetings, athletic events, and responding to discipline violations. The researcher believes that this study highlighted some areas that system leaders can examine to find ways to improve structures and systems to empower parents to be informed decision-makers. Educators and parents should meet with research-based organizations to design workshops and parent leadership institutes to inform parents about their rights. We can also demand more from our local politicians to create opportunities to educate and empower their constituency about their rights and resources available to support their communities. We can no longer wait for someone else to do what is right for our children; we must stand as a community to address societal ills to protect our children’s future. Finally, principals must have the courage to balance their leadership to ensure parent involvement is valued and respected.

References


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Dr. Smith is the Assistant Principal of Research & Service High School, a transfer school housed at the historic Boys & Girls High School in Brooklyn, New York. Dr. Smith earned his Educational Administration and Supervision certification from the College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York and recently completed his doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from the Sage Colleges on Albany, New York. He proudly serves as the Director of the Adelaide Sanford Institute and also serves as an adjunct professor at Alfred State University and Touro College.
Urban Education Disrupted: Observations from a Successful High School in the Flat World
Anthony P. Cavanna Ed.D., Mary Bonitatibus-Garrity, Charles Ezell, Eiad Masri and Kimberly Moreno.

Introduction

“Union City schools have become a model for ushering low-income English-language learners into the mainstream. Almost 96% of its students are Hispanic, and many live in Spanish-speaking homes. Officials estimate at least 15% of students are undocumented. Even so, the district’s 87% graduation rate in 2015 nearly matched New Jersey’s overall. A study from the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis this year found that on standardized math and reading tests, Union City students performed about a third of a grade level above the national average, although the area had a median family income of $37,000. Educators have come from Canada, Norway and several states to see how this system for more than 14,000 students succeeds.” (Wall Street Journal, Leslie Brody, 11.14.16)

How do we disrupt the pattern of failure in our urban high schools? What can we do for students including their families, teachers, principals and community partners to best support our students in any high school? What makes successful school systems prepare students to survive and prosper in a global society? Recognizing it is important that the entire school community believe in what is possible for students and use those beliefs to develop shared values and core beliefs to drive decision making. In this article, we examine a successful urban school high school, compare its success to specific international success stories, and highlight some of the strategies that drive this urban high school and its community members to focus on priorities that help all students achieve its goals.

In the Union City School District, located just four miles from New York City, the superintendent and other administrators emphasized that it is hard work to achieve the level of success this district has enjoyed, and it does not happen overnight – in the words of Superintendent Mrs. Silvia Correa Abbato, it requires, “slow and steady progress.”

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal, Leslie Brody highlighted one of the many student successes the Union City School District has experienced:

“Jocelyn Encalada, a high school senior, arrived a year ago from Ecuador with limited English and a daunting road ahead. She misses her mother, who stayed behind, and lives with her father, a factory worker. But after bilingual classes and a job at a bank, Ms. Encalada’s hopes are high as she applies to Columbia University. “I want to be the first in my family to graduate from college,” she says.

Best Practices

Union City High School has become a model for providing effective instruction for English language learners. About ninety-five percent of students are Hispanic and living in Spanish-speaking homes. A vast majority of the student population qualify for free or reduced lunch programs - prompting the district to offer after-school meals and snacks for those students remaining at school long after the last school bell has rung.

According to the Stanford Center for Educational Policy, the Union City School District has performed above grade level in reading and math. But, how can a district that has a median family income of $37,000 perform at this level? The key is a slow and steady progression; understanding the fundamental needs of the students and tailoring effective instructional practice to meet those needs.

As students enter the district, there are various assessments designed to diagnose the student’s needs. The resulting data prompted the district to implement bilingual classes that allow for students to become content literate and fluent in their native language, while also providing as English language instruction simultaneously. Additionally, the district recognizes that not all English language learners who come from non-English speaking countries have uninterrupted educational opportunities. Union City Schools implements bilingual support services so students can continue to master content in their native language while learning English. Thus, to better serve these students, Union City provides meaningful and effective supports to aid in the transition of both content and language.

Effective Strategies Implemented in Union City

There is a large and growing body of literature on how best to ensure the success of students who may be at risk, especially English language learners (ELLs). In Union City, support for all students is organized at three levels, but especially for ELL students:
- District level - The district systemically provides support to all students.
- School level - The school ensures that it is serving all
students.
- Classroom level - The classroom teacher relates to and engages all students.

Approximately sixty percent of the nation’s ELL students are economically disadvantaged (ED) (“Educating English Language Learners: Strategies for Closing America’s Other Achievement Gap,” 2013), therefore, programs that support ED students will be an integral part of an effective district level program for all students. At the Union City district level, the research is fairly clear: a commitment to early childhood education that is supportive and responsive to the needs of all learners is an essential component to long-term K-12 educational success for all students (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015). Furthermore, the fully-developed Union City program is designed to meet the needs of the whole child, and also includes child care, after school activities, summer programs, full-service, school-based health centers, nutrition, and lead absorption screening (Leila Morsy & Richard Rothstein, 2015). While the aforementioned initiatives may be realized at the school level, they are developed, coordinated and promoted at the district level. While the Union City School District is where the conditions for success are created, it is at the building and classroom levels that support for all students is operationalized.

“Research has shown that mainstream teachers who receive appropriate training in how to teach language minority students can create instructional environments supportive of the second language and content learning” (Anstrom, 1997). Part of this work requires an understanding of how second language learners acquire language; another part is understanding the student themselves. To that end, research suggests that professional development (PD) be available which offers information about the different cultures of ELL learners in the school. Furthermore, teachers must receive PD unique to the context of the ELL learns in the school and finally, ELL teachers must receive training that elevates them to leadership status (Anne Walker, Jill Shafer, & Michelle Iiams, 2004) to advocate on behalf of their students.

So, the question becomes, “Why is Union City High School effective?” The answer lies deep in the relationships and commitment that educators develop around the work of making every child successful; foresight and strategic planning for continuous improvement. Union City High School has a School Improvement Team whose responsibility is to analyze data to make informed decisions about the needs of all of the students in the building. The School Improvement Team delineates the information to the instructional leaders and administrative team. Instructional staff members receive collaborative planning time and attend weekly professional learning community meetings. These sessions focus on instructional practice, building capacity, and cross-curricular lessons.

Most stakeholders in Union City are focused on creating and maintaining a culture of shared responsibility. Providing three meals a day for students is not enough. The school aids in providing school uniforms to families in need, collecting needed winter items, and food for distribution at the District’s annual parent night. There are also supports in the school that helps families apply for public assistance and citizenship. Finally, Union City High School has a health clinic and a parent linking program to provide support for students who are parents. Providing support to the whole child not only at the academic level but the social-emotional level is a key variable in the formula of success.

Union City’s Place and Lesson Learned in the Flat World

Globally, Union City School District is not unlike other successful international school systems. For example, a growing school-age immigrant population in Finland and other countries has caused an increase in as much as fifty percent more learners whose home language is other than Finnish. (Darling-Hammond, 2010) In the 1970’s, Finland endeavored a major education reform effort, which focused on equal and equitable education for all students. For the past several years, Finland has ranked at the top of the list of countries in the OECD--Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a group of thirty-four countries working together to share information and find solutions to common problems in the social well-being and economic issues of their populations. Most notably resulting from the reforms, Finland has closed the education gap between schools with polar socioeconomic statuses, which exceeds success evidenced by similar global education systems.

Key areas at the center of the gains in Finland’s education program include, as Darling-Hammond (2010) indicated:
- improved teacher training and candidate preparation
- nationally funded equitable education programs
- concentrated attention to students with special needs
- improved teacher-driven and developed curriculum
- evaluation of learning that instills formative assessments and de-emphasizes testing

Significant changes that educators believe had the greatest positive impact on the education system in Finland is the distribution of funding for education provided at the federal level with local control of budgeting and finance management and improved teacher training. Finland has focused great attention and finan-
cial support to better-preparing teacher candidates and ongoing academic development of experienced teachers. In addition to coursework, teacher candidates perform in a classroom setting for no less than one year as a student teacher. The teaching profession is highly sought after in Finland, equaling other professional occupations, and only the top 15% of undergraduates gain admission into the graduate-level education programs. (Darling-Hammond, 2010) In 2010, Linda Darling-Hammond detailed schools’ dependence on teachers to develop research-based, locally relevant curriculum at the school level.

One of the most significant changes in education relates to how students learn. For example, Finland promotes personal creativity, self-monitoring, inquiry-based learning, and group projects, so classrooms are abuzz with activity, discussion, and personal exploration. Moreover, schools have established common planning times where teachers meet weekly with their peers to share ideas, modify and develop curriculum, and attend professional development. Finland has made it a priority to attend to the needs of the child, not only in the learning process but the health and wellbeing of every child and ensuring the students have all necessary resources to be successful. According to Hargreaves and Shirley (2008), in addition to improving and sustaining teacher capacity, school leaders in Finland teach classes at least a few hours per week.

Lessons learned from successful international school systems

Successful global education systems that emphasize quality education for all students receive and stress the importance of employing and developing effective teaching practices (Stewart, 2012). The quest for recruiting, retaining and training high quality teachers is an important part variable in identifying successful school districts. Finland, for instance, demands their educators to obtain a degree in the subject they will teach, requires them to organize and run weekly peer meetings, scrutinize proposed and needed improvements, and develop strategies to overcome challenges. Novice or seasoned, teachers are encouraged to take part in research projects and disseminate their findings throughout their districts. Contributing to the success of their educational system is the culture educators have developed around a positive attitude about educating all children. Similarly, in Union City Public Schools, the importance of education is culturally embedded and education combined with persistence, perseverance and hard work is an imperative a supported philosophy that leads to positive life changing opportunities.

In Union City, education is about building relationships around the work of educating all children. Teachers know they also serve as lifetime mentors to their students and in return, students share their successes and challenges with their teachers. Global education powerhouses such as Finland recognize the importance of supporting teachers and how impactful it is to student success and more importantly, the success of the overall education system.

Conclusion

Countless characteristics of successful schools have been generated based on research regarding school reform and improvement. This article emphasizes essential elements of a high school that is successful at not only helping all students achieve academically, but helping students to become caring, contributing, productive, and responsible citizens. These dual missions; educating the hearts and educating the minds of youth, are considered of equal importance in a school’s quest to be successful. Recognizing that school cultures are contextual, the combination and interrelationship of the strategies listed below have provided a successful formula for most Union City High school students:

1. A “commitment” to early childhood education  
   High-quality early childhood education, which is responsive to the needs of all learners and prepares all students for success in school. In Union City, most, if not all, three and four year olds are exposed to a “suburban-like” preschool experience where they are immersed in English and age appropriate literacy skills, which sets the stage for success in secondary school.

2. A “culture of caring” – The entire community is committed to wrap-around services that include childcare, after school activities, summer programs, school-based health centers and nutrition. Union City boasts of a food court offering a plethora of food options and includes dinner for students remaining at school for after school programs.

3. A “no excuses culture” that pervades the community and supports the school system. The district has long treated schools as neighborhood hubs. It offers three free meals a day to students, health clinics, and frequent parent workshops on immigration and other issues.

4. A high-quality, rigorous, coherent curriculum, which focuses on 21st Century skills including problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork from preschool through high school. In Union City, schools do not focus on remediation. Schools support students from preschool through high school and on into post-secondary education or a career. All students, including English language learners, are immersed in literacy through reading, writing and speaking activities while building a strong curricular foundation in their native languages if needed. Curricular coherence is maintained across schools so that transient students can seamlessly transfer between schools without academic disruption.
5. A high-quality, highly trained professional staff – High functioning school districts value professional staff and provide the training and support that they need in order to be successful. Union City values their staff and provides the professional development needed to move students forward. Teachers attend continuous, well-planned, professional development to build teacher capacity to ensure students receive quality instruction.

6. In-depth analyses of data - Data is used to assist struggling students. Teachers use data to design instructional strategies, identify curriculum and teaching materials, and design professional development activities.

7. Real connections with parents and families - Parents are welcome in the schools and included in the educational process in many ways. In addition, parent workshops and an array of assistance is provided, such as preparing parents on how to assist their children in succeeding in school, understanding assessment results, and navigating the bureaucracy of school, city, state and federal processes for immigration, among others.

8. Adequate funding - Resources have been committed from both the community, City, State and Federal levels to provide the high impact program that supports all of the students and professional staff in the district.

