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RETHINKING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: A WHOLISTIC HUMANISTIC VIEW OF STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND LACK OF PERFORMANCE

by

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DEDICATION

This seminal work is dedicated to my beloved parents Mr. Emmanuel Chukwunyere Azode and Mrs. Fidelia Ulunma Chukwunyere whose enduring love for education ignited my quest for knowledge. Mom and dad, you are the wind beneath my wings. You are first among equals in questioning taken-for-granted assumptions. I can never be grateful enough for the life you have given me. You are my heroes. I want you to know that your motivational song to me whenever I complained of the challenges of this terminal degree was and will continue to be my beacon of strength in my academic journeys. Your melodious voice will always remain with me as you sing:

Akwokwo an atu uto, ma ona ara ahu muta, Onye nwere ntashi obi, oga amuta akwukwo, ma oburukwa ma nne gi na nna gi nwee ego-oo.

In English: Education is sweet, but it is difficult to obtain. One who has perseverance will succeed in obtaining knowledge. However, your mother and your father would have to have money.

Although you are not the richest, you gave me what money can never buy, self-esteem and a sense of purpose and direction. I can never thank you enough!

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To each and every one who has impacted my life thus far, I say thank you and may God bless and reward all of you.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnographic case study that explored minority and low SES inner city high school[1] students' perception and sense-making of school, learning, academic behaviors, and academic achievement through an integrated theory of human development, learning, and achievement. I sought an understanding of the reason behind the persistent academic failure of inner city minority and low SES high school students, as well as the academic achievement gap within and between this subgroup of students. The aim of this study was threefold. First, I explored the factors operating in high school students' thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions to school and academic achievement. Second, I examined the mechanisms by which these factors operate. Third, I utilized an integrated humanistic paradigm in analyzing student learning and academic achievement. The integrated framework for this study comprised of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development, Bandura's sociocoginity theory of learning, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Using prolonged engagement, interviews, focus group, fieldnotes, diaries, and documents, I generated information rich data that enabled me to answer the following questions: 1. How do minority and low SES students perceive and make-sense of school and schooling? 2. How does the bidirectional interaction between

[1] **Inner city high schools** are schools characterized by high percentage of minority and low SES students, lower levels of competition from peers, apathy and lack of motivation among students, high student turnover, truancy, and mobility, limited elective courses, students with many health and emotional problems related to poverty and to living in the ghetto or barrio conditions, high teacher turnover and low expectations for student performance (Orfield et al., 2004).

student characteristics and school processes and procedures impact student academic behavior and school culture.

PROLOGUE

In the closing lines to the prologue of her book, *The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrison writes, "There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since why is difficulty to handle, one must take refuge in how" (p. 6). Being of African origin and one who has worked in private schools for so long before joining the American public school system, it was strange for me to see students come to school, sit in classrooms, but refuse to participate in classroom activities and it was okay for almost everybody. I was highly disturbed by this and so I began asking questions. I wanted to know why students come to school and why they have such attitude toward school and schooling. However, since searching for why is a difficult endeavor, I immersed myself in looking for how this has become a norm among the students in the research setting.

Hence, this dissertation emanates from my nine years classroom experience, as a teacher, in an inner city high school that caters to predominantly minority and low SES students, as well as my unanswered questions from the literature as I grappled with what I interpreted as students' apathetic behavior toward learning, academic excellence, and academic achievement. This study is not so much about students' academic behavior or school characteristics as it is about the bidirectional interaction between context and students and how this interaction imparts the behavior of both students and school. Stated differently, the underlying motivation for this work is my sense-making of things that have seen and experienced in this space as well as the challenges these experiences have posed to my personality, beliefs, values, and understanding of education and the purposes

of education. As I struggle daily with the confounding feedback that results from well-intentioned programs, policies, and procedures on students' academic outcome, this study becomes a channel through which I seek an understanding of this space for my students and myself, as well as how to better utilize this space in breaking the status quo for minority and low SES students who occupy the space.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Inner City High Schools

As Riles 1969 posits,

> American education's most challenging problem in the half of the 20th century is indisputably in the large cities. Achievement test scores show that children in the central cities lag consistently behind the average in educational attainment. The concern over the elimination and unification of small, rural inefficient school districts has now been overshadowed by the controversy over the organization and administration of large metropolitan school districts such as New York, Washington, D.C, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Questions about quality of instructional programs and adequate educational expenditures are being raised as much in the cities with their large industrial tax base as in the poor communities of the South. The so-called crisis in urban education appears to have materialized in the last few years, contemporaneously with our concern over civil rights and poverty. In effect, the crisis is in the center of our urban areas, in the ghettoes populated by poor and minority groups. But the fact that children of minority groups and /or low income families do not do as well in school as middle-class Caucasian children is not a new problem nor a sudden discovery. (p. 1).

Statement of Problem

Despite the concerted efforts of social, cultural, religious, and political activists economic inequality and academic achievement disparity between the poor and marginalized; and the rich and powerful of the society have persisted. It is surprising that even within an industrialized nation, such as, the United States, economic inequality and academic achievement gap continues to exist and progressively widens. The inverse relationship between inner city students' academic achievement and innovative educational policies, curriculum, and teaching strategies suggests either a misunderstanding of what constitutes student learning and academic achievement or a misdiagnosis of what enhances learning and academic achievement.

As the achievement gap widens, more money is poured into school districts with the belief that more funding and stringent accountability measures on schools will close the gap between minority (Blacks and Hispanics) and mainstream students (Whites) (Hanushek, 1996;Goldschmidt & Eyermann, 1999; Grubb, 2006). However, these intervention strategies neglect the actual players in the game, "The Students." Although money, innovative curriculum, and school accountability for student learning are very important for student achievement and effective functioning of schools, these components alone cannot engender the "developmentally generative dispositions"[2] (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) needed to engage in processing the progressively more complex skills that learning and academic achievement demands.

[2] **Developmentally generative dispositions** are those person characteristic that have the ability to generate and sustain positive reciprocal interaction between a developing person and her or his environment. Bronfenbrenner contrasted these with developmentally disruptive dispositions that retard or disrupt such positive proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; 2005).

Within the prevailing models of research in Education Production (EP) literature (Hanushek, 1996;Goldschmidt & Eyermann, 1999; Grubb, 2006), majority of studies within the field of student achievement focus on identifying core societal, racial, and contextual deficits, which has given birth to three dominant achievement theories in discussing student academic outcome namely: Social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1876; Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Bernstein, 1973; Heath, 1983), cultural ecological (Ogbu, 1978; 1981; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999), and psychosocial theories (Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Clasen & Brown, 1985; Ungar 2000; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). For instance, much of the research on students' career and college readiness through high stakes test score focus on inner city high schools' inability to prepare minority and low SES students for success on these tests, as well as on strategies for improving schools (Orfield, 2002; Orfield & McArdle, 2006; Easton, 2006). Furthermore, studies on student academic achievement have typically been experimental and quasi-experimental in nature with little focused on the lived experiences and daily practices of students, teachers, and administrators of inner city high schools.

With a predominant focus on etic and highly deterministic representation of minority and low SES students of inner city high school, little research has been aimed at understanding minority and low SES students' academic outcome from an emic perspective. Very few scholars who have undertaken the emic stance (Valenzuela, 1999; Fine, 1991) tended to represent these adolescents as inert objects lacking in agency, conation, and cognition to analyze, evaluate, and choose actions that best serves their self-interests of protection and survival. They also take a reductionistic view of academic achievement by suggesting that school accountability will invariably amount to students'

academic success. Nonetheless, no study, so far, has focused on how students' personal characteristics influence and are influenced by school contexts as well as the effect of this bidirectional interaction on teacher behavior and student outcome. Thus, there is a need to explore the reciprocal effect of person characteristics and context on minority and low SES students' academic outcome and their inner city high school culture, as well as the mechanisms through which academic achievement is deployed and navigated.

Positing that minority and low SES inner city high school students are human beings and especially adolescents who as active self-serving organisms are capable of orchestrating their future (Bertalanffy, 1959; Bernard, 1991; Brandtstader, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 2005), my study investigates the bidirectional interaction between students, teachers, and school rules, policies, and procedures, as well as the role of this interaction in creating the observed students' academic behaviors, school culture, and students' academic outcome. Through this in-depth examination, I considered how the participants manage, contest, resist, and make sense of the varied and layered meanings of school, schooling, and academic achievement. Deviating from the mechanistic perspective, I undertook the humanistic stance and analysis, thus situating this work within the humanistic psychology framework (Maslow, 1968; Magnusson & Torestad, 1993; Magnusson, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) that was informed by bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), sociocognitive theory of human development (Bandura, 1996), and the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977).

Purpose of the Study and Intellectual Goals:

Employing ethnographic and humanistic human development approaches, this study evaluated the bidirectional interaction between minority and economically

disenfranchised inner city high school students and their school context and how this interaction impact students' educational outcome by (1) examining the factors operating in high school students' thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions toward school and academic achievement, (2) examining this sub-group of students' academic behaviors, and (3) identifying the mechanisms by which these factors operate. This study positions inner city high school as a space to examine the implication of person characteristic and context on the academic behaviors and academic outcome of minority and economically underprivileged students. Positing that minority and economically disadvantaged high school students have the intelligence and ability to excel academically, this study examined the reason behind the observed student apathy, nonchalance, persistent academic failure, and the confounding feedback that arises from policies and programs adopted to enable academic achievement within this space.

Research Questions:

Although school production[3] and school finance scholars[4] (Coleman et. al, 1966; Hanushek, 1996; Hedges, Laine, & Greenwald, 1994a; Goldschmidt & Eyermann, 1999; Marlow, 2000; He, 2000; Grubb, 2006) are currently grappling with the paradox of more input and less output in the educational industry, few researchers (Grubb, 2006; He, 2000) have incorporated a humanistic view of human development and functioning in exploring the achievement gap puzzle. Hence, my in-depth examination is accomplished through an ethnographic case study that emphasizes and attends to the local everyday

[3] **School Production**, within this study I include those specialists, researchers, parents, and educators who have contributed to the growing body of literature surrounding students' educational outcome as it affects career and college readiness. Although the use of the term in this study does not exclusively refer to critical theorists' understanding of the social re-productive nature of schools, it connotes all scholars who have critically or otherwise evaluated the outcome of schooling.

[4] **School Finance**, within this study I include those specialists, researchers, parents, and educators who have contributed to the growing body of literature on the relationship between school funding and students' educational outcomes.

practices of the study participants (Atkinson et al., 2001; Bryman, 2001; Van Maanen, 1998). Informed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development, Bandura's sociocognitive theories of self-efficacy and agency, and Bourdieu concept of habitus, I worked to position my analysis and interpretation at the intersection of the local practices and the broader social and political frameworks relevant within the data corpus.

Additionally, in order to explore inner city high school students' sense making of school and schooling, as well as the impact of the bidirectional interaction between context and persons on students' academic outcome and school culture, I worked to methodologically and theoretically position this study within the humanistic psychology framework (Magnusson, 1995; Magnusson & Torestad, 1993; Bronfenbrenner 2005) that is informed by critical theorist's understanding of "social facts, not as inevitable constraints on human freedom, but as pieces of history that can be changed" (Agger, 1991, p. 5). Consequently, the following two primary research questions guided my data collection, analysis and interpretations:

1 How do minority and low SES high school students perceive and make sense of school and schooling?
    - What mechanisms undergird their perception and sensemaking of school and schooling?
2 How does the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures impact student academic behavior, school culture, and student's academic outcome?
    - How does each of these components (person characteristics and school characteristics) influence student learning and academic outcome?

Significance of Study:

Before discussing my perceived contribution of my study to the body of literature on student academic achievement and the achievement gap, I believe it is important to explicate my sense-making of the concept of "significance." Seeing the "significance of this study as integratively achieved as I actively participate in the making and remaking of the study's major claims (Kvale, 1995), I depart from the idea that only me can absolutely name that which is most profitable within my work, knowing that I can offer only one of many possible explanations (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, I view my findings as "instructive statements" (Shotter, 1993, p. 34) that lead the reader to key features within the ethnographic account and the interactional effect of the reciprocity between process, person, context, and time on students' academic development, academic achievement and school culture, which I believe have been overlooked by prior academic achievement studies.

Therefore, I invite the reader as I invited my research participants (Howarth, 2010), to evaluate the significance of my work (Wood & Kroger, 2000) recognizing that occasionally, "the conversation between writer, reader, and character should be allowed to wane before additional voices interject themselves in the dialogue" (Barone, 1995, p. 72). Situated within my acknowledgement that my way of making sense of my data will always be "partial and positional" (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004), I present ways in which I believe my study contributes to the broader literature on the education and academic achievement of minority an low SES students and the achievement.

First, it presents student learning and academic achievement as a synergistic effect of a complex relationship between school process, person (disposition, resources, and

demand), context, and time. Hence, instead of the linear notion of learning and academic achievement that inform current educational policies, student learning and academic achievement should be seen as the responsibility of all stakeholders, parent, student, teachers, educational leaders and the society at large, especially the student whose personal proclivities trump the constructive effect of the proximal process.[5] This insight has several implications for the way school and schooling is performed[6] in the United States. (I) It has policy implications as it calls for a nuanced look into the policies, practices, and procedures that undergird the education of minority and economically disadvantaged students and the ideologies that inform these policies, practices, and procedure. (2) It has implications for school restructuring and reformation as it calls attention to the taken-for-granted everyday experiences of minority inner city school students as they are recycled and pushed out of the school system through dehumanizing, demoralizing, and handicapping policies and practices that permanentizes their situation as wage laborers.

Additionally, through this study, I sought to fill the need in school production literature for the application of a comprehensive humanistic theoretical model in the analysis and evaluation of high school students' learning, academic achievement, and the achievement gap. School production literature is replete with chronicles of the achievement gap between inner city minority and low SES students and the suburban mainstream students, the role of family, school, and finance in engendering the gap, and possible ways of fixing the gap. However, the literature is lacking in an integrative or

[5] The proximal process refers to the direct interaction between the person and her or his environment. Bronfenbrenner (2001) describes it as which is the engine of development.

[6] In this document, I use performance and perform to depict learning and academic as a socially constructed event that is shaped by the reciprocal interaction process, person, context, and time. Hence, learning as well as academic is both contextual and individualistic.

holistic view of the operating factors in student's academic achievement and how these factors operate simultaneously in either closing or widening the academic achievement gap. Additionally, the literature on students' educational outcome downplays the nature of academic achievement as a complex volatile phenomenon that can neither be accurately measured nor interpreted without an integrative framework that reflects the simultaneous interaction of various components of person characteristics and environmental contexts, which are also emergent and evolving. Thus, the existing literature offers a reductionist view of student achievement through its unilateral focus on a single factor at a time and its use of unilateral theoretical frames in studying students' educational outcome.

Thus, by utilizing the holistic humanistic perspective of person characteristics and environmental contexts into the analysis of high school students' academic behaviors and subsequent achievement, (3) this study introduces a comprehensive and integrative model of analyzing high school students' academic achievement through the integration of three theories; the bioecological paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; 2005), sociocognitive theory of personal agency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). (4) It initiates the process of a new direction in the tinkering with inner city high school students' learning and academic achievement as a bidirectional interaction between the student and her or his complex environment. (5) Finally, the study contributes to a better understanding of inner city minority and low SES students' individual and collective understanding of learning, academic achievement and the achievement gap through its qualitative nature and provides school policy, instruction practices, and administrative

decision-making implications for students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and the general public.

Delimitations and Considerations:

Like all human endeavors, this study has its attendant delimitations that set boundaries and restrictions to its overall scope, while necessitating certain considerations. These flaws and accommodations mostly derive from its theoretical frameworks. Theoretically, the wholistic humanistic theory of human development comprises of three micro theories Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, Bronfenbrenner's (2001; 2005) bioecological paradigm, and Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theories of personal agency and self-efficacy. Although Bourdieu's and Bandura's theories are widely referenced in educational literature on students' academic performance, Bronfenbrenner's (2001; 2005) bioecological paradigm does not have such popularity among educators. However, from the review of literature for this study, Bronfenbrenner's theoretical works are widely used in research and policy development across a range of disciplines, including social work and public health.

From reviewing the literature, it was evident that successive development of Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm, first published in the 1970s, seems to have created various misconceptions of the role of the environment on human development, and much of the contemporary critiques of Bronfenbrenner's theory was based on this earliest version. To find an appropriate framework for this study and to learn more about the theory, I examined series of scientific publications produced by Bronfenbrenner and his associates within the three last decades up to a current version, which Bronfenbrenner (2001) referred to as the bioecological model of human development. Although these

efforts resulted to an appropriate framework for the aims of this study, it is evident that its complexity delimited the possibility of meeting all the criteria stipulated in the theory in a single investigation—a fact that Bronfenbrenner (1979) himself identified in his monograph. Even though the four key elements of the theory—Process, Person, Context, and Time (PPCT) are represented in this study, the scope and purpose of the current study necessitated the restriction of context and time to school context (See context in chapter three) and to the duration vis-à-vis consistency and inconsistency of programs, policies, and procedures within the setting of the study.