Most importantly, the lesson we have learned from examining the Union City School District and successful school systems around the world, is that relationships built around the work of making all children successful is integral to district and school success.

References


Dr. Anthony P. Cavanna has served as a teacher, principal, chief academic officer, assistant superintendent and superintendent in New York and New Jersey. Mary Bonitatibus-Garrity is a business education Teacher in the Paterson Public Schools, Charles Ezell is an Assistant Principal in the South Orange-Maplewood Schools, Eiad Masri is a Guidance Counselor in the Passaic Public Schools and Kimberly Moreno is a Health Science Teacher in the Union City Public Schools and a Milken Teacher of the Year. Mary, Charles, Eiad, and Kimberly are future transformational school and district leaders.
Disrupting Inequity: Rethinking what seems not to be working

Dr. Peter Madonia and Dr. Albert Sackey

Introduction:

In the 1983 report of American President Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, underscored a growing concern that American students were losing their position of prominence among their peers in many countries (Gardner, Larsen, Baker, & Campbell, 1983). Its publication is considered a landmark event in modern American educational history. The report contributed to the ever-growing assertion that American schools were failing, and it touched off a wave of local, state, and federal reform efforts. Since the publication of that report and over the last thirty-three years, the focus on failing schools in America has continued to produce one wave of reform after another, each seeking to address continued decline in the achievement of American students. Recommendations include a range of initiatives intended to reduce and halt a widening achievement gap, as well as calling for increased expenditures and new initiatives steeped in accountability (Gardner, Larsen, Baker, & Campbell, 1983). With increased scrutiny centered on student achievement, a growing body of educational research has sought to explore and identify factors that help characterize the focused concern about students and ways to best support them. Today, and throughout the last fifteen years, the importance of closing the achievement gap is without question, a major challenge faced by educators. Closely related to learning gap and opportunity gap, the term achievement gap refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, or students from higher-income and lower-income households (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Generally speaking, achievement gap refers to outputs—the unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits—while opportunity gap refers to inputs—the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Reform, 2013). Learning gap refers to relative performance of individual students—i.e., the disparity between what students have actually learned and what they were expected to learn at a particular age or grade level (Reform, 2013).

What Is Inequity?

In order to truly tackle and address inequity, we must first have a good understanding of what it is. Baum and Harris (2006) explain that inequity in student performance is usually based on social and economic disadvantages, as well as community and school factors. Equity is focused on what we do or our various approaches and activities taken to achieve desired and intended outcomes of success for all our students. For instance, in any classroom an important and desired outcome of good teaching practice is to fully engage all students in learning. How we do that may be realized through a range of efforts, not necessarily the same in degree for each student. While we may call upon a range of engagement efforts, strategies or approaches, not equal in the instance of each of our students, the outcome should be the same (equal) for all students in terms of what we would say characterizes a successful learning experience. Equity is not only about what we do but also it is about how we think about what is necessary for us to do. Attitudes and dispositions about the potential of students have the potential to influence and shape our actions in working with students. When we are committed to the belief that all students can learn, we must ensure that there are no qualifiers in translating that belief in our interactions with students. There is a direct line that connects understanding of equity with quality of program. High performing schools are places where the commitment to student success reflects practices that are not limited to only some of the children in that school but rather to all the children.

School Inequity Past and Present:

History has shown that the design of various state aid formulas have led to inequitable funding at the public school level within various states and communities since the turn of the 20th century (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). Communities that were in poverty tended to get less aid than their wealthy counterparts and, in most instances, had more needs than them as well. In the 1960s and the 1970s, this issue with inequity in state funding was taken to the federal and state courts. During this time, standardized testing reemerged as the tool for measuring equity in schools, based on how students performed on those standardized assessments (Sackey, 2014). Currently in the United States, inequity still exists in school funding mechanisms as well as student performance, teacher and school quality and the relationships that are formed at the school and classroom levels. Inequity still poses a problem because even now, not all schools or districts are funded equally (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). Unfortunately, the schools that need the most money, due to the high level of disadvantaged, special education and ESL students, still end up having the least amount of funding. Unless
we see the connection between poverty and student achievement, then we will not truly understand why it is so important that we get the school funding inequities corrected. As district and school leaders, we cannot control the inequity in our school or district funding, but what we can control is the equity in our districts and in our schools.

In this environment, efforts to legislate increase accountability for teachers and leaders of schools has impacted the language and expectations of federal and state legislation. Increased demands, the introduction of one initiative after another, a punitive focus on failure, coupled with penalties for failing to make gains, have all served to discourage teachers and impact morale. At the same time, research into teaching and learning has greatly enhanced what we know about how children of different backgrounds and cultures learn and strategies for working with broadly diverse student groups have become the focus of efforts to professionally develop teachers. Schools struggling to meet expectations tied to success for all students have been inundated with a range of initiatives. Research is replete with attention to identifying what works in areas such as tracking student performance and professional development. Acknowledging where the short fall occurs, while failing to connect singular best practices to a big picture view of what is needed to address the issue of inequity is at stake. For instance, the notion that all students can learn has been with us for some time, but the manner and depth of belief by which we deliver on that obligation is still a matter of question and grave concern. The outcome of this approach is often realized in the creation of cultures of compliance when what is needed is commitment. The playing field for our students is not level. Thus, we would argue the best hope for improving practices inside and outside of the classroom rests in three key areas structured to disrupt the inequity of failed approaches and status quo ideas. These key strategies address school level actions that speak to taking a strategic approach to clarify and establish focus, commit to building a culture of commitment, and maximize social capital.

Addressing Inequity: Taking a Strategic Approach to Focus Our Efforts

Equity is not achieved by simply willing it. The challenge to ensure high outcomes for all children is embedded in understanding who our learners are, what makes them diverse, and how any response to promoting success for all learners has a direct line through to our practices in teaching them and the attitudes and dispositions that shape these beliefs of those who interact with them. Achieving a compelling vision of what needs to be done demands a strategic thinking perspective helping to define practice. One might ask what defines strategic leadership as different from the singular notion of leadership. Research and experience reveal subtle but important differences: strategic leadership is exerted when the decisions and actions of leaders have strategic implications for the organization. It might also be described this way. Strategic leadership is broad in scope, felt over long periods and involves significant organizational change (Hughes & Beatty, 2005).

Initial disruption of inequity begins when we call into review and question personal beliefs and dispositions that have long since shaped classroom practices in working with diverse groups of students. It can be said herein lies a major tactic to effect disruption of inequity. A purposeful effort to explore personal biases as a step toward opening the door to creating a changed mindset about how we see the learning differences among children in our classrooms, our schools, and communities. This is a strategic leadership action. It doesn’t happen without careful planning.

In another instance, we cannot improve or disrupt inequity simply by sending staff to more PD on differentiation or by hiring a more diversified staff. This may be a start, but more needs to be done beginning with a careful and thorough consideration of what meaningful professional growth should look like for adult learners. The magnitude and task of revamping or reforming a school or district curriculum to be more inclusive is much broader in scope and duration than just setting high expectations for students. The result is often a fine effort to address the symptoms, but not much progress in addressing the issue of inequity. Equity is not just about changing context or conditions. It is more about changing what defines our practices that reflect moral commitments established in desired outcomes for students, parents, teachers and colleagues. We must move beyond if only we could or how come they never to how can we.

Relationships and Climate:

The climate that is built within a district, school and classroom can help address the issue on inequity. Research shows that the climate that a teacher creates in their classroom and the principal creates in a school can improve student achievement in that school, thereby disrupting the inequity that was created by inappropriate school funding mechanisms (Hattie, 2013). The real issue is how do we engage our students to communicate with them about what is important to them, as well as motivate and encourage them, change their beliefs and attitudes from feeling less capable of meeting expectations of adults in their lives. Dr. Bill Daggett (2014) includes the importance of relationships into his 3R Framework of Rigor, Relevance and Relationships. Dr. Daggett explains that to maximize student outcomes, we must have all 3Rs present and the relationship building is a critical piece to make this work.

A second area for disrupting inequity for change leaders is to articulate a personal vision for the work of the school through conscious efforts to create a culture
of commitment in meeting the needs of all children. If culture is about the way the school conducts its business, the manifestation of culture is evident in the attitudes and perceptions of all. The identification of beliefs is only a first step in creating added value and commitment in support of the commitment to engage in collaboration to increase the capacity of the school to identify a direction and deliver on it. Mind-set matters. Every action leaders take sends ripples through their organizations. The messages may be intended or unintended, but can either build coherence and commitment or foster tension and frustration (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Relationship building and maximizing the social capital that are connected to our students are two important ideas connecting to influencing the development of culture in schools.

So, what do we mean by disrupting inequity. Any measure, initiative or strategy that disrupts the status quo will begin to disrupt inequity. We must change our focus from addressing the symptoms to fixing the problem. Some of the symptoms of inequity in schools are low student performance, less staff or compensation to attract high quality staff, fewer programs offered at the school, less resources for students, fewer after school opportunities etc. At the building and district level, the status quo comes with a level of comfort because this is business as usual and everyone already knows what to do. The only issue with this is that, as educators, we must always be striving to continuously learn and improve. Secondly, if there are students who are not flourishing in this environment, they would be destined to continue to struggle. The status quo does not address all children and not all children succeed. This tends to be easier for the adults but at the detriment of the children. If something is not working for most of the children, we need to look at what we can do differently to make it meet all children’s needs.

Maximizing Social Capital: Making Best Use of Resources

Schools cannot control the out of school factors that affect their schools, but they can maximize the amount of time they have with their students, to disrupt the inequity that exist in their school or building (Sackey, 2014). Putnam (2002) explain that social networks have value. The social networks connected to a school through the staff, parents and community have the potential to address the inequities in schools. The idea of social capital has been in existence since the 1920s, but was explored extensively in the late 1980s by researchers James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu (Dika & Singh, 2002). Their research found that social capital could positively impact a school and students’ performance and achievement. Bourdieu defines social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 33). By school leaders having an opportunity to build and utilize their social capital, they will have more opportunities to support their students. For example, a parent who is able to support programs at their child’s school or who knows someone who is willing to support the programs or community organizations who are also willing and able to support schools based on their relationships with parents, teachers and school leaders all work on building a school’s social capital. These social capitals can in many instances provide financial and material support to schools. These social capitals can also be the main catalyst that would help to support and enhance a school’s program options. By school leaders and school practitioners being advocates for their schools through their social capital, within their communities and state, the more likely they will be able to maximize those resources to disrupt inequity and support all students’ achievement.

Conclusion:

The ultimate goal of disrupting inequity is identification of practical strategies that have the potential to make a difference in the lives of all school children. This paper raised for reflection and consideration three key areas, which have the potential to disrupt inequity in favor of the pursuit of equal outcomes of education for all students. Notions of strong school communities characterize successful change, where there is shared ownership among all stakeholders for taking on the work of improving schools (Madonia & Sackey, 2016). It is inconceivable that the work of creating strong and effective practices of equity in our schools is not worthy of rethinking what is not working and acting on our insights to disrupt it once and for all.
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Dr. Peter Madonia has served as a teacher and public school administrator in three districts in Connecticut in a variety of roles including Middle School Principal, Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent of the Woodbridge PS, Woodbridge, CT. In 2003 he joined the Southern CT State University Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Department as Associate Professor and filled the role of Chairperson for eleven years during which he developed and spearheaded a leadership cohort program preparing leaders in school districts throughout the State of CT. In addition Dr. Madonia currently serves as a CT Association of Schools, Executive Coach for new principals and as a LEAD CT Executive Coach for newly appointed School Superintendents in their first year. Madonia holds his doctoral degree from University of Sarasota, FL, an Executive MBA from University of New Haven and undergraduate and additional graduate degrees from Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT.

Dr. Albert Sackey is the Principal of Nathan Hale Middle School in Norwalk, Connecticut. He was the state of Connecticut’s 2014 Middle School Assistant Principal of the Year. His research interests include school climate and the impact of community demographic variables on student achievement. Dr. Sackey received his doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy from Seton Hall University and Masters degrees in School Administration and Supervision from Mercy College and in Special Education from Manhattan College. Dr. Sackey spent six years as an Assistant Principal in the Greenwich Public School System. He previously spent eight years as an Assistant Principal, Instructional Support Specialist, and both a general and special education teacher in the New York City Public School System.
Establishing a Teacher Growth Trajectory (TGT)
Producing Great Outcomes with a Possible Dash of Professional Conflict

Don Sternberg, Ed.D.