Limitations:

As an ethnographic case study, this investigation has the accompanying limitation of a lack of generalizability due to its subjectiveness. Nevertheless, I view this limitation as deriving more by choice than from methodological flaws. I do recognize that scientific scholars position their claims as "generalizable" actions. However, I undertake such scientism as that, which is self-contradictory (Butler, 2000) and as such, a mere obsession that is not especially helpful in the everyday world of the classroom with its constant encounters with the novel, the unexpected, and the particular (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). Instead, I vie for credibility, which is produced by the researcher; rather than discovered through the researcher (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996). Grounded on the belief that human beings are agentic organisms whose reciprocal interaction with their context, person dispositions or characteristics over a given time period produces unique human behavior that facilitates or disrupts development, this study assumes that the findings derived from it are unique to the participants. However, findings of this study could provide insight about the phenomenon of interest in settings and individuals that emic the

same characteristics as those of the participants. Because of my subjectivity and positionality to this study, consumers of the information that will be published from this study will have to be cognizant of my situatedness (See chapter II) and filter through the information bearing in mind that each of us interacts with situations from a frame of reference. However, I do not think that these limitations will hinder the understanding of the phenomenon as my participants experience and interact with it. Consequently, I do not envisage that this study will completely demystify the puzzle of the achievement gap for everybody and in every situation, nor will it completely fill the gap in literature for the need of a comprehensive theoretical model that provides unified information on how the individual and her/his environment function as a unit in shaping individual student's academic outcome.

Organization of Text:

In chapter one, I presented the introduction to this study, outlining the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. In chapter II, I discussed the epistemic and ontologic presumptions that I brought to this work, explicating my positionality and subjectiveness. In chapter III, I presented the literature review focusing on the history of American public education, the achievement gap, and theories that explain the gap. Chapter IV deals the theoretical framework that guides the study including an explanation for the need for an integrated framework, the varied components of the wholistic humanistic framework and how they interact to explain the puzzle of the achievement. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study and the need for an integrated theory in evaluating high school students' learning and academic outcome. Within chapter V, I focus on the study's

methodological framework, delineating the underlying epistemic and ontologic assumptions, methods of data collection, and data analysis. I specifically discussed the research approach I utilized to explore the interaction between student and context creating academic behaviors and school culture and the role of this interaction in reproducing the status quo of minority and low SES students' academic failure. In chapter VI, I present a thick description of the research setting and participants. Focusing on students' and faculty interviews, focus group and class discussions, all observational field notes, school documents on policies, processes and procedures and researcher's journals and diaries, Section one, chapters VII through XI, centers on the analysis, findings and interpretations that are primarily related to the first research question.

Specifically, chapter VII focuses on students' definition and/or description of school and schooling. Chapter VIII presents students' explanation of academic achievement. Chapter IX discusses students' view of school policies and practices, their assessment of the implications of school policies, practices, and procedures for student learning and academic achievement, as well as the policies and practices' relationship to students' understanding and interpretation of the meaning and purpose of school and schooling, while chapter X focuses on faculty and staff perception of the policies and practice along with their implications for student academic behaviors and academic achievement, and chapter XI explains students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling and the mechanisms that undergird their sensemaking of school and schooling.

Drawing upon the entire data corpus; students' and faculty interviews, focus group and class discussions, all observational field notes, school documents on policies,

processes and procedures and researcher's journals and diaries, section two discusses the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures along with the role of this interaction in the navigation, deployment, and performance of student learning, academic achievement and educational outcome. While chapter XII presents the school culture, chapter XIII discuses student academic behaviors, chapter, and chapter XIV provides the discussion, implications, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter II

Positionality and Subjectivity Statement

Throughout this text, I acknowledge my "role in the making and remaking of social sciences as we know it today" (Morgan, 1983, p. 376) and I endeavor to explicitly bring to bare the assumptions I bring to this project. As a researcher, I position myself as a subject who is always negotiating, constructing, and reconstructing my multiple, and intersecting social locations (Fine, 1994, Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). I challenge the objective and formalist's notion of reality and in such challenging; locate my positionality and practice of reflexivity (Watt, 2007; Noblit ea al., 2004) as critical to the research process (Hytten, 2004; Murillo, 1999; Pillow, 2003).

I also assume, like postcritical ethnographers Noblit et Al. (2004) that I "exist within a critical discourse that in part makes" me "responsible for the world" I am producing when I describe, interpret, and critique social phenomena of interest (p. 24). Consequently, throughout this work, I turned back on myself, acknowledging the personal, social, and political dimensions of my positionality and the intersectionality of my own identities (Crenshaw, 1991) as researcher, researched, and audience of my work.

As Noblit et al., (2004) posit, "No one is a blank slate, especially researchers" (p. 24), hence my subjectivities about school, schooling, and academic achievement remain with me as I waddle through the literature, choose research topics and methods, collect data, and analyze, interpret, and present my findings. Similarly, my histories, privileges,

political and moral commitments converge to shape this work. In this chapter, I attend to these identities and intersectionalities as I accept the consequences of my representations (Hall, 1997; Murillo, 1999). I feel it is important to share these prior to presenting the literature, methods, and findings of this project. Hence, I share some of the ways in which I come to this project and the educational philosophies that shape this work.

Chapter Overview

I begin this chapter by explicitly presenting the professional commitments and personal beliefs that motivated me to pursue this work followed by the philosophical assumptions that I brought to this study. Through these, I intend to clarify my role within the research process as well as share how I engaged in recursive reflexivity.

Personal Commitments and Musings

Since my childhood, I have always marveled at the paradoxes of life: the incongruence in human behavior, the imbalance in the distribution of wealth, greed, poverty, misery, injustice; and as I mature into adulthood, these musings extended into achievement motivation, the effects as well as implications of social policies on marginalized groups, and the meaning of life. I believe my interest in these phenomena originates from my humble beginning. Born into a patrilineal culture where every family live in their paternal home, on their family land and has many lands and cash crops that generate income for them, my family lived on a borrowed land in my maternal home and sharecropped for subsistence. However, my parents' combined efforts and hard work put our family ahead of many of our neighbors who were naturally predisposed to be economically better off than us because of their family endowments. Schooled in the importance of education, hard work, self-efficacy, and resilience in becoming successful

in life, I created my maxim, "Your only tool for success is you," early in life and it has been my guiding light through life. Nonetheless, as baffled as I was, at the time, about the level of poverty and need in our community and the indolence of majority of the poor people, I was more surprised at the selfishness of the rich and angry at the ineffectiveness and negligence of the government in doing nothing to alleviate the poverty and suffering of the underprivileged citizens, a concern that led me into becoming a teacher.

With undergraduate degrees in humanities and education K-12, a graduate degrees in educational administration and education specialist with cognate in curriculum and instruction, and a good number of years of experience in parochial and public schools as principal, bursar and classroom teacher, I consider myself as certified, professionally prepared, and knowledgeable in matters of student learning, pedagogy, and school leadership theories and practices that engender learning and achievement. By professional standards, I have the credentials and training to understand the relationship between effective pedagogy, school leadership, and student discipline[7] in the learning process, as well as to recognize the effective integration of these essential achievement springboards in any school. In my current role as classroom teacher in an inner city high school, I often struggle with the desire to fix and render efficacious (Foucault, 1995) anybody who compromises any of these achievement correlates, be it students, teachers, and/or administrators.

As a first generation college graduate and Ph.D recipient, as well as a teacher of African origin in American high school classroom, I believe that learning and academic achievement (intelligence) is neither hampered by race and family background nor by

[7] Discipline in this context refers to person characters of responsibility, industry, drive, perseverance, resilience, and optimism.

social economic status. Instead, the stigma of marginality and need motivates the marginalized and disenfranchised to seek social and economic elevation through self-discipline, responsibility, zeal, and industry. Thus, as I engage in this research, I question those totalizing ideologies that work to situate academic achievement as contingent upon race, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status.

I also contend against those scholars and philosophers who represent academic achievement as fixed realities dependent on factors external to students such as teacher quality, finance, peer pressure, and parental involvement. I do not discount these factors as important in fostering student achievement; however, I suggest that these will amount to nothing without individual student's willful development of the generative dispositions necessary for surmounting the challenges of learning and academic achievement. I position minority and low SES inner city high students as "liminal individuals who are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). As liminal individuals, they are the frontiersmen who in concert with the "other," social and political environments, reproduce their liminality. With Turner (1969), I concede that being liminals, minority and low SES inner city high school students can overcome dehumanizing and disabling environmental influences that strangle them through person characteristics.

Similarly, while I do not deny the impact of socioeconomic status on student readiness for academic learning and achievement, I do propose that student learning and academic outcome is always lived and performed through the self and others, social and academic environments. I do not argue for the elimination of teacher and school accountability for student learning. Rather, I suggest that instead of school improvement

agendas that promote a narrow view of school effectiveness as on-time graduation of students; otherwise, pushing out students (Fine, 1991); learning and academic achievement as social promotion and given grades, and effective pedagogy as teacher ability to regurgitate prescribed curriculum, enforce counterintuitive policies and rules, as well as move student on without educating them (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010); school reform policies should include holding students accountable for their own learning through the elimination of learning and academic achievement disabling policies and procedures. I contend that inner city schools should commit to critical and integral humanistic education, a kind of education that promotes human development, well-being, and dignity of all students through humanizing curriculum, pedagogy, and policies that liberate students from the shackles of ignorance, caprice, prejudice, alienation, and false-consciousness, as well as, empower them to actualize their human potentials and lead autonomous, full, and fulfilling human lives (Butler, 2000; Aloni, 1999).

It is from this committed and troubled place that I undertake this study. First, commitment to the socially and economically disenfranchised and marginalized individuals who, education should not only be a means of social and economic elevation, but also a process of self-emancipation from the acceptance of their situations as irreparable (Freire, 1985; Hook, 1994). Second, commitment to human beings as autonomous and rational organisms who by virtue of being endowed with freedom of will, rational thinking, moral conscience, imaginative and creative powers deserve respect, equity, reciprocity, solidarity, and a political order of pluralistic, just, and humane democracy (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1948). Hence, with Adler Mortimer (1982), I assert that all children have the democratic right to equal educational

opportunity, “the opportunity to become educated human beings” (p. 83), as well as equal access to those opportunities.

Finally, a commitment to assist all individuals to realize and perfect their potentials through an education that empowers then toward critical consciousness and assertive viewpoints; a kind of education that would allow them to utilize their human natural inclination to self-regulated development, spontaneous exercise of personal agency, personal authenticity, and responsible citizenship (Dewey, 1911; Alder, 1982; Maslow, 1954) to alter environmental conditions that subtly incapacitate them and reproduce their marginality. From these commitments, I recognize anew that, although born poor and economically disenfranchised, I have never been socially marginalized or singled out as underperforming and so needs to be fixed. Instead, I take up my many social identities laced with privileges. Thus, as a researcher and a teacher of minority and low SES students, I am learning daily to continually reflect on how I manage, contest, and make relevant my identities vis-à-vis the identities, the behaviors and the selves of others.

Certainly my positionality does not stand still and is indeed subject to critique, as I continue to search for the why and how minority and low SES inner city high school students have become so complaisant with mediocrity, dehumanizing practices, and academic failure. With Butler (2000) I proclaim that I do not remain the same and neither does my cognitive categories as I enter into knowing encounters with this space. Both the space and I is undone and redone by the act of knowledge. I consistently question my role in the making of minority and economically disenfranchised inner city high school students’ academic self as I engage in recursive reflection on how my words and actions

as researcher and teacher serve to reify potentially oppressive and dehumanizing practices within inner city schools. Situated in the hope that this study serves to question taken-for-granted representations that function to spectacularize, essentialize, and pathologize inner city schools, students, and teacher, I carefully present my students and my colleagues' stories as I heard, observed, experienced, and lived it with them for the past nine years.

Epistemic and Ontologic Presuppositions

Throughout this study, I undertake the role of a critical and integral humanist. Hence, I see education as a process of liberating individuals from the "fetter of ignorance, caprice, prejudice, alienation, and false consciousness in the one hand; and a process of empowering individuals to actualize their human potentials in order to lead autonomous, full, and fulfilling human lives, in the other (Aloni, 1999). This presupposition derives from my epistemic and ontological view of humans as organism endowed with reason, whose supreme dignity is in the intellect; and as free individuals in personal relation with a Supreme Being, whose ultimate righteousness consists in voluntarily obeying the law of God. Drawing from Saint Thomas Aquinas, I believe that human beings comprise of body and soul and, therefore, are persons, who hold themselves in their hands by their intelligence and their will. They do not exist merely as physical beings. Rather, there is in each individual richer and nobler existence. Hence, each human being is, in some way, a whole, and not merely a part; s/he is a universe unto her/himself, a microcosm in which the great universe can be encompassed through knowledge (Huitt, 2000).

Consequently, I see education as a process that moves students to a critical perception of the self and the world, which enables them to "get a comprehension of total reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 18). Hence, the primary aim of school is to develop in students

epistemological curiosity (Freire, 1998). That is, curiosity or drive for a complete knowledge about the object of knowledge as well as the willingness, openness, and discipline to engage in the search for and creation of knowledge. Drawing from Freire (2000), I argue that when students lack the necessary epistemological curiosity and conviviality with the object of knowledge, it is difficult to create conditions that increase their epistemological curiosity in order to develop the necessary intellectual tools that will enable them to apprehend and comprehend the object of knowledge. Stated differently, when grade become the object of knowledge, students loose the drive to learn new ideas, eliminate information gap, and solve intellectual problems. This in turn leads to a lack of the development of the necessary intellectual tools that would enable them to apprehend and comprehend information in order to acquire and'/or create knowledge.

I question the notion of grade as a symbol of academic achievement and contend that academic achievement is a learner's ability to transform his or her lived experiences into knowledge, as well as his or her ability to use the already acquired knowledge as a medium for unveiling new knowledge that will enable him or her to transform his or her life and world. Correspondingly, school effectiveness becomes the ability of the educational institute to develop and sustain in each learner the epistemological curiosity needed to become life-long learners who critically analyze, evaluate, and consistently indulge in the processes of self and societal transformation. Seen in this manner, academic success becomes relative to individual, group, and societal needs.

This becomes important because education is inherently directive and must always be transformative (Gutek, 2005). Through education, learners come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they

find themselves and, often, take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them the opportunity of participation. Education is in its real sense is a subversive force (Freire, 2000). Consequently, there is no such thing as neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the learner into an existing system and bring about conformity within the system, or it becomes "a practice of freedom" the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 2000, p. 34). However, poverty creates in the disposed a culture of silence, ignorance and lethargy. Rather than being equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, victims of social and political domination become submerged in a situation in which such critical awareness and response are practically impossible (Freire, 1985; 1998). Thus, instead of the educational system becoming the major instrument for the maintenance of this culture of silence and mediocrity (Freire, 2000), schools should be instruments of liberation and transformation guiding each student to the development of the skills, attitude, and discipline needed for critical and reflective thinking on how to improve his or herself as well as his or her world.

Maintaining Reflexivity

With both the researcher and the researched seen as active producers of knowledge, throughout this study, I engaged in recursive reflexivity and maintained a stance that resulted in consistently "exploring and illustrating rhetorical constructions through analyzing one's own analysis" and emerging interpretations (Potter & Whetherell, 1984, p. 184). I worked to decenter "my unreflexive self," with the hopes of creating, as Richardson (1997) stated, "a position for experiencing the self as a

sociological knower/constructor" (p. 193). As I navigated through these uncomfortable realities, I adapted to my writing as a means of inquiry (Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2000), enabling my audience to consider the way in which I constantly worked on my own beliefs and assumptions. This recursive reflexivity layered my understanding of data and the theories, which informed my data collection and analysis process.

Throughout this study, I kept a research journal and analytic memos, chronicling my struggles with, and at times, against my own assumptions regarding the meanings and performances of academic achievement. Through this journaling and memoing, I critically reflected upon my research decisions and routinely documented my analytic and theoretical ideas as they emerged in the research process. I often shared my doubts and emotional conflicts with one of my mentors and a colleague engaged in similar methodological work to review how I am dealing with these conflicts and proffer their own insights on the subject. As I spent time engaging in reflexively writing about my questions, hunches, doubts, concerns, initial interpretations, and representation of work, there were times when I felt alienated and distanced from the study; however, in these moments of alienation I garnered new and surprising insights. For instance, I came to this work believing naively that hardship and the stigma of poverty is enough to engender minority and low SES teenagers' activation of their personal agency and sense of purpose in the performance of school and academic achievement; however, as the research process progressed, I found out that my understanding of school, schooling and the utilization of self-systems in performing school in the United States is simplistic and monolithic. As, I continued in the research process, I found these understanding to be complicated, layered, and still unfolding. Nevertheless, I attribute these shifts in

understanding to my positionality, which became more manifest as I engaged in reflexive research.

Chapter III

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a documentation of the literature on student learning, academic achievement and the achievement gap. Specifically, this chapter dwells on the findings from the literature on the history, purposes, and reformations of the American public education system, the current state of American high school students' academic performance and various attempts at explaining the persistent academic failure of minority and low SES students. The chapter ends with the research questions.