Teacher Growth Trajectory (TGT)
There is probably no area within the purview of a building administrator where the potential for conflict is virtually inevitable than the engagement in observational practices to enhance teacher performance. An effective tactic to the observation process is to remove one word from the dialogue regularly associated with the practice of observation, and that word is evaluation. Observation and evaluation are not the peanut butter and jelly of quality schools. I never utilize the word evaluation but rather I bond teacher observation with the words: establishing a teacher growth trajectory (TGT).

Please do not look at the process as an evaluation of a teacher’s pedagogical process, but rather distinguish it and present it as an opportunity to discuss with the teacher a plan for their professional growth. A Teacher Growth Trajectory (TGT) is based upon classroom performance objectives developed through the evidence collected during the observation – with no subjectivity, ambiguity or partiality. Pre- and post-observation conferences, as well as subsequent dialogues, build towards creating a collaborative effort of professional growth. The mantra that is disseminated to and practiced with the faculty is that I am observing to provide feedback to sustain pedagogical growth that ultimately translates into enhanced student progress.

A Teacher Growth Trajectory (TGT) is established after a post-observation conference following an observation (either formal or informal). Initially, an effort is made based upon the gathered pedagogical evidence from the observation allowing you and the teacher to come to a collaborative understanding of areas of their pedagogy that would benefit from an applied focus. That focus then becomes the foundational component of the teacher’s TGT for the year, if the desired outcome is reached sooner. Also, nowhere in the discussion do I ever utilize the word improvement. Eliminating the words improvement and evaluation might appear as trivial but it has a huge psychological impact and I will submit, a positive one on the teacher.

Feeding-Back, Feeding-Forward and Feeding-Up
While a TGT is a collaborative endeavor between building administrator and teacher, the ultimate goal is having the teacher in-charge of their own growth built through self-reflection, with you as a guide on the side furnishing resources, time and support. Glickman, et al. (2014) maintain that we ought to shift towards a collegial model, “characterized by purposeful adult interactions about improving school-wide teaching and learning” (p. 6). This is ultimately what you are trying to accomplish and it is rendered down to your ability to work with people, putting them at ease, establishing your trust credentials and together creating a TGT through your feeding-back, feeding-forward and the feeding-upward of the teacher.

A Subtle Nuance
It is imperative that you understand that there is a thought-provoking and somewhat subtle nuance between desire for growth and the demand for compliance. I might have missed used the word subtle because in the eyes and mind of some teachers there is an inappropriate link between the two. Some teachers will look at your efforts as their need, or worse, their requirement to comply because, after all, you are the boss! This is the avenue you want to avoid going down and the mindset you want to evaporate quickly and entirely from the teacher. This is also where the trust you have established with the teacher will come in. Your job will be to create a strong desire for professional and sustained growth. Getting someone to comply is mental; you are the boss and I will do what I am told. This, however, is not the foundational underpinning that will provide the teacher with the most effective growth potential. You must understand and implement factors that shape individual behaviors so as to cultivate collaborative covenants. You are seeking to develop workforce capabilities and a continuous improvement mindset to cultivate sustainable pedagogical growth. Initially, you are holding the bicycle seat and running alongside but you eventually want to let go and see the teacher propelling him or herself towards their self-developed TGT.

What you will need to initially establish is collaborative initiatives and not directive informational
behaviors. When a principal attempts to establish collaborative TGTs, he or she shares the growth process with the teacher in a joint effort to grow – you are running alongside and holding the seat. When utilizing a more directive informational approach, which usually is the forerunner to only obtaining compliance; you give (order, as it will be viewed by the teacher) suggestions for instructional growth and you subsequently hope the teacher will integrate the changes/suggestions. This leads to haphazard outcomes and will almost never result in positively influencing teacher performance or their mindset toward being in control of their professional growth trajectory.

At the end of the day, people follow those who know where they are going. –Jack Trout

When you create a more collegial ethos, one with self-reflection serving as a foundational tenet, teachers can feel intrinsically motivated to improve their practice. What you will be doing is developing a sense of empowerment and collaboration. The ship needs to be steered by the teacher but the both of you can outline the road map, the GPS of the voyage. When people feel a sense of empowerment, they are more inclined to dedicate themselves to a pattern of sustained introspection and subsequent professional growth.

Peter Northouse, in his book Leadership, Theory and Practice (2013), points out the many perspectives used to define leadership but finally settles on the definition of leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Kouzes and Posner (2012) wrote, “Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It’s the quality of this relationship that matters most…” (p.87), and it is that influence upon others, as they self-select whom to follow with their hearts, that supports your efforts as an administrator to achieve greatness within the school.

Professional Maturity

How do you get people to leave their comfort zone and buy into new ideas such as a TGT? How do you get them to tap into their intrinsic motivations via a professional maturity rather than manipulating them into action? According to Simon Sinek, you achieve these by convincing colleagues that what you are proposing is the right thing to do and it is intrinsic to the ethos of the school. In his book Start with Why, Sinek (2009) suggests starting by explaining why we want or need to make changes. Why should anyone spend their time listening, let alone following, if they don’t know why? The why catches people’s attention and, hopefully, their hearts and then you can move to the how. You must have the attentiveness of all those who will be influenced by change and if they know both the why they need to do something and also how to go about it, then they will have support on the what they want to accomplish. Sinek’s model of influencing people can be the means to the effective development of a TGT model. Sinek writes that great leaders “inspire people to act” (p. 7); meaning that change is not totally driven by one individual, you; but rather by those being led.

Tucker (2008) states that, “Principals committed to building successful collaborative school cultures recognize the need to behave more like a facilitator and less like a boss” (p. 8). Her research is complimented by Foord and Haar’s (2009) findings that emphasize the need for “ongoing leader involvement, not as a director but as a monitor and coach” (p.22). David Novak writes in his book Taking People with You, “identify what you want to change, make a plan for improving yourself and your skills, set deadlines and benchmarks, and seek out feedback and help” (2012, p.219). The way in which leaders conduct themselves and represent their ideas to the teachers plays a key role in the development of ideals that they will ultimately hold close.

Understanding Conflict, Because It Is Going to Happen

Your ability to handle conflict is essential to the overall effectiveness of the professional TGT concept. You will need to learn and understand how to motivate people and to deal with a variety of different emotions. Emotions are many times the precursors to conflict. If the
teacher feels you are rating (evaluating them!) they can draw inward and not be open to a TGT. This response needs to be recognized by you as what it truly is; an emotional response, not a logical one.

Regrettably, emotion is the unstable part of human beings and the standard observation/evaluation process can reek with emotions. Hocker and Wilmot (2014) wrote, “Constructive conflict resolution depends upon our ability to work with and transform, not close off or repress, normal human emotion” (p. 190). They also discussed how conflict is equivalent to a light switch when it comes to emotion; emotions change when conflicting situations arise.

Types of Conflict
De Witt, Greer, and Jehn (2011) expounded on conflict, which they defined as “the process emerging from perceived incompatibilities or differences among group members” (p. 360). They postulate that there are three types of conflict within any organization: relationship, task, and process. Relationship conflict can occur when disagreements emerge such as within the observation process as well toward establishing a mutual agreement toward a growth trajectory. Task conflict occurs with disagreements over the content and outcome of tasks. Here is where you and the teacher disagree on what was observed and/or what the teacher did or did not do. Process conflict is tied to task conflict because it happens with the logistics, delegation, and responsibilities of accomplishing the desired growth as established in the post-observation conference. Overall, these three conflict types noted by De Witt, Greer and Jehn are based on real and teacher perceived power imbalances. You will inevitably experience a tangled web of these types of conflicts as different teachers react differently to your attempt at constructive collaboration and a planned TGT.

Principals influence the Teacher Growth Trajectory and its outcomes by filtering information and defining the possible alternatives for the TGT. You serve as a conduit and if the channel is not smooth and direct the teacher can unfortunately perceive the process as being punitive, and that will instigate friction and friction (remember your science) produces heat; the last thing you want in this process. Friction is not conflict, it is what is left over if you’re handling of conflict is not performed well. I have been somewhat poetic about conflict not being bad within a school because if handled in a positive fashion it can lead to a heightened awareness and dialogue that produces the best results.

Conflict in close relationships, such as the one potentially developed in a pre- and post-observation conference, are inevitable so the chance of ending your school day having experienced some type of conflict is probably fifty-fifty. The reason conflict is constantly occurring is because people see situations differently and may not always agree on the desired outcomes.

Small Steps Can Equal Huge Results
Your initial step is to not view conflict as the enemy; it is simply the road to harmony taking the long way around. A positive conflict does not mean that the conflict was good, but rather it means that the occurrence of that conflict led to things that are good, or, at the very least, better. For a successful implementation of a Teacher Growth Trajectory, you cannot have a conflict that is viewed as negative, having discord, disharmony, and hostility. You cannot allow this to turn into a -- someone is going to win and someone is going to lose situation -- the classic win/lose scenario. This is where you must control your emotions while those around you are potential losing theirs. It is how you select to approach the TGT plan and the teacher along with the subtle parameters you establish around the TGT initiative for each particular teacher. By maintaining your eye on the prize – teacher growth manifesting itself in improved student performance – you must be willing to take any road to get to your objective. You need to prepare yourself to start small with the teacher – a simple TGT outcome first prior to moving on to a subsequent larger objective. Think incremental approach as compared the entire Kahuna at one time, or even in one year.
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Don Sternberg, Ed.D. (sternb66@optonline.net; Professional Portfolio: http://sternb66.wix.com/portfolio#) is currently principal of the Ivy League School (Smithtown, New York) and recently retired from the position of principal of the Wantagh Elementary School (Wantagh, New York) after 34 years. During his tenure in Wantagh, he was the New York State Elementary School Principal of the Year in 2009 and is a National Distinguished Principal. He is an adjunct Lecturer at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, teaching educational administration classes. His book, The Principal: Traversing the Hire-Wire with No Net Below: 79 Places Where the High-Wire Can Be Greasy, is available through Amazon.com.
WHY THE NEXT 10 YEARS OF EDTECH WILL CRUSH THE LAST 10  
by Matthew Lynch

With some of the biggest names in technology focusing their creative and financial assets on education, edtech will be at the forefront of education reform over the next decade. Bill Gates is investing billions and Mark Zuckerberg 100’s of millions, into the future of learning. We expect Edtech to transform the way we teach and learn.

Standardized testing and core standards are not going away, so many educators are turning to edtech to help them negotiate the demands of this exacting system. There is a growing relationship between these core standards and the personalized learning initiatives being funded by Gates and Zuckerberg. With these big investors at the table, educators are hopeful that the influx of edtech will move well beyond achieving benchmarks on standardized tests

Inventive Edtech and Personalized Learning  
Adaptive learning will personalize learning in our classrooms. Adaptive education, at its best, is using technology to measure a student’s strengths and weaknesses and then adapting their education accordingly. When the goal of adaptive education is to develop the student, not meet pre-established standards, then real education can take place.

Blended Education is another technique growing in significance. Classrooms will see an increase in the use of technology blended with traditional student-teacher interaction. Driven by algorithms; students will be placed in groups and given assignments. Students will often work collaboratively, broken into groups through a calculation of strengths, weaknesses, and interests.

A tech-created schedule will move students through the day according to progress, focus, and interest while integrating each person’s needs with the needs of the class as a whole. Teachers will float from group to group as the face-to-face tutor and coach and periodically teach a lesson. NPR reviews this type of classroom this report, Meet the Classroom of the Future. Do you see it?

Imagining the Classroom of the Future  
Imagine the hands-on fun and learning that happens at play stations throughout a preschool room, then add some really cool edtech tools like an earthquake table, cutting laser, high-tech microscopes, or 3-D printer. Then give the students real-life research to complete. Now you have imagined a makerspace, a blended workspace growing in popularity.

A makerspace is a shared learning experience long used in the Maker Culture, but now being honed for classrooms. They combine DIY crafts, manufacturing, engineering, and technology. Makerspaces are not limited to K12; Colleges are developing maker spaces to prepare students to solve real life problems. These stations can be mobile and shared, to decrease the cost.

Makerspaces fit well into the growing trends of Project Based Learning and Deeper Learning. Project-based Learning is learning which happens as students complete authentic projects. Deeper Learning is the process in which students meet and work with other students from around the world (Global Collaboration) as well as with experts in the field, through the use of technology.