History, Purposes, and Reformations of the American Public School System

Americans have always valued education; however, their reasons for supporting the education of the masses continue to shift over time (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005; Vinovskis, 1999; Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011). In the colonial America, the Puritans promoted literacy for the reading of the Bible and preparation for salvation, and for the understanding of the principles of religion and the law of the commonwealth (Cohen, 1974; Kaestle, 1983; Ornstein, 1984). During this era, elementary education was established and funded through parental initiative and informal local control of institutions (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011). Although some colonies, such as New England mandated parents to educate their children and towns to provide schools, the laws were not strongly enforced. Overall, the central colonial government played little or no role in

the education of the citizens; rather towns, neighborhoods, and even families provided and funded schools through diverse means. School attendance was not mandatory and parents usually paid for the education of their children (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011). Implicitly, only the children of elite whites and those who can afford the charges for school received some kind of formal education in reading, writing, and arithmetic (the three R's), while poor whites and the enslaved minorities of the era were left behind. However, families remained solely responsible for the formal and informal education of their children (Cremin, 1970).

With the founding of the Republic, the emphasis on education shifted to the production of a literate and intelligent electorate, the reconciliation of freedom and order, the stabilization of virtue (discipline, sacrifice, simplicity, and intelligence), liberty and government, and the provision of, "an acquaintance with ethics and the general principles of law, commerce, money, and government that is necessary for the yeomanry of a republican state" (Noah Webster, 1790, quoted in Kaestle, 1983, p. 5). Ironically, majority of Americans at this time were not landed yeomen, and thus were lacking in the supposedly "natural virtues" needed for the type of good citizenship envisioned for the republic.

Hence, it became the incumbent duty of both formal and informal educators (teachers, ministers, and parents) to help in creating a virtuous citizenry; nevertheless, the acquisition of virtues and intelligence was only validated through landed yeomanry and not through deliberate instruction on the virtues of republicanism (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011). The increasing number of landless citizens made it difficult to assume the natural virtue of the newcomers and non-yeomen; and necessitated the need for a formal system

of inculcating the intelligence needed to be a republican in these citizens. To meet this need, the founding fathers looked to formalized education of the citizenry through state organized and founded schools (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011).

Even though the federalists and the democratic-republicans of this era had dissenting ideas of the purposes of education in the new republic, overall, the American common schools of the 18th century were instituted to mold the citizenry into the new form of republican government, and to instill in a select few the statesmanship needed to run the republic, but not to end economic disparity among citizens (Kaestle, 1983, Spring, 2010). Although unanimous in emphasizing citizenship and moral training as the major role of education in the republic, obvious contradictions abounded in the republican educational theorists' conceptions of the role of education in the 18th century American society (Bankston & Caldas, 2009; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Whereas the Democratic-Republicans' ideal of public education focused on the production of a nation of yeoman famers with sufficient literacy to maintain their own affairs, the Federalists' vision of a free public school focused on shaping the moral development of citizens in ways that are consistent with their different visions of America as the biblical Promised Land (Bankston & Caldas, 2009). The conflict between the Federalists' and the Democratic Republicans' vision for the common schools and the lack of funding for the schools intensified in the 19th and 20th century when American society became diverse and multifaceted with each group vying for different meaning and purpose of education and schooling (Bankston & Caldas, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). As Kaestle (1983) stated, "This conviction that there is a chasm in education prompted some

prominent men in the early national period to argue for state laws requiring free local schools or even to argue for systemic state aid to common schools" (p. 8).

Although the common schools flourished in the 18th and early 19th century, there were flagrant differences in funding, organization, students' enrollment and teacher quality between urban and rural schools; and black and white schools. Whereas the children of the rich attended independent pay schools and boarding schools where the quality of education was higher or received instruction from hired private tutors, the children of the middle class attended the common pay schools or dame schools, and the children of the poor whose families could neither afford the common school nor dame school and indentured servants received some form of elementary schooling through apprenticeship or through church sponsored charity schools (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011).

As far back as 1791, the *New York Daily Advertiser* advocated increased charity schooling, arguing that the situation of many American poor children "exposes them to innumerable temptations to become not only useless, but hurtful members of the community." The condition of the American poor of this era was hopeless. Poverty, crime, and economic instability increased in the large cities and constituted constant worries for the then middle class. The overcrowding of newly established almshouses, the incipient slums, and the deteriorating sanitary conditions and other social problems necessitated the call for social reform that focused on education as the only solution to the compounding problems of the poor (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011).

Consequently, late 18th and early 19th century American society witnessed a reformation in universal education that focused solely on the reduction of crimes and

social disruption instead of the intellectual growth and personal advancement of the poor (Kaestle, 1983). The American charity schooling, which championed the education of the poor at this time, was not designed to implement equality of opportunity between the poor and the rich; rather economic mobility was "incidental to the educational goals of those philanthropists and public officials who advocated for the poor (Kaestle, 1938).

African Americans and Education in the Antebellum American Society

Between 1770, when the Quakers opened the first boys Negro school in Philadelphia, and in 1810, freed blacks' schools opened in other cities through the generosity of both the Quakers and other white philanthropists with the hoped that early attention to the morals of the newly freed slaves would keep them from "vicious courses and qualify them for usefulness in life" (Kaestle, 1983, p. 38). Nevertheless, free blacks of this era were not entirely dependent on the whites for charity schooling. According to Kaestle (1983), a number of the parents of Boston African School paid weekly tuition. Similarly, a report from New York in the 1820s estimated 100 black students in private schools in addition to the 620 enrolled in African Free Schools.

Commenting on the success of the Negro schools of this era, Kaestle (1983) posited, "Yet, the African Free Schools in the large cities substantially increased in elementary schooling for black children. They helped to demonstrate to some whites the fallacy of the widespread belief in the Negro inferiority" (p. 38). Implicitly, there was no learning gap between the freed African American children who were in school and their poor white counterparts in the same type of schools—charity schools. If there were academic achievement gap at this time, it was between the rich, the middle class and the poor, and not between whites and blacks.

Kaestle (1983) lamented this divisive gap between the rich and the poor perpetrated through the school structure in the mid-eighth century. According to him, "although the intellectual rudiments and moral slogans were virtually the same in charity and pay schools, there was a fundamental difference in the cultural process going on in the charity schools, on the one hand, and artisan and elite pay schools, on the other" (p. 55). Similarly, the differences between the rural and urban schools was also very glaring. While rural district schools flourished on local taxes, state school funds, and tuition charges from parents, urban school districts relied heavily on independent pay and specialized schools for the education of the children of the elite and middle class; and on charitable schooling and city grants for the education of its poor and underprivileged citizens (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011). These differences existed in the nations schools until the mid-nineteenth century when urban educational leaders consolidated the various charity schools into free public school system (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 2011). However, the story was not the same in the southern states where the schools remained segregated until the 20th century.

African Americans and Education in the Postbellum South

From the postbellum south, chronicles of early African Americans' experiences with formal education were replete with success stories of parental support and pupils' enthusiasm, internal motivation, and academic progress. Diaries, letters, memoirs, biographical and autobiographical accounts of the freed people's encounter with formal education through their northern missionary educators detailed the ardor with which African Americans embraced education and schooling as their only way out of ignorance

and poverty, as well as the only means of sustaining their delicate freedom. As Williams (2003) noted,

> As they attempted to take control of their lives, many freedpeople wanted one thing more than all others: to learn to read and write, the very act of learning to read had been a secret form of resistance, but in the aftermath, freedpeople transformed the act of becoming literate into one of life's necessities. . . . Realizing that their success as free people in a literate society would be severely limited by literacy, many newly freed African Americans latched on to the spelling book as a symbol and tool of liberation (p. 372-373).

According to Williams (2003), the newly freed slaves, like their poor white counterparts, understood and fully believed that literacy and freedom hold the key to "democratic political activities," which in turn "held a promise of enabling them to help shape the civil society in which they had hitherto been considered chattel; insurgent chattel" (p. 373). The emancipated African Americans sought to enter the free world distinct from their owners and realizing that only education could give them the opportunity to do so, they immersed themselves into achieving this dream—the American dream of better life and of success in their new world (Williams, 2002; 2003; Anderson, 1988; Span, 2002).

Notwithstanding the militating factors against these freed men and women, they persistently struggled to get educated. According to the northern missionary negro teachers, Negro schools' visitors, and Freedman Bureau administrators, the freed people had to fight against excruciating poverty, intractable hostility, insufficient educational materials, uninsulated homes and schoolhouses, fatal illnesses, and constant conflict with self-confidence and ambition that were consistently challenged by the historical

perception of African Americans as degraded and intellectually deficient. Nevertheless, they flocked to the schoolhouses from all directions; nothing could deter them from getting educated (Forten, 1846-67; Evellet, 1864-68; Jocelyn, 1864-165; Towne, 1864-67; Johnson, 1863). Similarly, chronicles of the encounter between Negro parents and the missionary teachers are filled with the formers' direct connection of schooling to upward mobility, their appreciation of education and the northern missionaries who brought education to them, and their willing sacrifices toward their children's education (Forten, 1953; Evellet, 1864-68; Jocelyn, 1864-165; Towne, 1875; Johnson, 1863).

Responding to their parents' enthusiasm and appreciation of schooling, the freedmen children fervently pursued schooling despite the obvious limitation of poverty. They trekked long distances in the sun, rain, and cold; hungry and barely clothed (Forten, 1953; Evellet, 1864-68; Jocelyn, 1864-165; Towne, 1875; Johnson, 1863; Alvord, 1866; Beales, 1866). One of the employees of the American Missionary Association working in Beaufort, South Carolina in November 1866 depicted the situation so well in his application to the society for books and for more teachers. He wrote, "All around us the Freedmen are struggling hard against poverty, some against actual starvation, yet they beg harder for school than for food or clothing" (Beales, 1866, p. 4).

This determination, persistence, academic progress, and unflinching belief in education as the only way out of poverty were evident in the numerous reports on the academic progress of the Freedmen sent to the Department of War, Refugees, and Finance from various sections of the south. Each of these reports emphasized the intelligence of these group of people formerly considered as intellectually deficient and subhuman beings desensitized by slavery. As some of the teachers candidly

acknowledged, “these children appreciate their past deprivations, and present advantages, and mean to make the most of it” (Parson, 1867, p. 187). Many of the teachers “were admittedly shocked at how quickly the children learned, not only because it undermined the notion of racial inferiority, but also because it challenged the idea that slavery had degraded African Americans into a sort of benumbed mass” (Williams, 2003, p. 378).

In her description of the eighty-multiage African American students she taught in Helton Head, South Carolina, Kellog (1863) noted, the students “differ, like others in mental capacity, but when their degradation is remembered, their success seems almost wonderful, and as a people, they are much more intelligent than I supposed” (p. 64). These and other stories of African American children’s past and present academic success in school evoke the question: What happened to the African American inner drive, persistence, belief in education as the great equalizer, and academic progress of the post-slavery south?

Education Reforms of the 20th and 21st Century American Public Schools

The 20th century was notable for its multifarious education reform agendas, beginning with the mid 1900s’desegregation of schools. Describing the intensity of the tumult in American public school during this era, Diane Ravitch (2010) noted,

> No one who lived in that time will forget the proliferation of experiments and movements in the nation’s schools. Reformers differed mainly in terms of how radical their proposals were. The reforms of the era were proffered with the best intentions; some stemmed from the desire to advance racial equity in the classroom and to broaden the curriculum to respect the cultural diversity of the population. Others were intended to liberate students from burdensome

requirements. Still others proceeded in the spirit of A. S. Neill's *Summerhill*,[8] where any form of adult authority was strictly forbidden (p. 23).

Imperatively, American public schools of this era became ideological laboratories, with students, especially the poor and marginalized, as guinea pigs and teachers categorized as either pawns, intransigent, or outrightly stupid. In the midst of this chaotic, purposeless and visionless atmosphere within the schools, *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR) with a list of what was wrong with the American high schools and how they could be fixed was born.

Scholars describe *A Nation at Risk* (1983) as the longest education reform effort in the history of American public education (Ravitch, 2010; Vinovskis, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gaddis & Lauen, 2012). Published three decades ago, *A Nation at Risk* still has considerable strength as most of its findings still resonate in the 21st century. The report introduced three major changes into educational reform. First, it shifted attention from school funding to student achievement. Second, it strengthened the waning expectations that all children can and should be able to reach high academic standards, and finally, it motivated national and state policymakers to set educational goals and hold educators and policymakers accountable for achieving the goals (Gardner et al., 1983; Ravitch, 2010; Vinovskis, 2008). However, it did not emphasize student accountability for their learning.

The passing of the 2001 "No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act" at the wake of the 21st century ushered in the age of accountability, high-stakes testing, data-driven decision making, choice, charter schools, privatization, deregulation, merit pay, and competition

[8] **Summerhill**, a school opened in 1922 by Alexander Sutherland Neil (A. S. Neil) to test his philosophy of free school. A. S Neil believed that children have the right to choose freely what they want to do with their lives. For him, "Freedom in a school is simply doing what you like so long as you do not spoil the peace of others'" (Saffange, 2000). His philosophy of education became a model of democratic progressive education around the world during the 1960s.

among schools (Ravitch, 2010; Gaddis & Lauen, 2012; Ladd, 2012; Hanushek & Raymond, 2004). Consequently, NCLB became the landmark federal legislation on accountability and the first of its kind in the history of American educational reforms to institute punitive measures against schools for students' academic failure (Ravitch, 2010; Gaddis & Lauen, 2012; Ladd, 2012; Hanushek & Raymond, 2004). However, it narrowly defined academic achievement as standardized test scores and graduation rates, thus overlooking academic excellence, which according to *A Nation at Risk*, is the major problem with American high school education. At the adoption of NCLB, the Republican senator, John Boehner of Ohio called it his "proudest achievement," while Democratic senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts described it as "a defining issue about the future of our nation and about the future of democracy, the future of liberty, and the future of the United States in leading the free world" (Hess & Petrilli, 2004, p. 14).

Congruent with prior educational reform legislations, NCLB blames the ever-increasing social ills and the supposedly widening educational, social and economic gap between the rich and the poor on schools (Ravitch, 2010; Gaddis & Lauen, 2012; Ladd, 2012). However, unlike its precedents, NCLB demands a time line for achieving 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2014 from states and threatens to close or privatize schools and fire teachers and administrator who do not met the goal of 100% proficiency as measured through high stakes testing, graduation rate, and eligibility for life scholarship (Vinovskis, 2008; Ravitch, 2010; Gaddis & Lauen, 2012). This punitive aspect of NBCL continues to generate much controversy among scholars as it becomes evident day-by-day that this is an impossible task for public schools to accomplish.

Currently, the creation of uniform national standards, the Common Core States Standards (CCSS), and its adoption by majority of the states restores hope in America's promise to provide equitable education for all its citizens (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, uniform standards alone cannot engender in students the cognitive, affective, and conative skills needed for success in the 21st century, nor can it grant them a fair chance and tools for "developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost" (Gardner et al., 1983, p. 11) as promised by the nation. Additionally, uniform standards without, rigor[9], relevance, and the building of the personal characteristics needed to pursue and achieve academic excellence[10] is like a giant standing on mosquito legs, a house without a foundation and will undoubtedly revert to the status quo without preparing the children for survival in the global competition.

The State of American High School Students Academic Performance

Undeviatingly, studies both past and present expose progressive deterioration in U.S. students' performance in domestic and international test of critical reading and writing; mathematics, science, problem solving, and logical reasoning; and often blame the lack of progress on the telling inequality within American schools (Darling-

[9] **Rigor**, as consistently used in this document, refers to the level of difficult and the way in which students apply their knowledge through high-order-thinking skills. Rigor also implies the reaching for a higher level of quality in both effort and outcome. Hence, a rigorous curriculum refers to an inclusive set of intentionally aligned components that has clear learning outcomes with matching assessments, engaging learning experiences, and instructional strategies that are organized into sequenced units of study. A rigorous curriculum serves as both the detailed road map and the high quality delivery system for ensuring that all students achieve the desired goal—the attainment of their designated grade and/or course specific standards or what students need to know and be able to do within a particular content area.

[10] In this document, **academic excellence** refers to students' ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate knowledge. Specifically, it means ones ability to transfer and apply knowledge garnered from specific context to new contexts and a variety of ever-changing situations that were not foreseen at the time of the learning. This definition is in keeping with the purpose of schooling purported by A Nation at Risk, "*knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence.*" Academic excellence encompasses habits of the mind or what I refer to in this dissertation as personal characteristics such as critical thinking, personal agency and disposition, self-discipline, and self-regulation and ability to sustain rigor as defined in this document.

Hammond, 2010; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007; Stage, 2005; NCES, 2012; Ravitch, 2010). Recent statistics show Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans students lagging behind their White and Asian peers in SAT and other college and career readiness assessments (NCES, 2012). Similarly, reports on the state of American high school students in the 21st century portray persistent academic achievement gap and differential dropout rate between black and white students from the early 1970s to date (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005; Barton & Coley, 2008; 2010; Gaddis & Lauen, 2012). Although these reports show a consistent reduction in the magnitude of the gap over time, they predict a continuation of the gap into the year 2050 and posit that the skills gap between black youths and their white counterparts will remain quite significant into the 21st century (Barton & Coley, 2010; Lee, 2010).

Although the test score gap scholars agree that success and failure in standardized test as a measure of academic achievement is not easily explainable due to the interaction of many factors in producing the test result, the widening test score gap between this subgroup of students and their white and Asian counterparts is a red flag on the school system and needs immediate attention (Ravitch, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010). It calls for the evaluation of the quality of education that is being provided for minority and low SES students, who predominantly attend inner city public high schools (Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Spellings, 2007; South, Baumer, & Lutz, 2000).

Lee (2010) explained the diminishing rate of academic growth among high school students as an indicator that longer time is needed to achieve the same amount of learning gain at higher age and grade level. He attributed this to the interaction between human development and curriculum development positing that the decreasing rate of growth in

child cognitive capacity for acquiring new knowledge and skills at the older ages, as well as, the increasing difficulty and complexity of school curricula and instruction at the higher grades is a global trend of the 21st century. However, while the decreasing academic growth and dropout rate in the higher ages and grades is a likely norm in most countries and cultures, "international comparisons of math achievement implied that American students experience relatively faster deterioration of growth in middle and high school when compared with high-achieving industrial countries" (Lee, 2010, p. 825). According to him, the obvious question then becomes the search for why American adolescents lag further behind in their high school years.

Both Lee (2010) and Barton & Coley (2008) acknowledged the general deterioration of American high school students' academic skills and the conflicting conclusions on the state of American students' academic performance due to the use of limited methods and processes of evaluating what students know and are able to do. They extended the literature by calling societal attention to the changing statistics on American high school students' academic ability in comparison to other industrialized nations and by questioning the polarized effects of social and educational reform policies on high school students' academic outcome; a comparison first made by *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and more recently by Darling-Hammond (2010) and Ravitch (2010). Lee (2010) and Barton & Corley (2008; 2010) recommended a continuation of the search for why American high school students' academic ability stagnates in high school through the use of an integrated framework that provides a comprehensive analysis of high school students' learning and academic performance.

Theories Explaining the Causes of the Academic Achievement Gap Between Minority and Low Socioeconomics (SES) Students' and White and Asian Students

Historical account of the achievement gap traces its roots to various factors including legitimized inequality (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), lack of cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983; 1998), deferential linguistic pattern and code (Bernstein, 1973; Heath, 1983), racial isolation (Coleman et al, 1966; Ogbu, 1978; Hanushek & Raymond, 2005; Card & Rothstein, 2007), family functioning (Coleman et al, 1966; Mandara & Murray, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Conger & Conger, 2002; Mandara, 2003; 2006), and peer group and peer pressure (Coleman, 1959; 1961; 1977; Ennett & Bauman, 1994; Kandel, 1978; Urberg et al., 1997; Ungar, 2000; Ryan, 2001). While unique in their respective theories, each of these groups of scholars explains minority and low SES students' academic behavior as a reaction to external stimuli. They connect students' academic performance and lack of performance to forces outside the student, thus blaming societal institutions for the academic failure of minority and low SES students. For the scope and purpose of this study, I will categorize these theories into three taxonomies: Social reproduction theories, cultural ecological theories, and peer pressure theories.

Social Reproduction Theories

Social reproduction theorists assert that school reinforces inequality instead of leveling it. They argue that minority and economically underprivileged students fail academically because the structure of American schools is set to promote the American capitalistic economy through the reproduction of inequalities. Hence school intentionally fails minority and low SES students academically so that they will willingly remain in

their low class status and continue to provide the skilled labor needed to maintain a capitalist society. These theorists contend that the American educational system engages in class reproduction through systemic structuring of schools to produce a reserve of skilled labor by legitimating the technocratic-meritocratic perspective, reinforcing the fragmentation of groups of workers into stratified status groups, and socializing minority and low SES youths to accept dominance and subordinancy in the economic system (Bernstein, 1973; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Heath, 1983).

According to these theorists, schools perpetuate societal inequality through tracking (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Lareau, 2003; MacLeod, 2009) and valorization of dominant groups' culture and linguistic codes (Bernstein, 1973; Bourdieu, 1977; Heath, 1983; Giroux, 1983). Accordingly, schools prepare minority and low SES students to accept the American systemic and oppressive inequality as legitimate and deserving (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Ogbu, 1978, Giroux, 1983).

Cultural Ecological Theories

Cultural ecological theorists explain minority and low SES students' academic failure as a result of the interaction between these students and the dynamics within their communities as well as broader societal and school factors (Bourdieu, 1977; Ogbu, 1974; 1978; 1981; 1994; 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1985; 1987a, 1987b; 1991; Bhachu, 1985a; Valenzuela, 1997; 1999). They posit that minority and academically underprivileged students fail academically because of their internalization of features that either marginalizes and discriminates against them, or because of their opposition to the dominant culture that devalues their own culture. Although theorists within this group offer different explanation of how minority and low SES students' environment disposes

them to academic failure, they all agree that either family culture (Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Mandara & Murray, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Conger & Conger, 2002; Mandara, 2003; 2006' Wentzel, 2002), neighborhood culture (Bourdieu, 1977; Ogbu; 1974; 1978; 1981; 1994; 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1985, 1987a, 1987b, 1991; Bhachu, 1985a), or societal culture (Ogbu, 1974, 1978, 1981, 1994, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1985, 1987a, 1987b, 1991; Bhachu, 1985a; Valenzuela, 1997; 1999) has strong impact on these group of students' academic failure.

Peer Group and Peer Pressure Theories

Scholars in this area of research identify adolescence as a social system that divests high school students of scholastic achievement and leadership of academic clubs. They posit that adolescence peer group holds down high school students' academic achievement efforts to a minimal level maintained by all and punishes those who exceed the norms through ridiculing, kidding, and exclusion from the group the group (Coleman, 1958; Ide et al., 1981; Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Ungar, 2000; Ryan, 2001; Ogbu, 2004; Noblit & Collins (1999). In their various ethnography study of African Americans and Mexican American youths academic achievement, Ogbu (2004), Suarez-Orozco (1991) Noblit & Collins, (1999), and Valenzuela (1999) consistently referenced peer pressure as a major deterrent of minority students' academic achievement. They describe this minority oppositional attitude toward academic achievement as "Acting White" and assert that minority students who defy the group by achieving academically are constantly ridiculed and ostracized. Through these punitive measures, minority youths' peer groups deter them from honors and advanced tracks.

Taken together, Bowles and Gintis (1973), Bourdieu (1977) and Giroux (1983); Bernstein (1973) and Health (1983), Ogbu (1978; 1983; 1985; 1990; 1991; 1992), Ogbu and Simmons (1998), and Valenzuela (1999), in their respective theories recognize school as a major agent in the reproduction of the systemic inequality within the American society and blame it for minority and working class students' academic failure. Each of these theories uncovers the incongruence inherent in an aspect of the social structure on which school functions and the purported assumption of school's ability to level the playing field between the rich and the poor; the minority and the mainstream (Spring, 2010; Goodlad & McMannon, 1997; Bankston & Caldas, 2009; Tyack & Cuban; 1995).

Overall, these theorists blame the imbalance in the social structure for the historic pattern of academic failure among minority and working class students and exonerate the students from all blames for their lack of achievement. Because of this, critics categorized these theories as negative, deterministic, pessimistic, reactive, and deficit (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Ceci & Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Magnusson 2005; Foley, 2004; Forster, 2004). They purport overt hopelessness for minority and the working poor in changing their status in life and fail to empower minority and low SES students to exert themselves in changing their situation through personal agency and person characteristics, innate qualities that enable individuals to struggle against and beat the current that holds them down. Although well written and convincing, these studies are also provocative, arousing the question, "why should this group of students choose achievement disabling instead of achievement enabling behaviors as their oppositional strategies?"

Individual Motivation and Academic Achievement

Alongside other explanatory theories of the differential academic achievement among students, individual motivation has featured prominently within the achievement literature. As educators continue to marvel at the roots of the differences in students' patterns of learning, engagement in learning, and the quality of their engagement in learning, many who have looked to individual motivation for answers have concluded that differences in students' engagement level on academic tasks is contingent upon the meaning or purpose for engaging in the academic behavior as construed by each student (Kaplan, Middleton, Urdan, & Midgley, 2002). McInerney and Etten (2004) noted the difficulty in motivating "students to achieve their best in our classrooms" and explained the behavior as a consequence of the "complex histories" that individual student bring to the classroom (p. 1).

On the other hand, Kytle (2004) saw the lack of motivation and engagement in learning as a result of students' refusal to accept the concept that is presented (p. xix). He contended that lack of engagement derives from lack of self-motivation. Hence, in order for a student to achieve academically, the student has to become self-motivated towards learning. This implies that, each student "has to make the concept *of the learning* hers or his; not an abstract matter learned to please someone else, to pass a test, or to earn a grade" (Kytle, 2004; p. 1; italicized words are added). Motivated students aptly engage in classroom activities. They carefully follow directions, mentally organize and rehearse learning materials, take notes to assist them while studying, reflect on their understanding and ask for help when they do not understand the material (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons 1992; In Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Conversely, unmotivated students are not as

meticulous in their learning effort. They are inattentive during lessons, unorganized, do not rehearse the learning materials, and take notes haphazardly. Moreover, these students neither monitor their level of understanding nor do they ask for help when they do not understand what is being taught. Collectively, these students' passivity during learning activities leads to their poor performance (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p.13). Although inconclusive on the reasons for students' lack of motivation or engagement in learning, these scholars assert that majority of high school students; especially disadvantaged and marginalized students are either negatively motivated towards learning or not motivated, at all, to learn.

The Humanistic Systems Theory of Human Development and Behavior

Humanistic theory of human development and behavior is a value orientation that holds a productive view of human beings and their significant capacity to be self-determining (The association for Humanistic Psychology, 2012). The humanistic stance portrays individuals as active organisms who possess the freedom to choose their behavior instead of reacting to environmental stimuli. Put succinctly, humanistic theories of development recognize the developing person's contribution to the creation of his or her own developmental history (Brandtstader, 1998; O'Hara, 2001). As an offshoot of humanistic psychology, humanistic theories of development and achievement stems from the belief that intentionality and ethical values are strong forces among other determinants of human behavior (O'Hara, 2001; 1995; Rowan, 2011). Theorists in this school of thought recognize the individual as an embodiment of mind, body, and spirit and promote the complex interaction between these three domains of the personhood[11]

[11] In this study, the term **"personhood"** refers to the quality and conditions of being an agentic individual capable of using the protective factors of person characteristics as buffers against adversity.

and other biological and environmental factors in shaping an individual's personality, maturation and achievement. Finally, humanistic theories prioritize human needs and human ability to self-organize in order to achieve set goals (Maslow, 1968; May, 1969; Bandura, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Like every other philosophical stance, the humanistic systems perspective has diversified into different models since its inception. Variants of this person-centered theory that have featured intermittently in educational journals include Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Rollo May's existentialism and phenomenology approach to humanism, and Bronfenbrenner's (2001) bioecological systems. While Maslow and May conceptualized motivation as dependent on a system of needs and assert that individuals are prone to satisfy their basic needs before attending to other needs, Bronfenbrenner (1995) idealized it a product of a complex reciprocal interaction between an individual and her/his environment.

Nevertheless, student achievement literature is replete with theoretical models that utilize aspects of humanistic theory while undermining its fundamental tenet—the complex interaction between the psychological, biological, and environmental aspects of life that enables the individual to shape and be shaped by his or her environment. Such fragmented models of humanistic view that have been used in explaining student academic achievement and the achievement gap include: the cultural ecological model of minority achievement (Ogbu, 19974, 1981; Bronfenbrenner, 1994) cultural model for voluntary and involuntary minority students' academic achievement (Ogbu, 1991), the sociocultural model (Vygotsky, 1986), and sociocoginitive theories of achievement motivation (Bandura, 1987), and sociostructural reproduction theories (Freire, 2000;

McLaren, 1994; Giroux, 1997). A unifying attribute of these theories is that each of them offers a unilateral explanation of individual development as a product of either external influences or a product of the self.

Magnusson (1995) described these earlier versions of humanistic theories as more of explanatory models that "analyze and explain why individuals function as they do in terms of their psychological and biological dispositions" (p. 20); rather than developmental models of humanistic theories of development, which foster the integration of the different explanatory models—mental, biological, and environmental systems. He lamented the fragmentation purported by these theorists and the dangerous implications they have had on empirical research on human development and functioning and social policies that emanated from these research. According to Magnusson (1995), mentalistic theorists explain individual's functioning as solely the function of the mind. They discuss and explain human functioning in terms of intrapsychic processes of perceptions, thoughts, values, goals, plans, and conflicts. The Piagetian constructivism is a variant of this model that dominated education research in the 20th century.

The biological model of human development identifies biological factors as primarily influential in individual functioning. In its extreme version, the biological model of human development implies that individual differences in the course of development have their roots in the genes with little role played by environmental and mental factors (Hunt, 1961; Cairns, 1979a). Hunt (1961) discussed and criticized this view as "predetermined development" and "fixed intelligence" (in Magnusson, 1995, p.22), while Cairns (1979a) characterized it as a "gene machine" (p. 165).

Similarly, the environmental theorists of human development locate the main causal factors for individual functioning in the environment (Gibson, 1955; Bronfenbrenner, 1774). Embedded within this theoretical model is the assumption that the environment is the sole determinant of individual outcome (Magnusson, 1995). Additionally, inherent in this view is the idea that individual differences in various aspects of the life course are a result of the differences in the upbringing environments (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983).

Elucidating further on the nature of these explanatory theories of human development, Magnusson (1995) asserts, "Nothing is wrong with each of the three general explanatory models per se. What is wrong occurs when each of them claims total supremacy, and that has been the case to an extent that has hampered real progress both in research and in application" (p. 24). He posits that each of these unilateral methods of assessing individual development and functioning have had far-reaching impact on the fundamental aspects of societies" such as "social welfare, politics, culture, education, the causes and treatment of mental illness, criminal behavior, and alcohol and drug abuse" etc. (p. 21). In other words, finding from studies conducted using theses theories have informed our reformation strategies in each of these domain. Accordingly, he hinted on the problem of with using these empirical models in analyzing school productivity, functioning and academic outcome and their implications on planning, implementation, and interpretation of educational outcomes.

Contrary to the fragmented theories of individual development and functioning, Magnusson (1995) proposed and discussed the key elements of an integrated, holistic model of individual functioning and development that would serve as an effective general

framework for evaluating, planning, implementing, and interpreting empirical research on specific aspect of individual development and functioning to include the integration of the psychological, biological, and environmental elements and the complexities of change and time. According to him, this model will emphasize the holistic character of the processes and the need for the integration of all operating factors in the theoretical models that serve as theoretical framework for planning, implementation, and interpretation of empirical research and the role of biological and environmental factors at different levels of development.

Taken together, the early variants of humanistic theory neglected the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit, which was the core argument against deterministic theories that led to the advent of the humanistic theory. In order to recapture this essence, Bronfenbrenner introduced into his already existing ecological systems model the person dimension, thus creating the bioecological systems theory of human development and behavior. Hence using Bronfenbrenner bioecological model of development, Bandura's sociocognitive theories of self-efficacy and agency, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the current study examined student learning, academic behavior, and academic achievement of minority and low SES inner city high school students. Through this paradigm, it explored inner city high school students' behaviors that enhance or impede learning and academic achievement through the following research questions:

1. How do minority and low SES high school students perceive and make sense of school and schooling?

- What mechanisms undergird their perception and sensemaking of school and schooling?

2. How does the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures impact student academic behavior, school culture, and student's academic outcome?
    - How does each of these components (person characteristics and school characteristics) influence student learning and academic outcome?

Chapter IV

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the current study. In keeping with the aim of this study—to explore minority and low SES inner city high school students' understanding of school, learning and academic achievement and the reason behind inner city minority and low SES high school students' lack of engagement and apathy toward school[12], schooling[13] and academic achievement.[14] This chapter explains the wholistic humanistic theory of human development, each of the three microtheories that constitutes the wholistic humanistic theory, how each of the theories fits into the study, and the reason for the integration of these three theories into one theory. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study and the need for an integrated theory in evaluating high school students' learning and academic outcome.

Wholistic Humanistic Perspective of Individual Development and Achievement

Background

The wholistic humanistic view of individual development and functioning focuses on the integration of the different aspects of human life—biological, psychological, and

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[12] **School** in the context of this study refers to all school processes including rules, policies, and practices and all human and symbolic authority figures through which the institutionalized rules, policies and practices are enforced.

[13] **Schooling** in this study refers to all procedures, pedagogy, and curricula through which learning is targeted, disseminated, fostered and assessed.