STEAM, Virtual, Augmented…Enhancing Reality Budget cuts in the arts have limited these subjects to “specials,” offered weekly, but ‘the right brain is a terrible thing to waste.’ The right brain is the birthplace of innovation, and that is what STEM is all about. STEAM is the integration of the arts into STEM. Edweek offers this overview of STEAM education, and in this clip of the Landfill Harmonic from Paraguay we see and hear the beauty the addition of the Arts adds to STEM.

Finally, we look at the exciting use of virtual and augmented reality in the classroom. Techtimes gives an overview of virtual reality and augmented reality. You can be sure that the blended classroom will make use of these fabulous tools. The virtual reality experience is separate from reality (think goggles or helmet). With augmented reality, virtual reality interacts with the real world. For example, studying the night sky in real-time with a virtual overlay.

Imagining the edtech reformation of education, we will see over the next ten years; you may feel like you are falling through the rabbit hole. But don’t be frightened, just buckle-up and enjoy the fall into the brilliant future of edtech and education.

Bio: Matthew Lynch is the owner Lynch Consulting Group, LLC, and the editor of The Edvocate (www.theedadvocate.org) and The Tech Edvocate (www.thetechedvocate.org).
TO PLAY IS TO LEARN

Fiona Zinn

Let the children play

According to Early Years specialist Fiona Zinn, “Never before have we known as much as we do now about the way the young brain develops and the significant role of play in this process”. Why, then, is time given to play under such pressure in the Early Years?

Top down pressure

Zinn, who lectures at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education sets the pressure on the Early Years Curriculum in a wider context “We seem to be facing a stronger and stronger push for early academic or formalized learning in the youngest years of school”. This is something she calls the “schoolification” of the Early Years curriculum.

“The most significant challenge is the increasing pressure for the overt and didactic teaching of academic skills in the early years. The minute that this pressure enters the early childhood space, timetables are changed, days are organised according to learning priorities and play is immediately at risk”.

Playing to learn

Early Years practitioners know that pushing play out of the regular curriculum is dangerous and ultimately self-defeating. Zinn is fully behind them: “Instead of seeing play as an alternative to learning, something that you do when you need to ‘take a break from learning’, we need to develop ways to value the rich learning that occurs within complex, challenging and engaging play”.

She then goes further: if you don’t provide the opportunities for effective play in the early years, subsequent learning suffers: “Understanding the role of symbolic play as a foundation to later more formalized academic learning requires a major shift” on the part of policy makers.

It is the Early Years specialists themselves who need to act as advocates as the case is made. The “Third teacher”

If play is crucial, it follows that devoting time, thought and money to the creation of the best possible environment in which it can happen is vital: “We must think carefully not only about the physical spaces we provide but the social, relational, emotional, spatial, temporal and political spaces that shape the early childhood experience” argues Zinn.

The environment, then, is much more than the space is, and therefore learning happens. It actively shapes learning. It is no coincidence, according to Zinn, that much of the world’s best Early Years practice “takes inspiration from the educational project of Reggio Emilia where the environment is recognized as the ‘third teacher’ (Malaguzzi)”.

The special contribution that Early Years Teachers make to schools becomes even more valuable as they embrace these ideals. “When it comes to creating environments that promote agency, inquiry and collaboration, early childhood teachers are especially skilled. I have found that they are often the most ‘spatially literate’ practitioners in schools today”.

Few observers who are familiar with good practice at outstanding schools would disagree.

Early Years teaching and transnationalism

What other issues does Zinn see as important in her international work as an early years specialist? “The rise of trans-nationalism now sees people moving within and between cultures frequently, giving rise to a sense of global community. This has had a significant impact on young children and their education, dramatically changing the idea of culture’s once static influence on the child”.

This is a trend with which teachers working in an international context will be very familiar, while multi-cultural classrooms in a national context are increasingly common. Teachers of multicultural classes “Are well placed to explore the ways that culture shapes language, identity, agency, wellbeing and social bonds, exposing new layers of important connection between culture and childhood”.

The Engine of Learning

Awareness of the cultural context and constructing the best learning environment for learning, then, are both central to effective practice in the 21st Century early years classroom. However, it is the idea of “playing to learn” to which Fiona Zinn constantly returns: “Almon and Miller described play as the ‘engine of learning’ which is I think, a wonderful analogy; an engine is a machine that creates force and is self-propelling, such a powerful image for self-directed learning through play. Don’t you think?”

It’s hard to disagree.

This article was originally published in December 2016. It is now reproduced by kind permission of Consilium Education, publishers of International Teacher Magazine and Fiona Zinn.

Fiona Zinn is an Educational Consultant based in Australia. She lectures at the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education, is elected to the managing committee of the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange and works with the International Baccalaureate as a Professional Development Educator, Field Representative, Global Curriculum Writer and Workshop Developer.
HOW TO MANAGE CELL PHONE USE IN YOUR CLASSROOM
by Matthew Lynch

In today’s technological world, there is no escaping the smartphone phenomenon. The average person uses their smartphone anywhere from 8 to 10 hours a day. Most people are even checking their phones every 15 to 20 minutes while they’re awake. The ways in which smartphones have become such an essential part of modern life is staggering, and something to be aware of when teaching in a classroom.

Smartphones can be both a great educational tool and a great distraction in the classroom. It should come as no surprise that almost every child in the US owns or has access to a smartphone. Statistics show that 56 percent of children age 8 to 12 have a smartphone. That number jumps up to 88 percent of teenagers ages 13 to 17 have or have access to a smartphone. And a whopping 91 percent of middle and high school aged students primarily access the internet via their smartphones.

This change in the way we interact with technology and integrate it into our lives has come dramatically and fast. It’s sometimes hard for teachers, many of whom grew up in an era with no mobile phones or even the internet, to adapt to this fast-paced technological generation. While smartphones can easily be the downfall of your students’ attention spans and performance, they don’t have to be. More and more educators these days are incorporating modern technology and students’ own smartphones into their classroom to engage and excite students about learning. Below you will find useful tips on how to manage cell phone use in your classroom, and use it for your teaching benefit.

Establish Expectations

At the beginning of the school year or semester, it’s a good idea to be blunt with your students about what you expect of them when it comes to using their smartphones in class. This is also the time to tell them about any plans to incorporate technology into the classroom. The best way to create a set of rules when it comes to cell phone usage is to do it together with the students.

Set aside a class period at the beginning of the year where you and your students talk about the best way to keep their attention focused on coursework. Include a clear list of times that it is and isn’t appropriate to be using your phone in class. It’s also important to agree on and clearly lay out the consequences of breaking the rules. You can even write up a contract or agreement laying out all of the expectations and effects you agreed upon as a class, and have them read it over and sign it. This way students know what to expect, and there are no surprises when they’re caught using their smartphones.

Engage Your Students with the Technology

The best way to manage cell phones and other technology isn’t to ignore it, but to use it as an educational tool. There are several different apps such as Socrative and many others that you can easily incorporate into your classroom and use for fun activities. These apps engage students by allowing them to use their own smartphones or mobile devices in an educational setting. Using these apps for activities like exit tickets—activities students have to do before leaving the class, or bell ringers—activities that students do at the beginning of each class period, can bring diversity to your curriculum and keep the interest of even your most distraction-prone students.

Take the Time to Walk Around the Classroom

It’s hard to tell whether or not your students are staying on task when you can’t see their screens. You can easily fix this by re-arranging the desks into a semi-circle or small group design, making their screens more visible to you. Another solution is to increase the time you dedicate to walking around the classroom. If students know that you’re likely to come their way with little to no warning, they’re more likely to stay on task. You can also tell who is busy with other distractions on their phone or mobile devices, by those that exit out of tabs quickly or double tap their home screen when they realize you’re walking by.

Don’t Be Afraid to Take Them Away

It’s just as important to engage your students with technology as it is to give them a break from it. They’re on their phone all day every day, at school and at home. While they may not be fans of the idea, it may be beneficial to both their attention spans and mental health to designate a technology-free period of time. A sure-fire way to enforce this technology-free time in the classroom and rid your students of any temptation to check their phone while you’re not looking is to have students put their phones in a basket or on your desk. By eliminating all temptation and ability to check their phone for a portion of the class, the can focus better on the task at hand. This strategy works great for group discussions, tests, and quizzes when students have the hardest time focusing.

Give Your Students a Tech Break

Every 20 to 30 or so minutes, give your students a chance to check their phones and have some free time. Most students claim to experience anxiety when they’re unable to check their phone for more than 20 minutes. Giving your students three minutes to respond to text messages, look at their notifications, and check social media gives them a chance to get some anxiety out so it’s not distracting them when they should be focusing on learning.

Bio: Matthew Lynch is the owner Lynch Consulting Group, LLC, and the editor of The Edvocate (www.theedadvocate.org) and The Tech Edvocate (www.thetechedvocate.org).
If instructional coaching is beneficial to teachers, shouldn’t leadership coaching be beneficial to principals? In most instructional coaching philosophies the teacher wants to be coached. Instructional coaching expert Jim Knight, someone I work with as a instructional coaching trainer, says that teachers should be the ones to choose to enroll with the coach. Additionally to that, those teachers should be able to choose the goal they want to work on. This initial aspect to the coaching cycle takes a lot of dialogue to get to the heart of why the goal is the best goal for them. In those cases where a teacher doesn’t know what goal to choose, but wants to do a full instructional coaching cycle, the teacher and coach co-construct the goals together. This may take a baseline observation or a teacher video-taping themselves to look at whether their engagement is authentic or compliant.

According to Knight’s research, coaching is an effective way to provide individualized professional development to teachers because those teachers who choose to be a part of the coaching program are an eager participant in the process. Coaching will help teachers retain up to 90% of what they learned, as opposed to lose 90% when they go to the typical sit-and-get professional development. Knight’s research certainly fits into the research of others who have studied professional development.

For example, Timperley et al (2007) found that the most effect professional development had the following elements.

- Over a long period of time (three to five years)
- Involves external experts
- Teachers are deeply engaged
- It challenges teachers’ existing beliefs
- Teachers talk to each other about teaching
- School leadership supports teachers’ opportunities to learn and provides opportunities within the school structure for this to happen

Leadership support can happen in different ways. In the best case scenario involving school leadership and teachers, a principal would suggest coaching as a way to help any teacher improve. That means teachers who may have a low level of self-efficacy (Bandura) and need assistance or a teacher who is a high flyer and can benefit from a keen eye and effective feedback.

What about principals?

If principals believe that teachers can benefit from high quality coaching, doesn’t that mean that principals can as well? I wonder how many would engage in that type of professional development? Many times the school leader believes that they are supposed to know it all, which is quite possibly why they moved to the principalship. And some principals may believe coaching is for teaching and not for them, which is an interesting dilemma when it comes to who values coaching and why. If coaches are good for teachers, shouldn’t coaching be valuable for leaders too?

There are leaders who believe that coaching can be just as important for them as it is for teachers. This is the collaborative, growth and innovative mindset leaders should have. If leaders truly believe in being collaborative, they also understand that they have a blind spot (Scharmer) which they lead from on a daily basis, and they may need outside guidance on how to get through that blind spot. For example, a possible blind spot is that they may enter into a situation with a confirmation bias that prevents them from seeing what is really happening in the classroom.

Let’s use this scenario:

A principal may enter into a classroom of a teacher that they don’t necessarily believe is a strong teacher and look for the reasons to support their bias. A coach could help principals understand that they have a bias because that coach is entering without the same confirmation bias.

Additionally, leadership coaches may help leaders understand how they can communicate better with staff, students and parents. They can even help leaders understand how to build collective teacher efficacy, which John Hattie, someone I work with as a Visible Learning trainer, has found to have an effect size of 1.57.

Practice What We Preach?

Coaching can be very beneficial. I’ve seen the benefits more now than I ever did as a principal because I have had the luxury to work with highly effective coaches around the country. They don’t want the position for status or power, but they do want to coach because they have a goal of helping their peers (build collective efficacy) at the same time they learn from those peers they work with.

The same can be done at the leadership level. Building synergy among leaders and getting them to try new strategies to build collective efficacy among their staff is something coaches can help do, and they often offer an outside perspective because they have worked with many other leaders.

We know from Knight’s research and the research of others including Timperley that professional development, and that’s what coaching is, is a lot stronger when both parties want to be a part of it. If coaching is beneficial to teachers, we can make it better for leaders as well. We just have to have the proper collaborative, growth and innovative mindset to get there.