[14] Barton and Coley (2008) define **academic achievement** as what a student know and can do as measured by standardized test. However, in this document, academic achievement encompasses all elements of academic excellence described within this proposal.

environmental—and on the nature of the interaction between these factors, which produces human behavior (Alwin, 1994a; Magnusson & Torestad, 1993; Magnusson, 1995; Mortimer et al., 1982; 1991; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Originating from the debate over nature versus nurture, the call for a holistic view of human development and functioning has its roots in ecological and symbolic interactionism, which are derivatives of systems theory (Gibson, 1959; Sadovnik, 2007). In the late 19th century, interest in organism-environment interrelatedness began in response to the Newtonian theory of social physics; and accelerated with the emergence of Darwin's theory of evolution and the role of the environment in the adaptation and survival of species (Tudge et al., 1997; Marion 2002). However, these theoretical orientations presented a dichotomous view of the relationship between the individual and the environment (Tudge et al., 1997). It was not until the 20th century that John Dewey (1902; 1911) and his colleagues (Cooley, 1902; 1956; Mead, 1934; 1956; James, 1950), introduced the concept of reciprocal relationship between the individual and his or her environment (Dewey, 1902; Cooley, 1956; Mead, 1956). But, the concept of reciprocity[15] purported by the symbolic interactionists and the ecologists undermined the contribution of biological factors in the process of social construction of meaning. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development* shared in this reductionist view, a concern that led to his continuous modification of the theory until it evolved into the bioecological

[15] This **concept of reciprocity** was replaced by Bronfenbrenner's concept of reciprocality—A two-way nature of the bioecological model that positions the child at the center of all interacting systems so that he or she is viewed as a stimulus and a socializing agent as well as a reactive being. The child influences those who influence him and the behavior of all individuals involved with the child—including that the child is profoundly affected by other social systems in which these same persons participate in significant roles and relationships, both toward the child and each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1973). In reciprocality, the behavior of each participant affects and is affected by the behavior of the others. The concept is that of the child as a stimulus, who is not only seen as a reactive agent, but as an instigator of behavior in others (Bronfenbrenner, 1973).

theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001), the overarching theory for the current study.

Within the wholistic humanistic perspective of human development and academic achievement, the environment would serve as a source of information to the development and functioning of the individual, who, in interaction with her or his psychological and biological factors, intentionally processes environmental information at various levels of complexity. Embedded within this view of the environment is the belief of modern social learning, social cognitive, and sociocultural theorists such as Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotsky respectively. Social Learning theorists assume that learning occurs through observation (Bandura, 1989, Vygotsky, 1978). Inherent in this view is the belief that an individual's way of dealing with the external world develops in a learning process in which two types of perceived contingencies are formed based on situational outcome and behavioral outcome (Bandura, 1977; Bolles, 1971). Within these contingencies, social learning theorists purport that certain situational conditions lead to certain outcomes, while certain behavioral outcome have certain predictable consequences (Bolles, 1971).

On the other hand, sociocultural theorists believe that human activities take place in cultural setting and cannot be understood apart from these settings (Vygotsky, 1978; Bourdieu, 1977). They posit that mental structures and processes can be traced to the individual's interaction with others and that social interactions are not merely simple influences on cognitive development; rather "they actually create our cognitive structures and thinking processes" (Woolfolk, 2004, p. 45). Sociocultural theorists conceptualize development[16] as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized

[16] In addition to this, **development** in this document will include its bioecological implication as a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his or her environment.

processes (Woolfolk, 2004; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Consequently, the formation of situational and behavioral contingencies constitutes one source for the stability and continuity of individuals' functioning in relation to the environment and for the development of well-functioning mental system in the individual (Magnusson, 1995). For this reason, the wholistic humanistic framework for this study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory, Bandura's social learning and social cognitive theory, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus. However, Bourdieu's (1977) habitus is applied in this study as a derivative of the sociocultural theory because of its focus on the effect of ecological niche on individual development and academic outcome.

Guided by Systems' theory tenet of the individual as an interconnected organism who is both an active producer and a product of his or her behavior (Bertalanffy, 1959; Brandtstader, 1998), these theories in one way or the other, recognize the individual as an embodiment of mind, body, and spirit and promote the complex interaction between these three domains of the personhood and other biological and environmental factors in shaping an individual's behavior and overall outcome. They recognize the role of needs in individual motivation, but emphasize the reciprocal interaction between the human will, which equips a person with the ability to self-organize in order to achieve set goals, and the environment in determining individual motivation and achievement (Brandtstader, 1998; Huitt, 2006; O'Hara, 2001; 1995; Rowan, 2011). Correspondingly, at the core of these theories is the belief that human beings create the environments that shape the course of their development (Bandura, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). As Bronfenbrenner (2005) posited, human actions "influence the multiple physical and

cultural tiers of the ecology that shapes them, and this agency makes humans—for better or worse—active producers of their own development" (p. 6).

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development

The bioecological model is not only an expanded version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm, first introduced in the 1970s (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1977a, 1977b, 1979a, 1979b), it is also an integration of an evolving body of theory and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human being live over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Even though most of the systematic theory-building of this paradigm was done by Bronfenbrenner, his work was based on the analysis and integration of results from empirical investigations conducted over many decades by researchers from diverse disciplines (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Although the earlier version of the theory (The Ecological theory of Human Development) was highly influential in promoting considerable interest in the role of ecological systems in human development throughout the 1980s (Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino, 2002), it was criticized for undermining the characteristics of the developing person. Unfortunately, Bronfenbrenner was his own worst critic (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; 1989). He recognized earlier on that his theory of human development was incomplete without the inclusion of the different levels of individual structures and functioning (biology, psychology, and behavior) fused dynamically with the ecological systems (Lerner et al., 2002, Bronfenbrenner, 1986; 1989).

Consequently, throughout the last decade of his life, he and his colleagues, in successive stages, continued to refine and integrate other levels of developmental system

into the theory-construct that he finally referred to as “A Bioecological Paradigm of Human Development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2004; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Distinguishing Features of the Bioecological Theory

The distinguishing features of the bioecological model of human development is the “Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model,” which underscores four interrelated components for conceptualizing the integratedness of the developmental systems whose dynamic interactive relationships foster or disrupt the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues designated these four components as the developmental Processes shaped by the characteristics of the Person, and the Context over Time. Together, these four components constitute a PPCT model that function through both distal and proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1999b and Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). Appendix A presents the components of PPCT in form of nine propositions guiding the theory.

Process

Process is the core element of the bioecological model. It encompasses the *proximal processes*, which refers to particular forms of reciprocal interaction between the organism and the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The proximal processes operate over time. They are the primary mechanisms producing human development. However, "the power of the proximal processes to influence development varies "substantially as a function of the characteristics of the developing *Person*, the immediate and more remote *environmental contexts*, and the *Time* periods, in which the proximal

processes take place" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 994; emphasis in the original). As the engines of development, the proximal processes involve interaction with three features of the immediate environment: persons, objects, and symbols. They transfer energy between the developing person and the persons, objects, and symbols in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). This transfer could be unilateral or bidirectional and could occur concurrently and/or intermittently (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Additionally, the proximal processes have the general effect of reducing or buffering against environmental differences. However, this effect is greatest in more advantaged and stable environment than in poor environments (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Appendix B provides the distinctive features of the proximal processes.

The proximal processes produce two major kinds of developmental outcomes—competence and dysfunction—which in turn distinguish the proximal process as positive or negative, protective or detrimental. While competence refers to “the demonstrated acquisition and further development of knowledge, skill, or ability to conduct and direct one’s own behavior across situations and developmental domains (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 1999 p. 2000), dysfunction refers to “the recurrent manifestation of difficulties in maintaining control and integration of behavior across situations and different domains of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1002). Competence “can occur in any domain—intellectual, physical, motivational, socio-emotional, or artistic—either by itself or in combination with one or more other spheres of activity” (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 2000).

Person

The PPCT model distinguished three types of Person characteristics as most influential in shaping the course of future development through their capacity to affect the direction and power of proximal processes. The first is *dispositions or person force*, the second is bioecological *resources*, and the third is *demands* characteristics.

Person Forces Or Disposition

Person forces are personal dispositions that can set proximal processes in motion in a particular developmental domain and continue to sustain their operation (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). According to Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998), behavioral dispositions can "actively interfere with, retard, or even prevent" the occurrence of proximal processes (p. 1009). They described behavioral dispositions that set in motion and sustain the operation of the proximal processes as 'developmentally generative" characteristic and those that disrupt, retard or hinder its operation as "developmentally disruptive" characteristics (p. 1009). Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) identified examples of developmentally generative characteristics as active orientations such as "curiosity, tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone, responsiveness to initiatives by others, and readiness to defer immediate gratifications to pursue long-term goals" (p. 1009).

On the other hand, developmentally disruptive dispositions include "impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, inability to defer gratification, or in a more extreme form, ready resort to aggression and violence"—behaviors that are generally categorized as difficulties in maintaining control over emotions (p. 1009). Equally, they classified apathy, inattentiveness, unresponsiveness, lack of interest in one's

surroundings, “feelings of insecurity, shyness, or a general tendency to avoid or withdraw from activity as evidences of developmentally disruptive dispositions” (p. 1009) and posited, “persons exhibiting either of the preceding propensities would find it difficult to engage in proximal processes requiring progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal interaction over extended period of time” (p. 1009).On the other hand, developmentally disruptive dispositions include “impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, inability to defer gratification, or in a more extreme form, ready resort to aggression and violence”—behaviors that are generally categorized as difficulties in maintaining control over emotions (p. 1009). Equally, they classified apathy, inattentiveness, unresponsiveness, lack of interest in one’s surroundings, “feelings of insecurity, shyness, or a general tendency to avoid or withdraw from activity as evidences of developmentally disruptive dispositions” (p. 1009) and posited, “persons exhibiting either of the preceding propensities would find it difficult to engage in proximal processes requiring progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal interaction over extended period of time” (p. 1009). Table 4.1 presents the three stages of generative person disposition.

Person Resources or Developmental Resources

The next person characteristics that shape development are bioecological *resources* or developmental *resources*. These refer to the developing person’s ability, experience, knowledge, and skill required for the effective functioning of proximal processes at a given stage of development. These Person characteristics does not involve selective disposition toward something; rather, they “constitute biopsychological liabilities and assets that influence the capacity of the organism to engage effectively in

proximal processes" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1011). Like Person forces, Person resources are classified into developmental liabilities and developmental assets.

Table 4. 1: 3 Stages of Generative Person Disposition	
Stage I: Selective Responsiveness	Involves differentiated response to, attraction by, and exploration of aspects of the physical and social environments.
Stage II: Structuring Proclivities	Refers the tendency to engage and persist in progressively more complex activities.
Epistemological Curiosity	Involves the ability to elaborate, restructure, and create new features in one's environment—not only physical and social environment, but also symbolic environments.
Stage III: Direct belief-system Self-efficacy beliefs Locus of Control	Direct belief about oneself as an active agent both in relation to the self and to the environment. Involves increasing capacity to conceptualize experience. This is the same concept as locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and self-efficacy belief (Bandura, 1977).

Developmental liabilities refer to conditions that restrict or distort the functional integrity of the organism (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). Such conditions include genetic defects, low birth weight, physical handicaps, severe and persistent illness, or damage to brain function through accident or degenerative processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1011).

Conversely, developmental assets refer to the abilities, knowledge, skills, and experiences that progressively develop over time and extend to various domains through which the proximal processes can do constructive work. Overtime, these assets become another source of the "progressively more complex patterns of interactions forming a defining attribute of the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Obviously, there is a striking similarity between the two types of developmental

resources—liabilities versus assets—and the two types of developmental outcomes—dysfunction versus competence—in the Process domain of the bioecological model. This similarity derives from the ability of the Person characteristics to exist in three levels of the bioecological model—first as a defining attribute of the model and second as developmental outcomes. Hence, developmental outcome 1—Person resources of developmental liability—indirectly influences developmental outcomes 2—dysfunction arising from unstable and disadvantaged proximal processes, that is, inability to engage in effective reciprocal interaction due to predisposed liabilities. Figure 4.1 depicts the bidirectional interaction between developmental outcomes from the process component and developmental resources in the person component of the module.

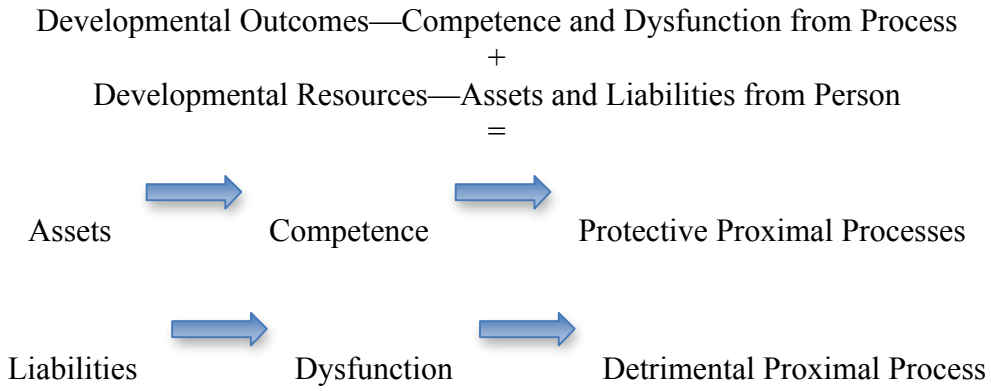

Figure 4.1: Developmental Outcomes vs. Developmental Resources in High school Students' Academic Performance

Person Demand Characteristics

The *demands* characteristics refer to person characteristics that are capable of inviting or discouraging reactions from the social environment. These characteristics can foster or disrupt the operation of the proximal processes thereby facilitating or hindering the psychological growth of the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006).

Examples of demand characteristics include a fussy vs. a happy person, attractive vs. unattractive physical appearance, or hyperactivity vs. passivity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1011). Allport (1937) referred to these demand characteristics as "social stimulus value" (quoted in Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1-12). The complex role of person demand characteristics in human development underscore the importance of those proximal processes that do not involve interpersonal interaction, but instead "focus on progressively more complex reciprocal interaction with objects and symbols. Because these are "solo activities" that are performed alone, the behavior of other participants does not affect the magnitude and effectiveness of the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). Furthermore, these "solo activities" significantly change the processes required in their performance, their outcomes, and the elements of the environments needed for their performance (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). Through person demand characteristics, this study will focus on individual student's effort toward completing independent versus group tasks.

The differentiation between these three forms of person characteristics leads to their combination in patterns of person structure that can further account for differences in the direction and power of resultant proximal processes and their developmental effect (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Likewise, "the contrast in all three domains requires a focus on human relationships and on task completion (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Summarily, in the bioecological model, the characteristic of the person functions both as an indirect producer and as a product of development (Lerner, 1982, Lerner & Busch-Rossnagel, 1981).

Contexts

Drawing from Lewin's theory of psychological field, Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1979) conceived the ecological environment as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls, moving from the innermost level to the outside. Consequently, in his bioecological model as well as in its earlier prototypes, he identified the environment as relevant to developmental processes and conceptualized it as a nested structure of four interconnected systems known as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and an overarching chronosystem. Because of the purpose and duration of this study, the chronosystem aspect of contexts is limited to time in between policies, pedagogy, programs, and curricular requirements within the setting of the study.

Microsystem

The microsystem refer to the innermost of the environmental structures and the immediate setting in which the individual lives and develops. It includes patterns of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations that the developing person experiences in a given direct, face-to-face setting with significant physical, social, and symbolic features that can invite, permit, or inhibit the *growing person's* engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Examples of the microsystem include such setting as family, school, peer group, and workplace. Within the microsystem, the proximal processes operate to produce and sustain development. However, the power of the proximal processes to do this depends on the content and structure of the microsystem. As Bronfenbrenner (1994) posited, "The effects of the proximal processes are more powerful

than those of the environmental contexts in which they occur" (p. 39). Nevertheless, this effect varies with the level of advantages within the ecological niche.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is the second level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological structure. It refers to the cross-relationships and lateral connections between two or more settings containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Examples of mesosystems are the relations between home and school, school and workplace. In other words, the mesosystem is a system of microsystems or the effect of the interaction between the microsystems. Whenever a developing person moves into a new setting, she or he forms a new mesosystem or extends an existing one. Bronfenbrenner (1994) referred to the movement into a new mesosystem as an "ecological transition." The interconnections between settings in a mesosystem is not limited to only those made by the developing person, but also include links between other persons who actively participate in two or more settings containing the developing person, such as parents involvement in the child's school life, intermediate links in a social network, various forms of communication among settings, and indirect connections via the "grapevine" or social network (Bronfenbrenner, 1977b, 1979a).

Similar to the interactions that occur within settings at the microsystem level, the processes of interchange between settings in a mesosystem are regarded as reciprocal. In some cases, there are consistencies between activities and interpersonal relations in the various microsystems within which the individual lives and develops. In other cases these linkages are less consistent. Moreover, the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting of a mesosystem are also likely

to create synergistic effects that impact the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1993). The social richness of an individual's mesosystem derives from the number and quality of its connections. Individuals participating in a large and diversified set of microsystems enjoy special opportunities for rich and stimulating experiences. When there is a range of interpersonal interconnections between two or more of the settings and total agreement in their values, these developmental opportunities are enhanced. Mesosystem risk is defined first by the absence of connections and second by conflicts of values between one microsystem and another (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992).