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How is the American K-12 education system similar to the Ancient Greek Empire - specifically, the Ancient Greek Empire prior to its unification under King Philip II and Alexander the Great?

Ancient Greece was organized into poleis, or city-states, that evolved and expanded from small farming villages into grand urban centers that were funded by public monies. They developed their own governments and organized their citizens under some sort of constitution or set of laws. While the citizens of these city-states all had what the classic Greek historian Herodotus described as “the same stock and the same speech, our shared temples of the gods and religious rituals, our similar customs,” every city-state was different. Though the Greeks considered themselves united as “one people”, politically, they were divided and even divisive toward each other. Sometimes the disagreements and struggles between these city-states led to serious conflicts and rivalries - the greatest one being between Athens and Sparta in the Peloponnesian War between 431 and 404 BC. The American education system is organized into academic institutions, or education organizations, that evolved from one-classroom schools in a local community to large federal, state, and local education agencies that are funded by public monies. They developed their own academic standards and organized their stakeholders under some sort of board of education or set of policies. While the stakeholders of these education agencies all have what the classic Greek historian Herodotus would describe as “the same mission and vision, our communal schools of K-12 education and academic practices, our instructional methodologies and strategies”, every education agency was different. Though educators consider themselves united as “one profession”, politically, they are divided and even divisive toward each other. Sometimes the disagreements and struggles between these education agencies led to serious conflicts and rivalries - the greatest one being between district and charter schools in the Public School Wars that started in the nineties and continue to this very day.

Can you see the similarities? The American education system is the Ancient Greek Empire, united professionally in its mission and vision but divided politically in how the mission and vision should be fulfilled - or, more specifically, funded.

(Interestingly, the Peloponnesian War lasted over a quarter of a century, and it’s been approximately 25 years since the first charter school opened its doors in Minnesota and began the Charter School Movement in the United States.)

In the Public School War, district schools are Athens. They govern their local education agency and its individual sites as a limited democracy in which its leadership is either appointed (e.g. the superintendent, and site administrators) or elected (e.g. local school board members) with input from stakeholders within the school district boundaries. Like the Athenians, district schools are focused on maintaining and strengthening their infrastructure, their relationships with their stakeholders, and their position and value within the community they serve. The campuses of district schools, like Athens, are maintained and operated as sprawling centers that not only provide education but other services within the community. District schools and their leaders are also highly civic minded, often extending themselves to have influence and input not only in education but all civic and socioeconomic issues that could affect them and their schools. Charter schools are Sparta in that they are primarily governed as an oligarchy (managed by a charter management organization) with elements of a monarchy (led by a charter holder or principal), a democracy (with a school board), and an aristocracy (that consists of appointed prominent local politicians and/or business professionals). Like Sparta’s system of government, charter schools’ leadership is generally very exclusive and open either to members of only the highest social standing or those who can contribute to the prosperity and growth of the school. For example, it is not uncommon for charter school boards to include the building contractor who built the school, the
attorney that represents the schools on legal matters, or members of non-profit organizations and political advocacy groups involved with education at the national, state, and/or local levels. Those who open and operate charter schools are also like the Spartans in that they are determined to expand their power and presence within the community, and they purposefully and strategically set up their schools within the boundaries of districts and schools who are not serving their stakeholders as effectively or efficiently. Charter school campuses can best be described as spartan, operating in churches, warehouses, or storefronts that are rented and refurbished with limited resources. Some charters have become fortunate enough to acquire fiscal backing or professional support to build campuses that rival the district schools and even resemble modern business buildings. However, for the most part, charter schools have limited resources due to the fact that their costs are mostly tied into building and payroll expenses. In regards to issues involving education, charter schools and their leaders, like Sparta, generally prefer to keep to themselves, getting involved only when necessary and needed.

As with Athens and Sparta, both district and charter schools have gathered allies and fought on and off for decades because no single local education agency was strong enough to conquer the others. The district schools have the size and strength to keep their organizations in operation. However, the charters have made considerable dents into districts’ infrastructure, enticing and luring the district school students to their schools with offerings and opportunities their local school district cannot provide (e.g., small classroom sizes, 1:1 technology, a particular education philosophy or practice).

The Public School War is education’s Peloponnesian War in that it’s a civil war within the profession of education. Similarly to how Athens and Sparta fought each other over trade routes, rivalries, and tributes paid by smaller dependent states, district and charter schools are battling over policies, rivalries, and funding paid by the federal and state funding. Both sides claim each other are unfair, unjust, and even undeserving in the support they receive fiscally, politically, and socially, and both sides have organized themselves under unions and associations who will fight for what they believe to be right and what they believe they deserve. The Peloponnesian War also took a devastating toll on the Ancient Greek Empire. Sparta eventually defeated Athens and established itself as the major power and presence in Greece. However, the Ancient Greek Empire was so fiscally, politically, socially, and emotionally bankrupt from the many years of senseless internal strife and infighting that still continued after Athens’ defeat, although not as large a scale. It took decades for Ancient Greece to regain and rise to an even greater glory under King Philip II and his son, Alexander III. However, the sociopolitical structure of Greece had to shift from a democracy to a monarchy with top-down leadership.

Is that what it’s going to take to heal and strengthen education in America?

This is the whole point of this blog. District and charter schools are both public schools. Both are dependent upon and governed by public policy and funding. They (hopefully) both subscribe to the same philosophy—make every decision and take every action in the best interest of students. Where they differ is in their political operation and structure. District schools function as a limited democratic organization in which its leaders are appointed or elected. Charter schools are oligarchies with elements of a democracy, monarchy, and even aristocracy. However, both are public schools in that they are funded by taxpayer dollars.

The senseless battles between district and charter schools have left education open and ripe for invasion, and that’s what’s happening as federal and state governments become more and more increasingly involved in deciding the fate and funding of the American education system under the guise of “reform”. The impression is that, yes, education in America needs to be strengthened and supported, but how this should happen is unclear and undecided. The federal government attempted to settle the issue with the Common Core State Standards, but how the standards were presented and perpetuated only worsened the conflict. State and local government attempt to address the issue by passing legislation and propositions that will fund and support schools equally; however, like Athens and Sparta, district and charter schools always seem to feel and find a reason for inequity.

There shouldn’t be a conflict between districts and charters. These are just petty squabbles over what’s right and wrong, which is a matter of perspective. The district schools do not feel that charter schools with a
non-profit status but maintained and operated by for-profit charter or education management organization should receive public funding. The charter schools do not feel that the district schools have a monopolistic attitude and approach toward education and fear competition. The district schools believe they are a true public organization. The charter schools see themselves as competition to the status quo of public schooling. The district schools claim charter schools are profiteers while the charters call districts bureaucrats. The district schools accuse charter schools of being selective in their enrollment while the charter schools accuse the districts of purging their student population of those who could affect their school performance levels negatively after the 100th day of enrollment. Is this pettiness really necessary? How is this benefitting our students?

However, there should be a concern. Are the schools serving the students they have enrolled as effectively and efficiently as they should? Are they being held accountable professionally and fiscally? Are they providing all students with an equal opportunity to receive a high quality and effective education in the least restrictive environment regardless of their race, creed, nationality, socioeconomic status, or even academic performance? Are they practicing and promoting equity and fairness between its schools and students? That’s what district and charter schools should be fighting for, not over. The civil strife of the Public School War between district and charter schools are on a course to end up like the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, which devastated the Ancient Greek Empire. One side will win, the other will lose, but as the Peloponnesian War proved in the end, the victory will be a Pyrrhic one (in keeping with the Ancient Greece and Ancient World History theme). The collateral damage will be the stakeholders in education - particularly, the students. Education, like Ancient Greece, is a people and profession of one divided by politics, and like the Peloponnesian War, the collateral damage of the Public School War will be devastating unless someone will step up and be the Alexander the Great who unifies us as one profession and leads us to regain and rise to even greater glory. That person will not be a district school supporter or a charter school advocate.

That person will believe what we believe in education - we do what we do in the best interest of students. Let’s hope that person makes him/herself known before district and charter schools end up like Athens and Sparta.

Eric Francis is an Academic Author, Education Consultant, and Professional Development Specialist. He is also the owner of Maverik Education LLC.
When he to whom one speaks does not understand and he who speaks himself does not understand, that is metaphysics. Voltaire

Many would argue, and rightfully so, that we have lost our way as an educational system. Education has become a Sisyphean task involving professionally-minded educators in rolling any number of balls up a hill with their noses and then, in frustration, watching those same balls roll off down to the base of the hill. Dutifully, they follow them down the hill and start all over again because just as our mothers told us when they asked us to take out the garbage and we asked why, she responded with, “Because!” We do it “because we are a driven culture” and the powers-that-be told us “Because” when we asked why.

Does this make sense? Should we just follow their dicta blindly because that is what we are told to do? Instruction seems more and more like a scene out of Groundhog’s Day, an ad infinitum film forever of trying to find a loop that makes sense.

The conundrum that Voltaire describes above seems to point us in the direction of where we in education find ourselves. A metaphysical disconnect appears to exist between those who make educational policy and the hard-working practitioners in the field. Each side, warriors on the sidelines, speaking at one another without understanding.

**Change**

Before we reveal the grand flaw, we do have to note that our country has changed. When you see what has happened to our society--from the Bernie Madoffs among us to the disrespectful behaviors that you read about each and every day, it makes you wonder--Where have civility, morals and good character gone?

This is not a Pollyanna-ish question. Of course, none of us is perfect. No one should pretend to be “above it all,” but if the current elections have taught us anything else, it is the fact that our nation is divided in so many significant ways, ways that we have not been seen in many years, if ever. Unfortunately, like the rolling balls we saw in the Sisyphean saga, we see those same micro-negative behaviors rolling to the bottom of the hill throughout our society. The behavior displayed is totally unacceptable.

Something is seriously broken in our society, and there are those who expect educators to fix it. These problems run deep—perhaps far too deep. Perhaps we have slipped off the edge of the precipice and will soon recognize our descent.

We’ve dug a hole that from which we have to extricate ourselves. Phyllis Diller once quipped, “We spend the first twelve months of our children’s lives teaching them to walk and talk and the next twelve years telling them to sit down and shut up.” Our system in a nutshell.

We have clearly lost our way. Our priorities as an educational system have been misplaced. Our society is left orphaned without a clear direction and a sense of true purpose. We have buried ourselves in a morass of paper, a veritable whiteout, a storm of paper.

The “experts” have written tomes. Thousands of pages of roadmaps and interminable lists of dicta that have left us in a rictus of incomprehension.

The Answer is in Testing, They say

We want proof, they say, that you are teaching and that our clients are learning. The answer, they say, lies in testing.

Testing has become the mantra upon which they have hung their hopes for educators, administrators and students.

What have we been doing by going along following their path?

1. We have been feeding an insatiable desire to have students take an interminable string of inane assessments, the purpose of which is not clear.
2. We have burdened our students with too many ill-conceived tasks or poorly designed tests.
3. We have asked them to perform on these state assessments only to find that the outcomes do not arrive in a timely manner to be meaningful, and the results are most often not indicative of what happens in classrooms on a daily basis.
4. We have been moving further and further away
from what the “Founding Fathers and Mothers” had intended--helping to create socially responsible individuals who contribute to a cohesive society.

Where Should We Be Going?
Perhaps the mantra for education should be-- Cogito Ergo Sum. I think therefore, I am. Given the bones of knowledge, they should be able to construct meaning, create something new and feed others with their ideas. Instead, we pour our molten-hot students into preconceived molds, protect them from new ideas and seal them away in safe rooms fearful that they might be exposed to propositions that violate mainstream thinking and thus challenge the system in ways unacceptable to the leadership. Our purpose as educators should be to encourage rather than disparage divergent thinking.

From an educational vantage point, here are some of the questions that need to be answered:
1. What do we want our students to truly demonstrate?
2. What skills, habits of mind, character traits should they possess as members of a society?
3. What should schools be responsible for producing in our young men and women?
4. How do we balance the need to produce high levels of learning in our students with the need to instill good judgment, respect for other’s ideas, and give them a sense of right and wrong?

Let’s look at what schools should produce first as a beginning point. It seems reasonable to conclude that there needs to be greater emphasis on how to make better citizens and good people instead of creating little test-bots who dutifully fill in answers on a bubble sheet. The Opt-Out movement, for instance, seems to have made that point quite clear, leaving us with a chasm between the many warring factions.