Exosystem

The exosystem is third level of the ecological structure. It comprises of the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least, one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person resides (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). An example of a high school student's exosystem includes the parent's workplace, economic systems, mass media, laws, educational systems and policies, political systems, industry, government, social welfare services. Consistently, research depicts three exosystem levels as of great importance in the development of children and youths through their impact on the school and peer groups. These are parent's workplace (Eckenrode & Gore, 1990), family social network (Cochran et al., 1990), and neighborhood-community contexts (Pence, 1988).

In the bioecological perspective, participation in exosystem is both a product and a cause of development. It creates possible interconnections among settings in a mesosystem that at its most fundamental form is called multisetting (Bronfenbrenner,

1994). Multisetting occurs when the same person engages in activities in more than one setting, for example, when a child spends time at home, at school, and in the neighborhood peer group. Since such participation necessarily occurs sequentially, multisetting participation can then be defined as the existence of a direct or first order social network across settings in which the developing person indulges in active processes within the immediate setting in which she or he lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This first order social network across settings becomes a kind of exosystem that indirectly exposes the developing person to broader societal structure as she or he actively processes the often progressively more complex information that emanates from his or her interactions with these multisettings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Exosystems can impoverish and enhance developmental processes taking place at micro- or mesosystem levels. The exosystem exerts these impacts in two ways. The first is through the significant others,[17] in the developing person's life, whose active involvement in settings that the person might never enter brings with them experiences that impoverish or enhance the significant others' behaviors in the microsystems they share with the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The second source of exosystem influences is through decisions made in those settings, which affect other peoples' day-to-day experiences. Examples include decisions of the school boards, church councils, planning commissions and other centers of power that impact on the social and physical context in which people live their everyday life. These decisions directly and indirectly influence the individual's development and achievement (Garbarino et al., 2002).

[17] According to Bronfenbrenner (1994 **significant others** refer to other people in the environment whose development is not under investigation. He posited that the PPCT model that captures the developmentally relevant features of the developing person can be applied as well to the developmentally relevant features of significant others.

Macrosystem

The fourth level of the environmental context is the *macrosystem*. It consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The common sharing of similar belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, lifestyles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options defines a macrosystem. Hence, it is thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture and subcultures, which incorporates values, customs, laws, and resources that influence the way life is organized. These are usually passed down through social, religious, and government institutions.

From this perspective, social class, ethnic or religious groups, or persons living in particular regions, communities, neighborhoods, or other types of broader social structures constitute a macrosystem whenever the interaction between them meets the above conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; 1994). The macrosystems are carriers of values and ideology that can impede or promote human development. Such risks at the macrosystem level include an ideology or cultural alignment that threatens to impoverish individuals' micro- and mesosystems and set exosystems opportunities and promises that enrich development against them (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992a). These could be in the form of a national economic policy that tolerates or even encourages economic dislocation and poverty for subgroups of people within the society versus one that gives special financial priority to subgroups of people within the society. Or, a pattern of racist

or sexist values that lower some individuals' status and dignity versus a pluralistic ideology that welcomes diversity and increases self-worth (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992a). As Bronfenbrenner (1994) posited, the underpinnings of the macrosystem point to the necessity of going beyond the simple labels of class and culture to identify more specific social and psychological interactions at the macrosystems level that ultimately affect the particular conditions and processes occurring in the microsystem. In this case, the chronic academic failure of majority of minority and low SES students at the high school level. Such macrosystem's level factors include social and educational policies, economic and political situations, mass media and social networks, and global technological advancement (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a; 1986b; 1988; 1989; 1993).

Time

The "Time" dimension is the final defining attribute of the bioecological model and the characteristic that "moves it farthest beyond its predecessor" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 995). The assumption underlying this concept of time is that environments influence the reciprocal interaction between an individual and her or his developmental outcomes not only in terms of the available resources within these environments, but also in terms of the degree to which the environments foster stability and consistency of the resources that the proximal processes need to function effectively over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994).

The principle that proximal processes require environmental stability for optimal human development is embodied in Proposition 2 of the bioecological model: "To be developmentally effective, proximal processes must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Moreover, in a corollary of Proposition II, Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) suggested that the duration, frequency, interruption, timing and intensity of exposures to people, objects, and symbols play critical roles in determining the proximal processes and their resultant developmental outcomes.

The element of Time underscores the idea that processes producing human development are not instantaneous; rather they occur over time. These processes are, in turn, largely affected by the impact of changes in both the characteristics of the developing person and the nature of the environmental *Context* (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). In the bioecological perspective, the individual's lifelong development is embedded in an ever-changing set of contexts at every layer of the entire ecological environment, from changes within and between the settings at the level of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems to changes at the broader macrosystems level. Within the PPCT model, time appears on three successive levels of the multidimensional structure namely: Microtime, Mesotime, and Macrotime (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Microtime refers to continuity versus discontinuity within ongoing episodes of proximal processes. The importance of microtime was presented in Wachs's (1979) study of the features of the environment most associated with individual differences in cognitive competence. His findings identified "responsive environment, presence of sheltered areas, instability and unpredictability of events, the degree to which the physical set-up of the home permits exploration, low level of noise and confusion, and the degree of temporal regularity (Wach, 1979) as strongly associated with individual differences in cognitive ability. Drawing from this study, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) concluded that proximal processes—reciprocal interaction between organism and environments—

cannot function effectively in environments that are unstable and unpredictable across space and time.

Mesotime is the periodicity of episodic events across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The cumulative effects of unstable and unpredictable episodes at the mesosystem level have the tendency of seriously jeopardizing the course of human development because at this next higher level of the environmental structure, similar disruptive characteristics of interconnected microsystems tend to reinforce each other (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Drawing from studies by Pulkkinen (1983), Pulkkinen and Saastamoinen (1986), Moorehouse (1986) and other studies that found high correlations between environmental mesosystem level events and children's developmental outcomes, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) formulated another corollary of the bioecological model as follows:

> The degree of stability, consistency, and predictability over time in any element of systems constituting the ecology of human development is critical for the effective operation of the system in question. Extremes either of disorganization or rigidity in structure or function represent danger signs for potential psychological growth, with some intermediate degree of system flexibility constituting the optimal condition for human development. In terms of research, this proposition point to the importance of assessing the degree of stability and instability, with respect to characteristics of Process, Person, and Context, at each level of the ecological system (p. 1020).

Finally, "*Macrotime* focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by processes

and outcomes of human development over the life course" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 995; emphasis in the original). The bioecological corollary referenced above also "applies at the macrolevel dimension of Time both during the individual's life course and through the historical period in which the person has lived" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1020). Proposition 2 first alluded to this property of the model in the stipulation, "To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p. 3).

In the article, "Socialization and Social Class through Time and Space," Bronfenbrenner (1958) reanalyzed the contradictory findings on social class differences in patterns and outcomes of child rearing. Based on his results he concluded that the observed difference in children's behavior was a result of gradual systematic change over time. According to him, within the period just after the World War II until the late 1950s, middle-class parents moved away from originally more authoritarian child rearing patterns toward greater permissiveness and lower-class parents move in the opposite direction. Based on this finding and the findings of Elder's (1974) study of the children of the great depression, Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues extrapolated Elder's four defining principles of the life course and their implications for corresponding research design into the bioecological model. The first of these principles refers to *historical time and place.* It states: *The individual's own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by the historical times and events they experience*—conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives (Bronfenbrenner 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006; emphasis in the original).

The second principle refers to *timing in lives*, "A major factor influencing the course and outcome of human development is the timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to the culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life. Thus, *the developmental impact of a succession of life transitions or events is contingent on when they occur in a person's life* (Bronfenbrenner 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006; emphasis in the original). The third principle linked lives and asserts, *lives are lived interdependently and social and historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships.* Hence, the life of all family members are interdependent. How each family member reacts to a particular historical event or role transition affects the developmental course of the other family members both within and across generations (Bronfenbrenner 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006; emphasis in the original). The fourth of Elder's life course principle adopted into the bioecological model refers to human agency. It states, "*individuals construct their own life course through choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances"* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1021). Thus, "within the limits and opportunities afforded by the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions in which they live, human beings themselves influence their own development—for better or for worse—through their own choices and acts" (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 22). However, Bronfenbrenner further explained that environmental changes across history and life course are not only temporal forces shaping development; rather changes on a much shorter time scale may be equally consequential (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Accordingly, changes over time in the four defining attributes of the bioecological model are not only

products, but also producers of historical change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006). However, the scope and duration of this study will only warrant the examination of the third and fourth principles of the life course.

Summarily, human organisms function as an integrated system, in which the various psychological domains interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 636). The bioecological paradigm conceives human organism as "an active agent, in and on, *her or his* environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 634; italicized not in the original). This active orientation is manifested in strong dispositional proclivities to set in motion, sustain, and enhance processes of interaction between the organism and particular features of persons, objects, and symbols in her or his environment (p. 634). Bronfenbrenner (1995) referred to these selective dispositional orientations toward the environment as developmentally instigative characteristics and asserted that these dynamic tendencies become operative from early infancy and continues to evolve until old age. He posited that infants manifest these dispositional instigative characteristics in their selective response to environmental "stimuli presented in different modalities and to variations in stimuli introduced within the same modality."

However, adolescents and adults manifest these characteristics through "differential interests, value, belief systems, and goals in relation to persons, objects, and symbols in the environment and in relation to the self" (p. 634). Hence, to obtain an understanding of how differences in students' psychological make-up affect the proximal processes and their resultant outcomes as well as how an individual contributes to his or her own development and academic achievement, the two general types of person characteristics—biopsychological resources versus directional dispositions must be

considered. To assess one without the other treats the developing person as devoid of either psychological substance or psychological force (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 634-635). (p. 1023). Figure: 4.1 is the diagrammatic representation of Bronfenbrenner bioecological paradigm with some modifications.

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Human Agency and Self-efficacy

Social cognitive theory adopts an agentic perspective to human development, adaptation, and change. It analyzes developmental changes across the life span in terms of evolvement and exercise of human agency. When viewed from this perspective, the paths that lives take become shaped by the reciprocal interplay between personal factors and diverse influences in the ever-changing societies. Sociocognitive theorists believe that the environment in which people live is not a situational entity that ordains their life course. Rather, it is a varied succession of transactional life events in which individuals play a role in shaping the course of their personal development through purposeful selection, interpretation, and use of environmental information (Baltes, 1983; Bandura, 1997; Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). Thus, by selecting and interpreting information from the external world and transforming this information into inner (internalization) and outer action, the mental system plays a crucial role in the process of interaction between mental and biological system factors within the individual, and in the process of interaction between the individual and his or her environment (Vygotsky, 1978; Bandura, 1986; Magnusson & Torestad, 1993). Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three modes of agency. (1) Direct personal agency. (2) Proxy agency that relies on others to act on one's directives to secure desired outcomes.

(3) Collective agency exercised through group action. In personal agency—which is the focus of this study—exercised individually, people bring their influence to bear directly on themselves and their environment in managing their lives (Bandura, 1986; 1989).

Individuals As Agentic, Active Being

Social cognitive theory explains human behavior through a model of causation that involves *triadic reciprocal determinism*. In this model of reciprocal causation, behavior, cognition and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally (Bandura, 1989, p. 2). As Bandura (1989) posited, reciprocal causation does not mean, "the different sources of influence are of equal strength." Some may be stronger than others. Also, it does not mean "reciprocal influences all occur simultaneously.

It takes time for a causal factor to exert its influence and activate reciprocal influences" (p. 2-3). Figure 4.2 is the diagrammatic representation of Bandura's (1989) triadic reciprocal causation determinism.

The P ⇔ B of the reciprocal causation indicates the interaction between thought, affect and action. The P ⇔ B subsystem of influence suggests that expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals and intentions shape and direct behavior and that what people think, believe, and feel, also affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986; Bower, 1975; Neisser, 1976). Similarly, the natural and extrinsic effects of individuals' actions, in turn, partly determine their thought patterns and emotional reactions. Within this subsystem, the personal factor encompasses the biological properties of the organism. While the physical structure, sensory and neural systems also affect behavior and impose

constraints on capabilities, the sensory systems and brain structures are, in turn, modifiable by behavioral experiences (Greenough, Black, & Wallace, 1987).

Similarly, the E ⇔P segment of reciprocal causation displays the interactive relation between personal characteristics and environmental influences. It purports that human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modeling, instruction and social persuasion (Bandura, 1986; 1989). Also, individuals evoke different reactions from their social environment by their physical characteristics, such as their age, size, race, sex, and physical attractiveness, quite apart from what they say and do (Lerner, 1982). They similarly activate different social reactions depending on their socially conferred roles and status. For example, students who have a reputation, as tough aggressors will elicit different reactions from their peers than those known to be unassertive. Thus, by their social status and observable characteristics individuals can affect their social environment before they say or do anything. The social reactions so elicited impact the recipients' conceptions of themselves and others in ways that either strengthen or alter environmental bias (Snyder, 1981).

Finally, the B ⇔ E segment of reciprocal causation in the triadic system represents the two-way influence between behavior and the environment. In everyday transactions, behavior alters environmental conditions and is, in turn, altered by the very conditions it creates. The environment is not a fixed entity that inevitably impinges upon individuals. In spite of this, most aspects of the environment do not become influential

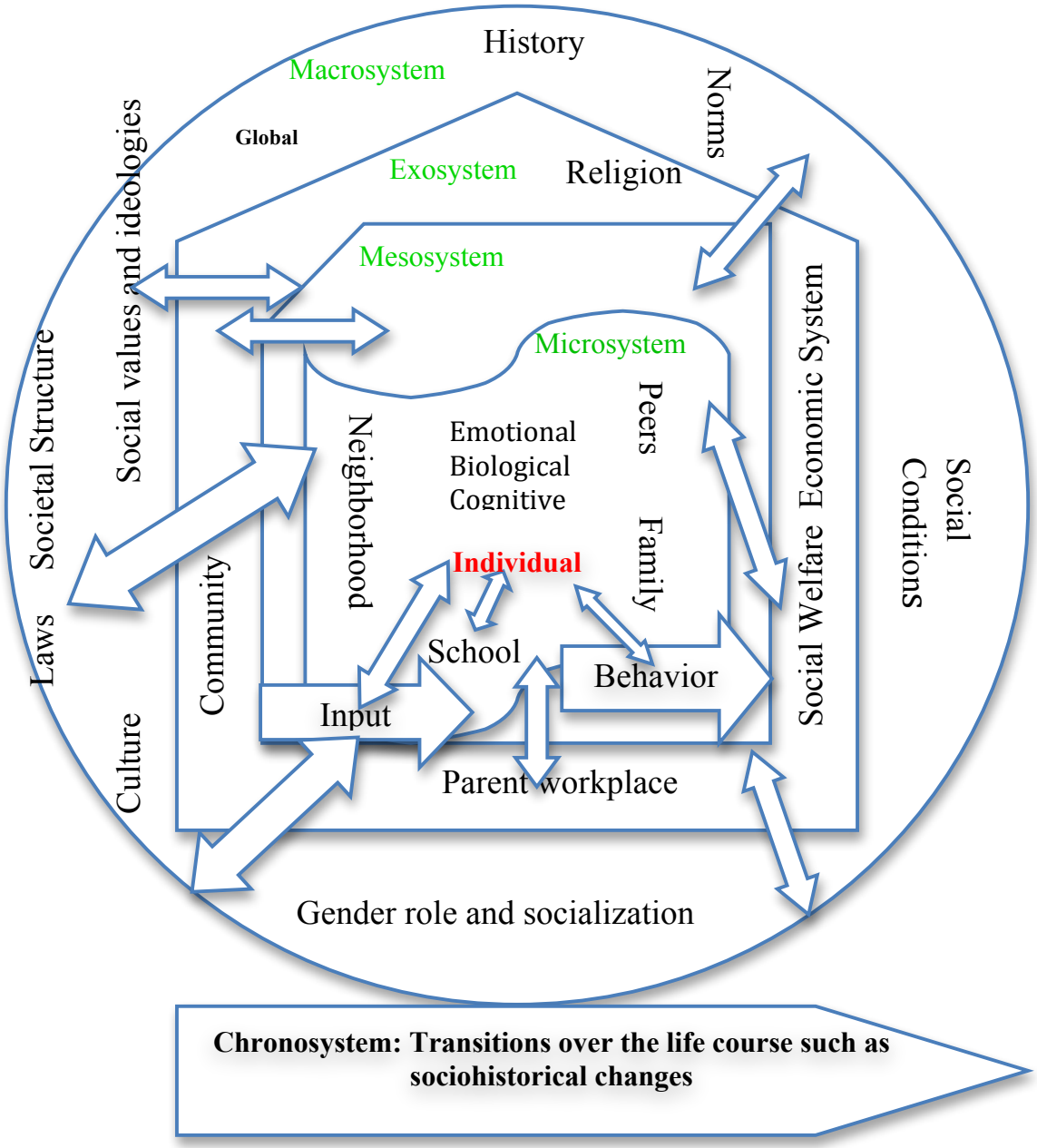

Figure 4.2
Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems of human Development