It is not an either or proposition. Our belief is that the balance is completely off. Well-designed assessments for legitimate purposes have their place in education. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that a quality educational system must also prepare better citizens, meaning thoughtful individuals who can see the efficacy of independence and collaboration, so that they can take an active part in the process to make a better democracy.

What should legitimate assessments assess? Legitimate assessments frankly ask students to apply learning in a series of unique ways. Learning should be exploratory, either individually or in small-group settings. These structures are part of a well-designed educational system. Students should be encouraged to take what they have learned and turn it inside out. They should be given the opportunity to see their learning from a variety of perspectives, accept and reject applications, and arrive at unique conclusions and proofs. It should no longer be acceptable to parrot back information in the same form as it was presented.

Let’s look at the end result of the current assessment system. The test makers expect some preconceived answers on the tools they create. Results, in scores indelicately pounded into a formula, are used to evaluate educators and administrators. Once test results are linked to a score that a teacher or principal receives, the entire process becomes null and void.

As most readers of educational material are aware, the top psychometric organizations have come out against the use of value-added models. Groups like the American Educational Research Association and the American Statistical Association have warned against using test scores to rate individual teachers. Both of these organizations contend that there are too many uncontrolled variables in these assessments. It should also be noted that there a plethora of individual differences exist among students, these differences make the ratings invalid.

They further point out that the greatest source of variation in test scores is not solely the teacher, but his/her students, family income, and home environment are two of the factors. Therefore, accountability measures for school systems should not be used to assign blame or heap layers of sanctions on schools. Rather, they should be used to look for ways to continuously improve the system.

After years of testing, the effort to improve the system using these antiquated tools have not emerged. If they proved valid and were truly a vehicle for assessing teachers, administrators and students, they would have been readily accepted. Instead, schools and communities have railed against them. Educators need to feel that they have more freedom to create valid assessments that better mirror challenges that students would see in life. Those systems would be less hesitant to use strategies such as problem-based learning as part of an overall classroom assessment system without being hamstrung by invalid assessments and the need to spend an inordinate amount of time preparing students for them.
The powers-that-be say it is criminal to keep students from taking these tests. They proffer the notion that as good citizens and adults, they will not have the option simply to run away from things that are difficult. That is not good training for citizens, they say. The fact is, this may be precisely the thing that makes good citizens. Put in front of them something challenging and meaningful as in Field of Dreams and they will come.

Over Testing

In a recent edition of Mother Jones, Kritina Rizga reports that, “Students in American public schools today take more standardized tests than their peers in any other industrialized country. A 2014 survey of 14 large districts by the Center for American Progress found that third- to eighth-graders take 10 standardized tests each year on average, and some take up to 20. By contrast, students in Europe rarely encounter multiple-choice questions in their national assessments and instead write essays that are graded by trained educators. Students in England, New Zealand, and Singapore are also evaluated through projects like presentations, science investigations, and collaborative assignments, designed to both mimic what professionals do in the real world and provide data on what students are learning.”

It bears repeating. Some countries value the idea of assessment. They demonstrate this when they require that students show in meaningful ways what they have learned. Those systems ask students to contextualize the ideas and concepts they have learned and to reapply them. They expect their students to re-form their learning in some palatable fashion and convert their thinking into something demonstrable. In addition those systems do not rate teachers and principals by a single test score.

Ask yourself this question—What do multiple choice questions demonstrate? After multiple-training sessions in how to second-guess the questioner, or determine how to eliminate possibilities, students will only be able to demonstrate that they can make reasonable guesses in response to a set of questions or simply regurgitate information. But, do they in any way use the material to create something new or make sense of the unknown? Sadly, the answer is a resounding no.

The idea that we must think in order to be, should be an encouragement to behave and recognize that we are sentient beings. It is a basic principle upon which we should begin our thinking about what we are doing and why we are doing it. Without it, one cannot be sentient, only content to be docile observers and non-participators.

Those in the Trenches

So we look out at them, we, steely-eyed educators, expecting that the materials that we have prepared for them are being processed. We put stuff in the blender of their minds, things we thought deeply about, and expected those things to be re-processed in some fashion, perhaps in the same way that Einstein may have reprocessed a painter falling off a scaffold into an answer for the time continuum question. Not too much to ask is it? Well, perhaps we cannot expect them to process to the extent of an Einstein. We can’t all be Einstein’s. But, should we not minimally expect that our students arrive at some hypothetical newness even if it is wrong.

Is there anything wrong with dreaming too large? We observe our students scribbling dutifully in their notebooks (sometimes) all those things that we have predigested for them on our Smart Boards, on organizers or on a plethora of new, technologically advanced tools. We observe them even writing (sometimes) in the margins, and we assume that the marginalia is their metacognitive doodling as they process those ideas of the lesson. It is likely that most are not responding to some deep, dark, enlightening insight, but rather trying to drive away the boredom that time produces when engaged in less than stimulating experiences.

Test Prep! Likely those doodles are merely hole-fillers and our voices are lost in a somnambulist’s dreamscape.

We shouldn’t accept that this it is really what it is all about? Shouldn’t what we do be meaningful because, as Voltaire said, “No problem can withstand the assault of sustained thinking.”

The Founding Fathers and Mothers Would Be Rolling Over in their Graves

People spend too much time talking at each other and not to each other in the current social fabric. Perhaps
they have always. But we live in a time that seems to be far more confusing and frenetic. We seem to be far crasser and smitten with social interactions in a world built on friending and unfriending. Our students are byproducts of Us and People Magazine and their ilk. They spend thousands and thousands of hours involved in the inanities of Facebook and labeling things with emojis. Can we expect our student to care about the “stuff” in our classrooms when they know more of the intimate lives of stars than they do of more critical things happening around them in their topsy-turvy world? It is impossible to read any article or watch any newscast and not come away with the understanding that the behavior and the morals of our country has taken a severe turn for the worse. If we want our country to be successful in the future, schools – and the educational system – must be part of the solution. To make any inroads in helping to prepare our young men and women to be better people and citizens, we must engage them in ways that wake up the tired synapses of their brains. We must stretch our imaginations far into the future and shuck off the tired aphorisms of the past. We are not saying by any stretch of the imagination that academics are not important. We are proposing a new standard of rigor where students are expected to create and be engaged in what they are learning. More time should be applied to providing students with situations where they find themselves intrinsically involved individually and in small and large groups with the material. We are proposing that we uncover a better balance, much better than that which currently exists.

In a recent article, the author said that it is unlikely that the Constitution could have been written today because the art of compromise has been lost. This sounds like a good place for school to start the process of regeneration. Can we find ways for them to explore the art of compromise? In light of that, we can ask:

1. Should schools help to ameliorate this situation or should they only focus on academics and have students just prepare for tests that are used to “rate” teachers and principals as one of the primary reasons for the tests?
2. Will society accept schools going back to teaching citizenship, values and the “golden rule?”

We are not advocating mixing religion with public education. What we are suggesting is that we need to take a good, long, hard look at what the primary and secondary focus for schools should be.

Looking at the results at the recent Phi Delta Kappan annual poll of the public’s attitude towards the public schools, we can see that this question is vexing for our entire country. The results of the survey are aligned with our thinking. We need to reevaluate the purpose of what is meant by a good education. According to the article, “Fewer than half of Americans – 45% – view the main goal of public education as preparing students academically; the rest split between a focus on preparing students for work – 25% – or preparing them to be good citizens – 26%.”

As practitioners will tell you, the current push on having students take multiple assessments over many years, and having those results used to put a “score” on teachers and principals, have made the other priorities outlined above take a backseat to academics. What we have not seen is an honest discussion of what we truly want from our students on issues that don’t relate to academics, and we feel if that topic is not addressed fully, honestly, and in a timely manner, our society will fall further and further into disrepair so prevalent in recent years in our major inner cities especially. It is a crisis with deep implications.

**Conclusion**

It is worthy of repeating. We suppose that we can bury our heads in the sand and maintain the status quo, but to what end? We are in up to our necks in an uncivil time. If we fail in our endeavor to create a citizenry that can think, act and improvise and are not sitting idly by on the sidelines mesmerized by inanities, then it would seem that we doom ourselves.

The answer may lie in taking away the diversions--over-testing students so that they simply become numbers on pieces of paper; evaluating teachers and administrators; and using these numbers created by a bevy of statisticians for questionable purposes. We should replace these assessments with the evaluations used daily by teachers about the progress of their students, administered over a long period of time. The more we create a problem-solving environment where we place our faith in well-trained practitioners and administrators, the more likely that our collapsing system will improve.

We must regain some focus for schools to be part of the solution in terms of teaching civility, a bet-
ter value system, and what it means to be a true citizen of the United States. We cannot continue to make believe that things are fine and that it will be worked out by itself. One cannot sit idly by while the world around us crumbles under the weight of sheer wrong-headedness where we find school systems failing our young people and our professional in the trenches at this point in time.

There has to be a middle ground where the right and left can meet and agree on what schools should be producing in our students. We cannot be viewed as test-prep centers turning our backs on helping our young men and women become better people, citizens, and thinkers. For us, it is a moral imperative.

References
Phi Delta Kappan Magazine September, 2015 PDK 48th Annual poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

Sy Roth has worked as an educator for forty-seven years. In that time, he has been in the classroom as an English teacher, department head, supervisor of Language Arts, District Coordinator of Language Arts and Assistant Principal. He has been in and out of hundred of classrooms in that time, and has a deep understanding of what a professional learning community looks like. He completed his doctorate in Educational Administration at New York University.

Currently, Andy Greene is the principal at Candlewood Middle School in the Half Hollow Hills School District. He is past president of LIASCD and is the current Co-President of the Suffolk County Middle Level Principal Association. In addition to those positions, he acts as a middle level liaison with the New York State Education department, and is an adjunct professor at Stony Brook University. He is also the Co-President of the Administrators Association in the Half Hollow Hills School District.
The academic underachievement of students in the United States is a present day academic recession. Of all the constituent members who get blamed for student underachievement, teachers mostly are held liable. Teachers bear the brunt of the burden, and, in many circles, are liberally charged and criticized, more so than parents, politicians, school leaders, District and central officials, and colleges and teacher preparation programs.

What we seem to forget is that teachers are people first. They are human beings; not robots. Instead of looking to tear them down, we need to identify at least a few humanistic, people-centered, manageable leadership strategies that may have positive impact in the classrooms and in the practices and careers of teachers at the school level. We may not be able to change the system, but we can have positive impact in the teaching work that he/she does. The result? With consistent application over time, greater teacher effectiveness.

Teacher Ineffectiveness and Teacher Dropout are National Problems

Education author, speaker and consultant, Franklin Schargel (Personal communication, 2016, December 29), holds that teacher dropout is as critical an issue in the U.S. as student dropout. He is right!

Three Key Practices for School Leaders Who Want to Give Teachers What They Need

1. Stop Managing
   Inherent in management is the need to get people to work together to accomplish desired goals. When we manage, we control, dictate, order, direct, demand. When we manage, we isolate, we pressure, we increase stress, we indicate, “You’re only as good as your last mistake” …. No offence intended to mangers here. This is what the managed teachers will tell you.

2. Practice Humanism
   Humanism, as a philosophical and ethical position, primarily focuses on the value, goodness and agency of human beings, as individuals and within the collective, emphasizing common human needs, and the pursuit of rational ways to solve human problems. Humanism is founded on compassion, democratic participation, human rights, social justice, and is driven by human need and interest. According to the Humanistic Theory of Motivation, as leaders we need to focus on individuals’ efforts to fulfill their total potential as human beings. When management trumps humanism, we lose the people, in this case, our teachers.

3. Practice Leadership
   When we lead, we inspire, encourage, support, guide, model. When we lead, we consistently focus on beneficence towards people, we value people and their abilities and contributions, we recognize that without them no objective will be met, and we invest in them over the long term. We can’t run a school without students. In the same way, we cannot lead a school without teachers and support staff.

Turning the Key Practices into Practical steps: 8 Simple Teacher Effectiveness – What Teachers Need Every Day: 8 simple strategies for showing care and fostering capacity and competency

Michelle Ann Patrovani
Strategies for Showing Care and Fostering Capacity and Competency

1. **Regard the teacher as a person, an individual, a human being, first.**
As leaders, when we see our teachers, we need to greet them, genuinely. We should also pay attention to who they are, their interests and abilities and what’s going on in their lives. I’m not saying to be nosy. I’m saying, pay attention to events and circumstances, become people watchers, be alert and observant. When we notice Ms. Teacher’s furrowed brow or Mr. Teacher’s slumped shoulders, take a moment to genuinely inquire, and convey “You come first” or “You and your family come first” we practice humanism. We let them know that they have value in and of themselves, beyond the work that they do. We show them that we care. This simple act of humanism – done consistently – energizes them, gives them a greater feeling of safety, acceptance, and wellbeing, and whether they stay or take the rest of the day off, increases their performance over the long term…

2. **Show care and appreciation.**
Along with regarding the teacher as a person, show care and appreciation. There are many small, inexpensive and meaningful ways to demonstrate care. A former principal of mine made ginger-lemon-agarve tea every day for staff during winter months. She laid everything out on the counter in the main office and provided a kettle so we could have it hot or cold. That one small act, every morning, made an impact. It warmed us up from the cold, gave some of us the gift of the only breakfast we might have, and built up our immune systems. Ha! One result was less absenteeism because we were, emotionally, and physically, in better health. Mutual benefit… This same principal made sure to express her gratitude, to make staff laugh, and to honor them by keeping confidential what needed to be kept confidential. When a reprimand was in order, that was done privately as well. Demonstrations of teacher appreciation were a regularity, and yoga for staff was held whenever possible. At Christmas, she lined the hallway with poinsettias, and every staff member picked one to take home. Everyone felt cared for and appreciated. The work was the same mentally and emotionally draining work, and teachers were happy.

3. **Give positive affirmation.**
When we see something good inside or outside the classroom, say so. Tell Ms. or Mr. Teacher explicitly what that “something” is and why it is so important. When we do so, we boost their self-esteem and that triggers improved outcomes. While this esteem-outcomes causality is debated in some circles, there is a direct correlation between self-esteem and happiness and happiness and work performance. Just think back to a time when you felt down or depressed on the job. How was your work performance affected? … No further comment.

4. **Provide extrinsic motivation to foster intrinsic motivation.**
Intrinsic motivation generally bears a direct correlation to work or task performance. However, not everyone is intrinsically motivated. Providing extrinsic motivation can increase job performance. Work performance itself is motivated by salary, status/power, enjoyment, and one’s personal interests. Most school leaders do not have control over salary provisions, thus, school leaders need to focus on the remaining areas of work performance motivation to sustain, empower, and satisfy teachers. When we find ways to bring fulfillment to teachers in these areas of status/power, enjoyment, and personal interests, we meet teachers where their hearts are and intrinsic motivation begins to take over through the vested interest and corresponding increase in job satisfaction.

Important: Provide these opportunities for all teachers on staff, not just a select few. Doing the latter will establish a rift between the chosen and the unchosen, which will lead to internal people, power and political problems.

5. **Focus on programming.**
Okay… So this strategy is not so simple… Programming efforts and decisions that result in more time for common planning and other collaborative meetings, increases communication, builds community, reduces the burdens of work, allows colleagues to learn from each other, raises standards, reduces stress, and increases job contentment. This programming work and implementation to foster satisfaction cannot be done without council, counsel, and budget wizardry. We must employ our cabinet members, school leadership team, and staff to get them on board. Then, we must bring our budget geniuses and sorcerers to the table, write grants, … do whatever needs to be done to facilitate the reduction of the burdens of teaching.

6. **Utilize nugget visits, coaching and feedback sessions**
As school leaders, we do get bogged down with inordinate quantities of managerial work, which, if we allow, will leave no time for instructional support and coaching towards effectiveness. An hour a day given to nugget visits, coaching and feedback sessions enables a school leader to pop into at least five classrooms and chat with five teachers a day. This increases leader-
ship’s awareness of reality, promotes school-wide leadership visibility, fosters teacher-leader relationships through non-evaluative coaching and feedback sessions, builds capacity and competency, and reduces the stress on teachers who often feel pressured when we pop in for those evaluative informal and formal observations. Like nugget-sized anything, these visits, coaching moments and conversations are bite-sized. I have yet to engage in one of these visits with a negative outcome, regardless of the degree of effectiveness of practice observed. Feedback is always aligned to the evaluation tool to further learning, and recommendations are usually solitary ones that can be implemented right away. At times, we try it out immediately – as a mini coaching session – and that leads to wonderful reflection and conversation later on. These visits also produce more authentic leader-teacher and leader-student relationships.

7. Meet teachers’ needs and honor their time
Use professional learning (PL) sessions wisely. Plan for them based on identified needs of staff. Delegate and differentiate please. If a third of teachers need assistance with coherent instructional design, a third with classroom management, and a third with communicating with parents, do not plan for three weeks of PL sessions and have all teachers sit through the same experiences. This practice conveys a lack of respect for the teachers and their time. Have three different sessions, or a series of sessions, run simultaneously. These will be in smaller, more intimate groups. Allow teachers with strengths in these areas to design and deliver the learning sessions, giving them opportunity to shine in their areas of expertise, demonstrate leadership, develop additional skills, and deliver learning experiences, which may be better received from a colleague who is also in the trenches.

8. Give learning experiences that mimic the classroom
We tell teachers to show, not tell; to facilitate, not mediate; provide hands-on, discovery, problem solving and critical thinking/engaged learning experiences, not narration/banking teaching (Freire, 1970), and more. What are we doing during professional learning sessions? Are we showing, not telling; facilitating, not mediating; engaging teachers in hands-on, discovery, problem solving and critical thinking learning experiences or narrating instructions and expectations, for and to them? The best learning experiences for teachers mimic the classroom, allow teachers to be the students and then give them opportunity to dissect, deconstruct, analyze, evaluate, debate, practice, and take ownership of the experiences.

Bottom line: Teacher Effectiveness begins with recognizing teaches as people, valuing them, caring for them, investing in them and giving them opportunities to improve and shine.

References:
Conducting classroom walk-throughs (CWTs) is not a new concept. Educators have been walking through classrooms, gauging instructional practices for years. Unfortunately, CWTs are often conducted due to mandates from downtown and not from the internal desire to improve educational practices. Administrators go through the motions of walking through without the school getting the benefits of this researched based activity. CWTs can be a powerful tool for both the observers and the teachers getting observed. Visiting your staff in their “natural habitat” as often as is practicably possible is huge for you and them. I often find this to be one of the biggest gaps in the make-up of otherwise very accomplished leaders (Branson, 2014). Studies point to the value of district-designed walk-throughs in developing shared understandings of high-quality practice. Training in the use of valid and reliable data-collection instruments and clear rubrics play an important role in creating a common language and communicating district priorities (Coburn, Honig, & Stein, in press).

Here are five ways to make your walk-throughs more powerful.

1. Don’t go alone.
CWTs are not meant to be conducted in isolation. Having an administrator walk through classrooms alone taking notes is a good start, but far from best practice. Having teachers walk through classrooms with administration is even better. This way, the teachers conducting the walkthroughs can debrief after each visit, discussing what strategies the teacher was utilizing. Strategies to look for include, but are not limited to grouping methods, students’ actions, classroom environment, research-based instructional strategies, Bloom’s or DOK levels, student engagement, and differentiation. Team members might include the principal, teachers, instructional coaches, or even staff from a neighboring school (Richardson, 2001).

2. Visit Every Classroom Every Week
Too often, CWTs are conducted when an administrator has a free moment. They’ll visit a classroom here or there, but never get to enough rooms to be able to collect enough data to see trends. CWTs need to be a priority. Time must be scheduled each and every day so that every classroom can be visited at least once per week. This can be achieved by creating even a 20-30 time frame each day for walk-throughs. Schools with multiple administrators should utilized the entire team in order to ensure the all classrooms will be visited. Keep visits short in nature. Empirical research suggests anywhere between 3-10 minutes. If visits are lengthy, the principal cannot fit as many into each day and will not see teachers often enough to have a sense of each teacher’s overall reality and the reality across all classrooms in the building (Marshall, 2003). After a few weeks, enough data will be collected in order to see department, grade level, and school-wide instructional trends. Be sure to visit classrooms at different times of the day. Over time, the walkthroughs tell a story about what is happening in every classroom in the building (Zenger, 2004).

3. Share The Data
Collecting data will not be of any service to anyone unless it is shared, analyzed, discussed and acted upon. I recommend sharing CWT data once a month with staff members. Data can be broken down by grade, department, or by individual teacher. Remember to be clinical, not critical with the analysis. Names of teachers or classrooms should never be used as CWT data analysis should not be used as a “gotcha”. You want your staff to embrace and discuss the data, not be defensive. Classroom walkthroughs are used to evaluate the process not the people (Zenger, 2004). Successful participation in productive professional conversations increases the capacity of the group to be a professional learning community—a safe place to ask hard questions about the links between results, content, and teacher practices. Finally, the walkthrough protocol is a tool that a learning community can use to deepen its collec-
tive understanding of instruction - moving beyond identifying and “fixing” problems to identifying and enhancing student mastery of content and skills (Martinez-Miller, P., & Cervone, L., 2008).

4. Use The Data To Make Changes
Data is useless unless you do something with it. Once the data is analyzed, discussed, and digested, use the data to decide where you need to go with on-site coaching and professional development. Walk-throughs can shed light on a variety of different instructional elements including student engagement, groupings, DOK levels, student and teacher actions, as well as classroom environment. Keep in mind that different grade levels and departments might have different areas of need. The walkthrough protocol is a tool that a learning community can use to deepen its collective understanding of instruction - moving beyond identifying and “fixing” problems to identifying and enhancing student mastery of content and skills. Select the biggest area of need and provide on-going professional development in that area (Martinez-Miller, P., & Cervone, L., 2008).

5. Provide Immediate Feedback
Many teachers get stressed out when another educator comes in their room to watch them teach. Even worse is having that educator leave the classroom without providing any sort of feedback. The teacher is left wondering the visitor they liked what they saw or if their instruction is seen as a cause for concern. To avoid this anxiety, leave a post-it note on the teacher’s desk at the end of your CWT. Pick out one positive instructional element and praise them for it. This will put them at ease and open the door for future conversations about CWT data in the future that might not be so pleasant. Building up trust in the process is vital. Teachers will not trust the process or value that data if they are kept in the dark. When discussing walk-throughs with teachers, observers may want to mention what they have noticed, their questions and compliments, and possibilities for improving equitable and high-quality student learning. In general, informational and supportive feedback is more productive than evaluative comments (Ginsberg, 2002).

References

Dr. David Franklin is an award winning school administrator, education professor, curriculum designer, and presenter. He earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from California State University, East Bay, a Master’s Degree in Education Technology from National University, and holds a B.A. in Music from the University of California, San Diego. In addition to serving as an adjunct faculty member at universities around the country such as National University and Colorado State University, Global Campus, he also serves as a Senior Faculty member of the National Excellence in School Leadership Initiative. Through his work at NESLI, Dr. Franklin mentors teacher leaders, aspiring administrators, current school principals, and district leadership. Dr. Franklin has presented at national and international education conferences and is a sought after presenter in the areas of academic intervention, school leadership, creating a shared vision, creating common assessments, and data analysis. Dr. Franklin is available for school and district professional development sessions. He can be reached at david@theprincipalsdesk.org.
Great schools / districts all have one thing in common: great organizational culture. Dedicated teachers and a researched-based curriculum isn’t enough to make a school great. Culture is everything. Management guru, Peter Drucker, wrote, “Culture eats strategy for lunch”. He is right. A poor organizational culture will send these amazing teachers straight into the arms of another school or district or straight out of the profession altogether. A growing body of empirical research now documents the strong positive relationships between supportive school contexts and teacher retention (Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Yee, 2016).

It is the responsibility of school administration to create and maintain a positive culture of teaching and learning. Here are five ways to create a strong, collaborative school / district culture.

1. Don’t Micro-Manage Teachers / Principals

Teachers and principals need to be focused on one thing: their students. Too often, their focus is shifted from maximizing student achievement to compliance issues, paperwork, or other aspects that are not important or urgent. However, they will get email after email, memo after memo, reminding them to complete these tasks that will have no bearing on student achievement. Let them keep their focus on students, not on compliance tasks. Trust in them that they know what their students need. After all, they are with them all day long. Autonomy and accountability go together: greater autonomy in decisions relating to curricula, assessments and resource allocation tend to be associated with better student performance, particularly when schools operate within a culture of accountability (Ikeda, 2011). One of the foundations of the teaching profession is to teach students how to think and act on their own. This brings the notion of ownership to the learning process. We should provide teachers and site principals that same framework.