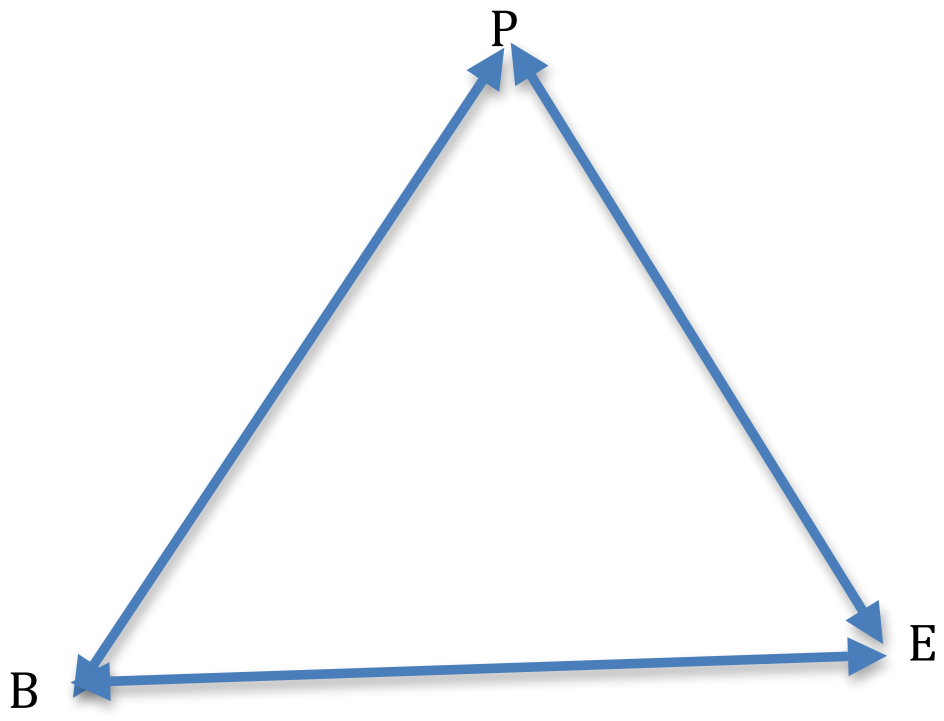

Figure 4.3
Bandura's Human Agency in Triadic Reciprocal Causation
The relationships between the three major classes of determinants in triadic reciprocal causation. **B** represents behavior; **P** represents internal personal factors in the forms of cognitive, affective, and biological events; and **E** represents the external environment. (Adapted from Bandura, 1986a).

until they are activated by appropriate behavior. For instance, teachers do not influence students unless students attend their classes and pay attention to them. Thus, the aspect of the potential environment that becomes the actual environment for given individuals depends on how those individuals behave (Bandura, 1986; 1989; 2005).

Because of the bidirectionality of influence between behavior and environmental circumstances, people are both products and producers of their environment (Bandura, 1986; 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 2005). They affect the nature of their experienced environment through selection, interpretation, and creation of situations. Individuals tend

to select activities and associates from the vast range of possibilities in terms of their acquired preferences and competencies (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Bullock & Merrill, 1980; Emmons & Diener, 1986). Through their actions, people create, as well as, select their environments. Hence, aggressive persons produce hostile environments wherever they go, whereas friendly people generate amiable social milieus (Bandura, 1989). Thus, behavior determines which of the many potential environmental influences are activated and what forms they will take. Environmental influences, in turn, partly determine which forms of behavior are developed, activated, and sustained (Bandura, 1989). Although the growing recognition of reciprocal causation has altered the way in which socialization is viewed (Bandura, 1989), it does not seem to have been recognized in the educational arena. Transactional analysis of how teachers and students influence each other has not replaced the one-sided developmental analyses of how teachers influence students, as is the case in other social systems such as the interaction between parents and their children (Bell & Harper, 1977; Cairns, 1979; Lewis & Rosenblum, 1974).

Additionally, because human functioning is rooted in social systems, human agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences. However, social structures are created by human activity to organize, guide, and regulate human affairs in given domains by authorized rules and sanctions (Bandura, 1987; 2005). Social systems necessarily operate through the activities of individual who preside over them. The socio-structural practices, in turn, impose constraints and provide resources and opportunity structures for personal development and functioning (Bandura, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Thus, there exists between personal agency and socio-structural practices a bidirectional influence in determining individual outcome (Bandura, 2005). Even

though the self is socially construed, it is noteworthy that socio-structural influences operate through psychological mechanism to produce behavioral influences (Bandura, 2005). Hence, human agency, through it personal and collective influence operates generatively and proactively on social systems. Human agency is never just reactive. Put succinctly, social systems are the product of human activities and individuals are the active producer of their own outcomes (Bandura, 2005, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006).

In the theory of triadic reciprocal causation, socio-structural and personal determinants are treated as co-factors within a unified causal structure. As Bandura noted, poverty is not a matter of multilayered or distal causation. Lacking money to provide for the subsistence of one's family impinges pervasively on everyday life in a very proximal way. Economic conditions, socioeconomic status, and family structure affect individual behavior mainly through their impact on individual's aspirations, sense of efficacy, and other self-regulatory factors rather than directly. However, knowledge of the factors, whether predictable or unpredictable, that can alter the course of life paths provides guides for how to foster valued futures. At the personal level, surmounting these challenges requires cultivating the capabilities for exercising self-directedness. These capabilities include the development of competencies, self-beliefs of efficacy to exercise control, and self-regulatory capabilities for influencing one's own motivation and actions. Such personal resources expand freedom of action, and enable people to serve as causal contributors to their own life course by selecting, influencing, and constructing their own circumstances.

With such skills, people are better able to provide supports and direction for their actions, to capitalize on planned or fortuitous opportunities, to resist social traps that lead down detrimental paths, and to disengage themselves from such predicaments should they become enmeshed in them (Bandura, 1989; 2005). As Elder (1981) avowed, life trajectories differ depending on where people are in their lives at the time of such changes (Elder, 1981). Whatever the social conditions might be, personal lives take varied directions at any given time and place. It is the way in which people take advantage of opportunity structures and manage constraints under the prevailing sociocultural conditions that make the difference.

Bandura (2005) identified four elements distinguishing human agency as intentionality, temporal extension of agency through forethought, Self-regulation, and self-awareness or self-examination. According to him, intentionality derives from the notion that people form intentions that include action plans and strategies for realizing them. Temporal extension of agency through forethought derives from the idea that people set goals and anticipates likely outcomes or prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts. Bandura (2005) referred to this proclivity as future-directed plans and asserted, "the future cannot be the cause of current behavior because it has no material existence" (p. 3), but by being represented cognitively in the present, visualized futures serve as current guides and motivators of behavior.

The third element of personal agency is self-regulation. As Bandura (2005) posited, "Agents are not only planner and forethinkers, they are also self-regulators. They adopt personal standards and monitor and regulate their actions by self-reactive influence. They do things that give them satisfaction and a sense of worth, and refrain from actions

that bring self-censure" (p. 3). Finally, Bandura identified self-examination and self-awareness as important construct of personal agency. He noted that individuals are not only agents of action, but also agents of self (Bandura, 1987). Individuals are self-examiners of their own functioning and through self-awareness they reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits. Through self-reflection, agentic individuals make corrective adjustment, if necessary. Forethought and self-influence are important parts of a causal structure in adolescents development (Bandura, 2005).

Personal Agency and Self-efficacy

The agentic perspective assumes that people are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting organisms. They are contributors to their life circumstances not just product of them (Bandura, 2005). Consequently, Bandura (2005) argued, "To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (p. 3). He identified self-efficacy as the fundamental mechanism of human agency and posited that self-efficacy is the "core foundation of human motivation, well-being, and accomplishments" and that unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they may have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties (p. 3). There are three main pathways through which efficacy beliefs play a key role in students' cognitive development and accomplishment. (1) Students' belief in their efficacy to regulate their activities and to master academic subjects. (2) Teachers beliefs in their personal efficacy to promote learning in their students and (3) the faculties' collective sense of efficacy that their school can accomplish significant academic

progress. For the purpose of this study, I will limit the discussion to individual student's self-efficacy belief in their ability to succeed academically.

Elaborating on the importance of self-efficacy beliefs, Bandura (2005) asserted, "Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by one's actions" (p. 3). Belief in one's efficacy is a key resource for self-development, successful adaptation, and change. It operates through its impact on cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes. Efficacy beliefs affect whether individuals think optimistically or pessimistically, in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways. Such beliefs affect people's goals, how well they motivate themselves, and their perseverance at the face of difficulties and adversity (Bandura, 1989; 2005; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Efficacy beliefs also shape people's outcome expectations—whether they expect their efforts to produce favorable or unfavorable outcomes. In addition, efficacy beliefs determine how environmental opportunities and impediments are viewed. Individuals of low efficacy are easily convinced of the futility of effort in the face of difficulties. They quickly give up trying. Those with high efficacy see impediments as surmountable by self-development and persevering effort. They stay the course in the face of difficulties and remain resilient in adversity (Bandura, 2005; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Efficacy beliefs also affect the quality of emotional life and vulnerability to stress and depression. It also determines the choice people make at important decisional points (Bandura, 2005; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Suggestively then, efficacy beliefs influence behavior, especially students' academic behaviors, and can "profoundly affect the courses lives

take because the social influences operating in the selected environments continue to promote certain competencies, values, and lifestyle" (Bandura, 2005, p. 4).

Self-efficacy Beliefs and Student Academic Achievement

Consistently, research portrays that efficacy beliefs contribute significantly to level of motivation, socio-cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and performance accomplishment (Bandura, 2002, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Equally, studies have shown considerable progress in the positive role of self-efficacy beliefs in students' academic interest, motivation, management of academic stressors, and growth of cognitive competences. Students with high self-efficacy exercise control over their own learning. Instead of depending on the quality of schools in which they are enrolled for their educational development, such students efficaciously augment the education they receive through self-interest, proactive initiatives, and global Internet libraries, museums, and multimedia. Through their own initiative, these students improve their learning through self-regulated learning and mastery goals (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Stipek, 2002; McCombs, 1989). Bandura (2005) described these types of students as "agents of their own learning, not just recipients of information" (p. 10).

According to Bandura (2005), "a major goal of formal education is to equip students with the intellectual tools, self-beliefs, and self-regulatory capabilities to educate themselves throughout their lifetime" (p. 10). The rapid pace of technological change and accelerated growths in the 21st century are placing a premium on capability for self-directed learning (Bandura, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Within the framework of social cognitive theory, students must develop skills to regulate the motivational, emotional, and social determinants of their intellectual functioning, as well as the

cognitive—self-regulatory—aspects of their learning experiences. Accordingly, efficacious self-regulators gain knowledge, skills, and intrinsic interests in intellectual matters. Weak self-regulators achieve limited self-development (Bandura, 2005). As Bandura (1989) contended, "It is not just enough to have self-management skills" (p. 11). These will contribute little to nothing if the student cannot get herself or himself to apply the skills persistently in the face of difficulties, stressors, and competing attractions. Firm belief in one's self-management efficacy provides the staying power and enables students to manage their own learning, aspirations and accomplishments (Bandura, 2005). Nevertheless, self-efficacy must be accompanied with strong sense of self-worth, self-discipline, and resilience (Bandura, 2002, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Additionally, the literature on personal agency and self-efficacy lauds the role of self-efficacy in affect regulation. Affect or emotion plays important role in intrapersonal, communicative, behavioral functional values, and students' academic outcome (Bandura, 1986; Caprara, 2002). Affect is also identified as the basis of social ties and the durability of social ties that influence people's lives (Bandura, 1986; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Saarni, 1999). Mayer and Salovey (1997) and Saani (1999) found emotional competence, such as the ability to discern emotions, to understand the social consequences of one's emotionally expressive behavior, and to manage one's emotional states, as essential for successful interpersonal transactions in everyday life. Further, scholars have found positive affect to enhance cognitive functioning, help buffer the perturbing effects of aversive experiences, and facilitate adaptive coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredickson, 1998). Failures in the regulation of affect leads to emotional and psychological dysfunction, which in turn, lead to poor academic performance and

subsequent dropout (Gross & Munoz, 1995; Larsen, 2000). Finally, affective states are often portrayed as operating directly on psychosocial functioning.

As Bandura (2005) declared, adaptive functioning requires discriminative regulation of affect. If not, people will get into deep trouble if they vented their wrath every time they felt angry. Also, people's lives will be severely constricted if fear automatically triggered immobility and avoidant behavior, because most important pursuits in life involve risk and fear-arousing threats (Bandura, 2005). The impact of affect on behavior operates through self-regulatory mechanisms. Thus, negative affect provokes problem behavior more frequently in those who have low self-regulatory efficacy than in those who have high self-efficacy (Bandura, 2005). Just like self-regulated learning and self-efficacy, the possession of self-regulatory skills without adhering to them in challenging and perturbing situations renders the skills useless. In order to avoid this, adolescents also need a resilient sense of efficacy to overrule emotional and psychosocial subverters of self-regulatory efforts (Bernard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991; Wang et al., 1997; Bandura, 2005). Adolescents' sense of efficacy to manage their positive and negative emotional life contributes to their perceived sense of self-efficacy to take charge of their academic life, to overcome peer pressure for transgressive behaviors, and to feel empathy for the experiences of others (Bandura, Caprara, Barbarnelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003). Thus, Bandura (2005) asserted, these forms of personal efficacy foster pro-socialness, deter engagement in antisocial activities and substance abuse, and enable adolescents to manage negative life events without suffering lingering bouts of despondency" (p. 20).

Summarily, the concept of agency and self-efficacy purports that individuals are proactive and aspiring organism actively contributing in shaping their own lives and the social systems that organize, regulate, and guide the affairs of their society (Bandura, 1997; Woolfolk, 2004). Personal agency operates within independent causal structure that involves reciprocal causation to activate internal personal factors (cognitive, affective, and biological), and within behavioral and environmental events to create intentionality, self-efficacy and self-regulation. These personal characteristics enable one to carefully select and execute intended actions (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, these personal characteristics are protective factors that shield individual from the adverse impact of predisposed debilitating conditions such as poverty, family instability, and perceived societal and structural discrimination.

As Wang et al. (1999) and Bernard (1991) posited, focusing on these protective factors and empowering minority and economically disadvantaged students to evolve and sustain them would, not only improve their academic performance, but also enable them to develop a high sense of self-worth, self-esteem, personal integrity and responsibility. Above all, developing and preserving these protective personal characteristics will empower minority and low SES inner city high school students to overcame generational poverty through resilience and to become contributing members of their society and the global community.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) Concept of Habitus

Bourdieu contended that children's educational performance is more related to their parents' educational history than occupational status. For him, social background is mediated through a complex set of factors that interact in different ways at different

levels of schooling. He described this complex interactive system of factors as "habitus"—a system of lasting fungible disposition, which integrates past experiences; and functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (p. 82-83). Additionally Bourdieu posited that minority and working class students' habitus predisposes them for academic failure. Habitus, according to him, is subjective and at the same time a collective system of internalized structures, schemes of perceptions, conceptions, dispositions, schemata, tastes, and actions common to all members of the same group or class. Habitus is not based on biological instincts; rather it is a culturally learned mode of being, thinking, valuing, and behaving that derives from a deeply positioned home-place world that one shares with others. In other words, habitus comprises of beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of those inhabiting one's social world. It is the conglomeration of deeply internalized values that define an individual's attitude toward events and institutions such as school and schooling (Bourdieu, 1977). Thus, the effect of habitus is not predestined; it can be influenced through conscious or unconscious choices.

In Bourdieu's view, habitus function as a regulator between individuals and their social world and between humans and the social structures. Commenting on this mediatory nature of habitus in student academic achievement, Wacquant (1990) argues that habitus flows from inside, it is the reactivation of subjective meanings and relations that are objectified as institutions. Habitus, then, is the mediating link between the individual and his/her social world. It is a conceptual bridge between the subjective inner consciousness and the objective, external constraints of the material world, which

disposes individual to think and act in certain ways without explicit reason or significant intent (Jenkins & Bourdieu, 1992).

Drawing from this concept of habitus, Bourdieu explains that minority and lower class students fail academically because they live in neighborhoods where success is rare and effort and academic achievement are hardly rewarded. Their habitus disposes them to see failure as success, while believing that they have no chance in the professional job market. Thus, this group of students accepts failure and low ambition as normal, an attitude that is shunned by their middle class peers who grow up around people who have 'made it' socially and economically in the society. Consequently, habitus not only engenders attitude and conducts that promotes lack of academic achievement among minority and working class students, it also enables the reproduction of objective social structure. Bourdieu (1977) refers to this self-destructive attitude of minority students that arises from their internalization of their habitus as "a circular relationship between structures and practices in which objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured action, which in turn tend to reproduce objective structures" (in Swartz, 1977, p. 548).