2. Be Mindful of Building Improvements

We all know that educators have a smaller chance of having cosmetic maintenance orders processed than walking on the moon. However, never underestimate the impact that small changes can make. Consider smaller improvements that will make a big impact such as new paint on playground benches, planter barrels in front of every classroom, new décor in the staff room, new posters for every room … Planting flowers and decorating planter boxes for every classroom is a wonderful and inexpensive way to spruce up the look of a school. Furthermore, students love engaging in this type of service. Work with your local nursery to secure some colorful foliage and get your hands dirty. I had teachers and parents snapping and posting photos of me on social media in a suit with my hands wrist deep in a planter barrel. Additionally, classrooms can go decades without being painted. If you are lucky enough to be able to do it, go for it. I have never seen teachers so happy before or since the day they were surprised by fresh paint in their classrooms. In a study of a large sample of teachers in Chicago and DC schools, researchers found that teacher retention/attrition decisions were significantly related to the quality of school facilities, even when controlling for other factors that might be perceived to impact attrition (Buckley et al., 2004).

3. The Student Council Coffee Cart

Sometimes, the best way to improve the culture of a school is with simple acts of kindness. Want to brighten up everyone’s day? Try this: Once a month, have your student council dress up a book cart with a table cloth, flowers in a vase, fresh coffee, and pastries. Have them go from classroom to classroom treating teachers. Don’t forget to include classroom aides, parent volunteers, custodians, and other support providers. For less than 40 bucks, you will make everyone’s morning and give them a story that will make staffs at other schools jealous. The look on their faces when the students come into their room is priceless! You can always serve hot chocolate or tea for non-coffee drinkers! While hot drinks work best in the fall and winter months, you can always mix it up and serve iced coffee and tea when the weather turns warmer. Don’t have a student council, put on an apron yourself and whip up a latte! It will be worth it!

4. Give Them a Voice in Decision-Making

No one likes to have decisions dictated from the top.
down. Teachers and principals must be trusted to make decisions for the students they work with. These decisions need to come from within, not from downtown. Like I stated above, teachers and principals are the ones with their students all day long. They are the ones who need to be engaged in moving the school forward (Cohen, J. & Freiberg, J.A., 2013). Fostering teacher leaders is a great way to ensure that multiple voices will be heard and that the vision of the school reflects its values. It is vital that teachers and principals at the school site are given the authority to practice site-based leadership. Giving local educators a voice brings the responsibility for decisions as close as possible to the school . . . defining how school staffs can work collaboratively to make these decisions . . . creating ownership for those responsible for carrying out decisions by involving them directly in the decision-making process and by trusting their abilities and judgments . . . “ (Harrison, 1989).

5. Share Success With Your Community

Notice how media focuses on the negatives? There always seems to be a story on corrupt administration, money siphoning, abuse scandals . . . We need to interject some positive stories into our community’s collective consciousness. While we can’t always control what the local paper or news stations report, we can control what we put out. It is essential that educators utilize social media and websites to share daily successes with their community. Create Twitter and Facebook accounts to share the hard work of educators each and every day. These posts will instantly reach local stakeholders. There is no longer a need to wait until the monthly newsletter is distributed. Educators are happier when they are receiving praise for their hard work. Just like students, this praise needs to be immediate. Principals are finding social media to be robust platforms for communicating with parents and other community stakeholders (Sheninger, 2014). We need to harness this power. It is time for educators to revitalize the industry and write their own narratives. If not, someone else will write it for us.

References

Dr. David Franklin is an award winning school administrator, education professor, curriculum designer, and presenter. He earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from California State University, East Bay, a Master’s Degree in Education Technology from National University, and holds a B.A. in Music from the University of California, San Diego. In addition to serving as an adjunct faculty member at universities around the country such as National University and Colorado State University, Global Campus, he also serves as a Senior Faculty member of the National Excellence in School Leadership Initiative. Through his work at NESLI, Dr. Franklin mentors teacher leaders, aspiring administrators, current school principals, and district leadership. Dr. Franklin has presented at national and international education conferences and is a sought after presenter in the areas of academic intervention, school leadership, creating a shared vision, creating common assessments, and data analysis. Dr. Franklin is available for school and district professional development sessions. He can be reached at david@theprincipalsdesk.org.
t’s already won 7 awards at the Golden Globes and is nominated for a recording breaking 11 awards for BAFTA. Writer and Director, Damian Chazelle has said he wanted “to take the old musical but ground it in real life where things don’t always exactly work out”. What he has created is a film with five valuable lessons for learning relevant to education.

Lesson 1: Build learning motivation out of the energy of students’ aspirations

We have all dreamed about what we could become. Seb wants to own a jazz club and Mia wants to be an actress, something she has been imagining doing since she was little. In classrooms across the country, what aspirations do our students have? In what way are schools places of aspiration and hope?

There is no denying the value of hope, even for people on the margins of society who feel limited in every way (Bryant & Ellard, 2015; Flouri & Panourgia, 2012). Strong career ambitions can have a positive and powerful effect on academic performance. A recent study revealed that nearly 30% of 10 year olds wanted to be either sports stars or performing artists, by 13 more aspired to be actors but another 10% also wanted to be doctors or in business (Archer et al., 2014). It is easy for adults to look down on some of these ambitions as pure fantasy. Many young people encounter cynicism and sometimes even teachers give the impression that they would prefer their students to lower their aspirations.

It is true that a person’s dreams can evolve or change; often there is a refining of plans in relation to a greater awareness of personal limitations. But surely it is not the business of schools to ‘reality check’ kids out of their ambition? At some point, Mia and Seb need the other to confront and exhort them to not abandon their aspirations. Part of the mission of schools should be to harness the motivational power of dreams, showing how they may be attained through hard work, effort and perseverance.

Lesson 2: Positive learning relationships are important to foster

Mia and Seb encounter each other unexpectedly, several chance meetings gradually unfold into a relationship. However independent we are, it’s important not to underestimate the importance of learning relationships and our need for recognition from others. Chance encounters of two apparently very different people which leads to harmony and synergisms is the stuff of romance, for sure. But, in fact, there are many opportunities in life to be open to others, listen and take note of the perspectives of those with whom we would not normally associate. When this happens we often grow as people because these encounters stimulate self-reflection and broaden our understanding of the world around us. This helps us think abstractly, develops our empathy and stretches our creativity (Angela & Chi-Yue, 2010).

In many ways classrooms are places of chance meetings. A mixed group of students and a teacher find themselves meeting at the same time and place. At the beginning of the year only a handful, perhaps, would have planned to be with each other. Classes can too easily slip into ‘them’ and ‘us’, that group and this. Teachers who work to resist this, who bring themselves to each lesson and encourage students to respectfully value each other enrich the educational opportunities of school (Siegel, 2012). Just as Mia and Seb took the time to learn about one another’s interests and backgrounds, so too do all those who find themselves positively learning together whether in lesson or on a date.

Lesson 3: Make the curriculum relevant and teach with passion

The audience learns quickly that Seb’s passion is jazz. It comes as a disappointing shock when Mia states, “I hate jazz.” No doubt many students can be heard muttering their way out of lessons, “I hate history”, or “Math is so boring”, and “I just don’t get the point of English”. We’d do well to learn from Seb. He responds to Mia by not accepting her dislike of jazz as final, she needs to hear it live, to understand its origins. Making it relevant and meaningful, these are shown as the
means by which Mia can be brought to an appreciation of jazz. It will take most of the film before she acknowledges her new found love of jazz but Seb persevered. His passion for it is ultimately infectious.

It’s one thing we know students respond to well. Teachers with a real passion for their subject make a difference to students’ learning motivation (Patrick et al., 2000; Carbonneau et al. 2008). This doesn’t necessarily mean wearing volcano socks if you’re a geography teacher or a scarf with DNA prints to your science class. But it does involve showing why your subject matters, helping students see connections between the curriculum and their lives.

Lesson 4: Help students see that effort and perseverance are pathways to success
Central to the story is how both Seb and Mia have to overcome disappointment and failure. On the path fulfilling our potential there are no want of challenges. Perhaps one of the greatest of these is coping with our own limitations and emotional lows. Mia goes to audition after audition for acting parts all without success. Even her use of initiative in writing, producing and starring in her own play seems to end in humiliation. Meanwhile, Seb’s dream of owning his own jazz club nearly gets side-lined by compromises due to apparent necessity. These disappointments and the near abandonment of their ambitions pushes their relationship to breaking point.

How we perceive difficulty, failure and the need for perseverance have a profound influence on our learning. We know that resilience and a growth mindset encourage us to see the application of effort and a willingness to overcome knock backs as pathways to reaching our potential (Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck, 2008; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). School cultures which foster these dispositions are not easy to create. It takes more than a few posters and an online questionnaire. Students need to be encouraged to hold to and embrace values that can positively shape their self-awareness. They need peers and teachers who they can trust.

In La La Land, Seb is shown on his piano, turntable next to him, practising again and again to master the melody; Mia is seen writing, rehearsing, learning her lines. We see that it’s their diligence, effort and commitment that help them realise their potential. From gritty efforts, their characters emerge stronger and better.

Lesson 5: No regrets, always look ahead
Finally, the lead characters in La La Land stand at a new place in their life’s journeys. Do they look forward and press on or regret their choices? It is easy for us to assume that prior success or failure will determine the results of future endeavours. Rarely do the choices we make work out exactly to plan. Those who have a changing and learning disposition recognise that like a healthy plant we always need to be growing towards the light. Obstacles, disruptions, unusual shadows and clouds will mean that each day we may need to recalibrate our trajectory a little. Regret can be appropriate for mistakes made but when it takes over, it leads to paralysis not growth.

Good quality formative assessment always points students to what can be improved in their work next time (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Students can easily get stuck thinking about their last performance. They can regret their choices to study in one way or another, to choose this subject rather than a different one for GCSE or post-16. These feelings can lead to doubts that muddle our thinking, hindering our ability to apply our energy and skills effectively (Eysenck et al., 2007). Schools need to be places of second, third, fourth, fifth chances. Teachers who maintain high expectations of their students greatly increase their potential to flourish (Cotton & Wikeland, 1989).

We end nearly where we began – looking towards the potential of our students, encouraging their hopes for the future. La La Land may not be everyone’s favourite film, but its lessons on learning are well worth thinking about. The music of learning has harmony and themes, melody and rhythm, that should get us all dancing.
References

Nigel Newton is a teacher, researcher and independent learning consultant. His experience includes over 15 years of teaching, both in the UK and Spain, from elementary to post-graduate level course, and holding management responsibilities for ESL provision in a further education college. During much of this time he has been involved in research, investigating post-compulsory recruitment strategies, the effectiveness of course inductions, and a significant study on student course choice processes and course success. Recently, his doctoral research has been an investigation into the relationship between school culture and students’ approaches to learning. Nigel’s current research interests are focused on how schools can create cultures in which both teachers and students experience authentic opportunities for learning. He is a member of the Centre for Researching Education Across Boundaries in theory and practice (CREAB) within the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK.
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The New York Academy of Public Education is announcing a Call for Manuscripts for its Seventh Annual Research Journal. Articles are to be no less than 1,000 words and typed double spaced in #12 Arial font. Manuscripts are to be submitted to the editor at - Triadedu@aol.com - no later than December 15, 2017, in order to be considered for publication in the May, 2017 Seventh Annual Edition. All manuscripts will be read and reviewed by the Academy’s Peer Review Committee and returned to the author with any editorial comments/corrections/suggestions and further instructions. Kindly indicate your interest in writing an article by contacting the editor at the above email address no later than October 31, 2017, with the proposed title of your manuscript.

Topics to be addressed can include (but are not limited to): the Cultural Arts; Core Content Standards; school building administration; teacher education; standardized assessment; budgeting; higher education; effects of class size; parent involvement; should a teacher internship be required; ELLs and/or Bilingual Education; impact of charter schools on public education; the impact of parochial schools on public education; effects of closing parochial schools; the new teacher/supervisor evaluation system; school restructuring; changing the culture of a school; the new Ed TPA process; and other areas dealing with the educational sphere. All articles must include a listing of references.

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Should you have any questions, kindly contact Dr. John Jangl at 914-320-7877 or at Triadedu@aol.com.

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