Within this study, the concept of habitus will be extended to individual school's policies and practices that consciously or unconsciously promote low aspiration, permissiveness, lack of academic excellence and rigor, and irresponsibility. These policies and practices divest students of personal agency, self-efficacy, self-regulation, responsibility and personal integrity through their subtle promotion of mediocrity and indolence among students. These policies include, but not limited to "No zero and minimum grade policies, Internet-based credit recovery, unregulated make-up policy,

handicapping Individualized Education Plan (IEPs), and ungraded extra credit packets for failing students. Although well-intentioned, these policies end up recycling minority and low SES students in inner city high schools within the educational system and graduating them without educating them. Having been long in these type of divesting policies and practices that rewards them for doing no academic work, these students and their parents make the lives of teachers who are not ready to give unearned grades miserable.

The integration of Bronfenbrenner's theory of bioecological systems, Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Bandura's theory of agency, self-efficacy and self-regulation in studying the academic performance of minority and low SES students and the achievement gap will include high school students in the accountability variables that are not punitive oriented. Evaluating this group of students' academic success and failure through their application of protective factors of person characteristic in neutralizing academic achievement disabling factor recognizes them as generative, creative, and proactive individuals who have the power to influence their high school educational outcome (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). More so, the combination of bioecological systems, habitus and social cognitive theories of development in the evaluation of the meaning and measures of students achievement will provide a holistic analysis of the reasons for the persistence of the achievement gap, validate the meaning that will be inferred through this study, and unify personal, cultural, and social practices in the explanation and improvement of student learning, growth, and achievement. Because of the growing influence of technology on the global arena, the classrooms, and on students' academic outcome, the environmental contexts of the wholistic humanistic framework would

include techno-subsystems. Figure 4.3 is the graphic representation of the wholistic humanistic paradigm of student development and academic achievement.

The complexity of the wholistic humanistic paradigm of human development and academic achievement demonstrates the intricacies of human behavior and explains the fluidity and misunderstanding that cloud the interpretation of student achievement, the persistence of the achievement gap and economic inequity due to the gap. The application of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development in deconstructing students' achievement and under-achievement will bridge the gap between theory and practice through its focus on how students create the learning and social environments, which in turn influence their academic and social development. It will enhance the validity of social policies intended to improve student achievement, and demystify the achievement gap by elucidating the bidirectional and reciprocal relationship between factors involved in inner city high schools students' academic achievement.

These three theories directly and indirectly reinforce and complement each other. Hence, their integration in analyzing students' achievement and academic success will broaden the meaning of achievement to include incremental growth in acquisition and application of maturation and self-enhancing skills and align student achievement and the factors that influence achievement with humanistic theories of human development. Additionally, it will alleviate the pressure and subsequent inferiority complex that arises from having to be compared to a normative group of students with different historical, cultural, and social backgrounds and contexts among minority and low SES students; and empower students to become generative, creative, and proactive individuals determined to choreograph their growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

As inner city high schools become increasingly diverse and achievement gap continues to widen (Lee, 1999), it becomes imperative for educational reforms geared toward closing the achievement gap to empower individual students to see education and learning as both enabling and librating tools that have the potential of freeing them from generational poverty (hooks, 1994). At the center of this theory is the individual actively utilizing her or his personal characteristics of agency, self-efficacy and self-regulation to process, retain, or reject information, based on the student's personal disposition, as she or he indulges in a reciprocal interaction with her or his micro, meso, exo, and macro systems. Conceptually, personal agency, self-efficacy, and self-regulation will be the mediating factors through which the individual arrest, analyze, decide, and discharge information (behavior) as the individual interacts with people, events, and her/himself.

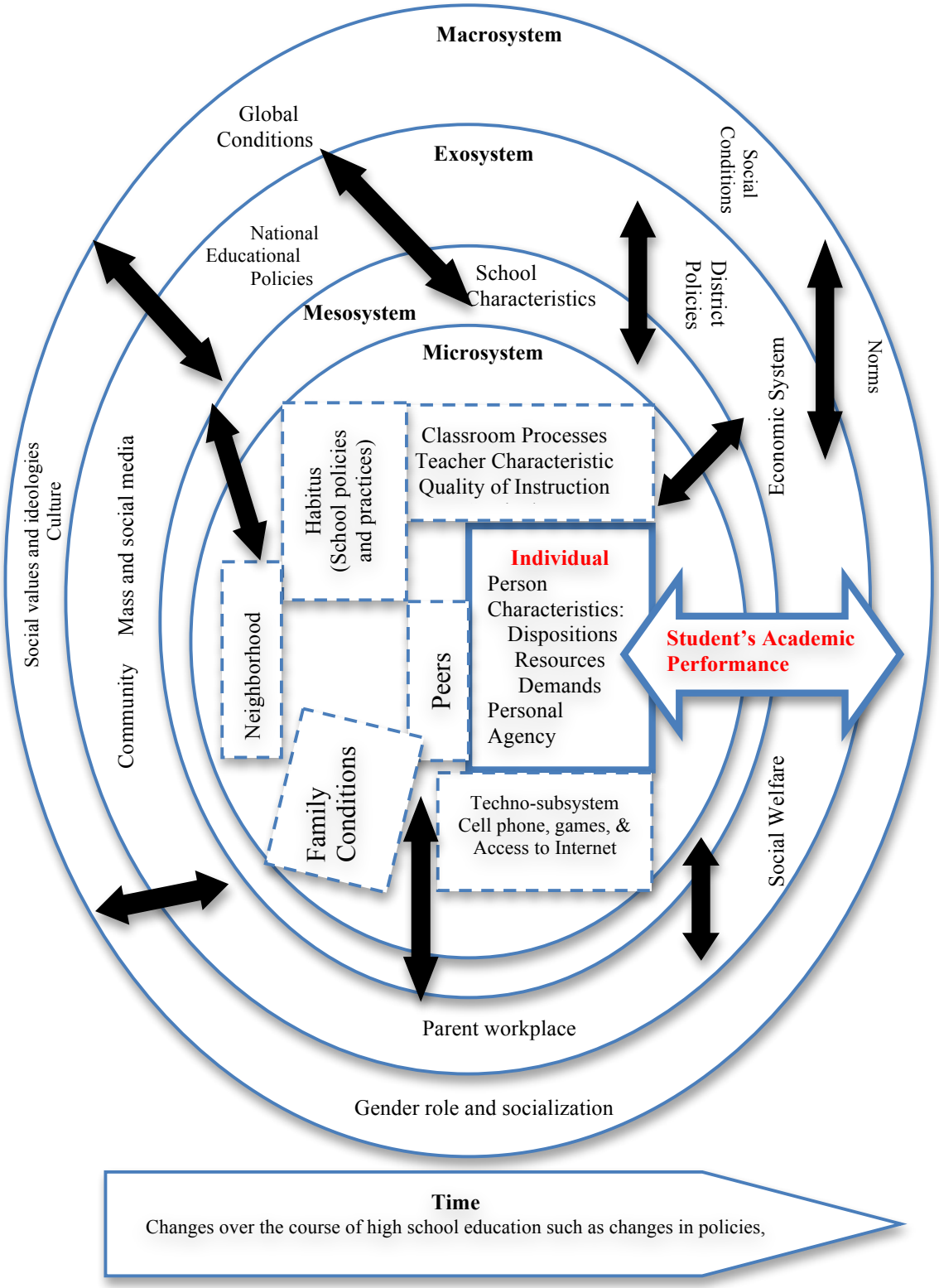

Figure 4.4
The wholistic Humanistic Paradigm of Student Development and Academic Achievement
Derived from a combination of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological paradigm, Systems theory, Bandura's sociocognitive theory of human agency and self-efficacy, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

As I analyze my participants' stories, I will look for evidences of the influences of the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and the impact of time on student's academic achievement behaviors and how these behaviors affect the student's overall academic outcome. Similarly, I will, from the participants' stories deduce how each participant uses sociocoginitive theories of personal agency, self-efficacy, and self-regulation and Bronfenbrenner's person characteristics of dispositions, resources, and demands in making decisions that either enhance or disrupt the reciprocal interaction between her or him and environmental influences that are for or against her or his academic achievement. Additionally, I will use the concept of habitus to explore those microsystem risks that divest student of the protective factors that would have otherwise buffered them from academic failure.

This study would differ from previous students' achievement studies in several ways: It would integrate a holistic and humanistic perspective of human development, achievement motivation, sociocultural and sociocognitive theories in analyzing schooling, school processes and students' outcomes. It would use rich qualitative data from the subgroup of students mostly affected by the achievement gap (Blacks and Hispanic and low SES students) to garner insight into these subgroups of students' understanding of academic achievement, factors that promote or hinders achievement, and the reason for their apathy toward school and academic achievement. Additionally, it would distinguish among different types of resources that constitute the complexity of student achievement. Rather than considering only the simple resources usually included in the school production analysis literature, it would examine the taken-for-granted person elements and environmental factors to reveal their influences on individual

outcome. Above all, this study would examine academic achievement from the perspective of various individuals affected by the phenomenon namely, low achieving minority and low SES students, high achieving minority and low SES students, and teachers of inner city high school students.

Chapter V

Design and Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how academic achievement is performed as an interactional event between minority and low SES students and their inner city high school(s), the mechanisms through which academic achievement is deployed and navigated and the effect of this performance on students' sensemaking of school and schooling, academic behavior and academic outcome. Because student learning, academic development and achievement are complex phenomena that involve the individual and her/his school environment, examining how students negotiate learning and achievement in a naturalistic setting provides a holistic understanding of the achievement gap within and between minority and economically disadvantaged students and their mainstream and affluent peers. In order to attend to how process, person, context, and time shape student learning and educational outcome and vice versa, I employed a humanistic approach to human development that is informed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (2005), Bandura's sociocognitive theory of human development (1996), and Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977).

Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on the type of study and rationale, the research questions, and an in-depth description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as their

selection processes and rationale. Additionally, in this chapter I discuss the data collection and analysis procedures, issues regarding the trustworthiness of the study and the researcher as the research instrument. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations related to the study.

Type of Study and Rationale

This study is an ethnographic case study that draws upon qualitative research traditions. Although different scholars define qualitative research differently and refer to it by various names (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Schwandt, 2005; Kirk & Miller, 1986), the general consensus among scholars is that qualitative research is a diverse method for studying social phenomena that prioritizes the lived experiences, values, and meaning making of study participants of a given phenomenon within their natural setting. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the social world from participants' perspectives and from their natural environment. This priority connects qualitative research to my primary motive of seeking to understand how minority and economically disenfranchised high school students make sense of school, schooling and academic achievement within their inner city high schools.

Despite the diverse nature of qualitative research, certain hallmarks distinguish it from other forms of research. Generally, qualitative researchers describe the field as complex, messy, pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of the study participants. Nevertheless, Rossman and Rallis (2003) deconstruct the complex nature of qualitative research into five distinct characteristics namely: (1) Qualitative research is enacted in a natural setting; (2) Qualitative research draws from multiple methods that respect the humanity of study participants; (3) Qualitative research is

holistic and humanistic; (4) Qualitative research is emergent and evolving in design; and (5) Qualitative research focuses on the context of the subject of interest. Correspondingly, irrespective of the diverse methodologies they engage, qualitative researchers espouse a holistic and complex view of the social world, engage in systemic reflection on the conduct of research, remain sensitive to their own background and experiences and how these shape their study, and rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deductive and inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). These characteristics of qualitative researchers intertwine with the motivation for this study, that I expressed in the epilogue.

Similarly, these overarching hallmarks of qualitative research—complex, interpretive, deductive and inductive, messy, pragmatic, contextual, holistic, humanistic, emergent, evolving, and interactive—situate it as the most appropriate method for my study of minority and economically disadvantaged high school students' academic performance through an integrated wholistic humanistic paradigm. Anchored in this interpretive paradigm, I contended that the achievement gap between minority and economically disadvantaged students' and their mainstream and privileged peers is a socially constructed phenomenon that is contextual and intricate. I posited that the achievement gap could not be properly explored or understood without an integrative framework that reflects the on-going interaction between person and environment, which produces human development, learning, and overall outcome. I argued that these components of human development and learning are both emergent and evolving over time. As such, they can neither be fully understood outside their immediate and distal

environments nor without an understanding of their interaction with active and agentic individuals.

Consequently, I conducted an ethnographic case study design to capture these complexities of minority and low SES students' learning, academic behaviors, and academic outcomes within an inner city high school. Ethnography is a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group, as well as elucidates the different meanings of their shared experiences through complex dialectical deductive and inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2007; Atkinson et. Al, 2001; Bryman, 2001; Van Maanen, 1998). It is an in-depth study of naturally occurring behaviors, interactions, and perceptions of a culture or social group (Atkinson et al., 2001; Bryman, 2001). At the core of ethnographic study is the provision of rich holistic insights into people's values and actions, as well as the nature of the space they inhibit through close association with, and participation in that space (Hammersley, 1992).

Ethnography involves personal contact with the participants and the suspension of apriori assumptions and judgments to understand the nuanced processes at work as the actors within the social setting interact to produce the phenomenon (Brewer, 2000), in this case, the persistence of low educational outcome among minority and economically disadvantaged inner city high school students. An important characteristic of ethnography is a commitment to cultural interpretation. I define culture as the knowledge, values, and beliefs that shape people's behavior (Merriam, 2002; Schein, 2004), and focus on how the actors—minority and economically underprivileged inner city high school students and their school—behave and how they explain their academic behaviors.

I studied a single inner city high school—a system or case within bounded systems or cases of inner city high schools thus, making this study also a case study. I wanted to obtain a holistic picture of: (a) minority and low SES inner city high school students' understanding of academic achievement and the achievement gap, (b) their behaviors that enhance or inhibit learning and academic achievement, (c) the mechanisms by which these behaviors operate, and (d) how the daily taken-for-granted routines of schooling manifest in the students' academic behavior and overall achievement. Schwandt (2007) defines a case as "a specific and bounded (in place and time) instance of a phenomenon selected for study" (p. 27) and posited that there is a dissent of opinion among qualitative scholars as to whether case study research is an empirical strategy for social inquiry or not. Nonetheless, Yin (2009) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry of contemporary phenomenon in its real life contexts. It is an in-depth focus on a single entity in its natural context (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999), or an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007) that "allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real world perspective" (Yin, 2014).

Drawing from these qualitative scholars (Stakes, 2005; 2006; Yin, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007), I chose to frame case study as a methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, an object of study, as well as the choice of what is to be studied; however, unlike them, I also viewed a case study research as the study of a subject(s) who is intertwined with the phenomenon of study. This perspective validates my choice of ethnographic case study as both the type of study and the product of my study. As an object and an arena of the study, case study research

allowed me to first understand the context of my phenomenon of interest—inner city high school and the phenomenon of academic achievement (the case)—and then to carefully examine its functioning and activities and to relate it to other cases (Stake, 2006).

On the other hand, case study research as a qualitative research methodology for studying the subjects (the case) whose actions or inactions produce the phenomenon of the study enabled me to explore a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time through detailed and in-depth data collection (Schwandt, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). Whether as a subject or as an object of the study, the prime referent in any case study is the case and not the methods by which the case operates, while the prime referent in any ethnography is the behavior and the methods by which it occurs and is construed (Merriam, 2002; Brewer, 2000). Hence, the choice of an ethnographic case study expanded the significance of the current study, thereby making it both explorative and explicative. As Yin (1994) posited,

> A case study strategy is preferred when the inquirer seeks answers to how or why questions, when the inquirer has little control over the issue being studied, when the object of the study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context is blurred, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence (cited in Schwandt, 2007, p. 28).

Each of these criteria positions me as the inquirer and the research instrument of the current study. They also describe the study I conducted. The integration of ethnography (with its intent on determining how a culture works) and qualitative case study (with its intent on understanding an issue or problem using a specific case illustration, on generating knowledge about a particular phenomenon, and on furthering understanding of

a problem, issue, and concept e.t.c.) (Stake, 2005; Van Manen, 1990) granted me the "thick description" needed for better understanding how inner city high school students construct and share the meaning of school, schooling, learning, academic achievement and lack of achievement (Glesne, p.17).

Additionally, conducting an ethnographic case study enabled me to immerse myself in the daily lives of minority and low SES inner city high school students. Through detailed participants observation and in-depth interviews I gained better clarification and rich information on their learning, academic behaviors, and overall educational outcomes. Finally, the ethnographic processes—extended time period, extensive fieldwork, detailed description, theme analysis, interpretation and context—granted me the needed time and freedom to holistically explore themes, patterns and ideas that emerged from the data and to meticulously apply the wholistic humanistic framework in analyzing interpreting, and writing-up the meanings I construed from my participants' stories, actions, and inactions.

Although addressing the gap in academic achievement between the haves and the have-nots have been an enduring global concern, it was not until recently, that education scholars began using the qualitative methodologies to explore the phenomenon of students' academic performance. Prior to the 1970s, studies on students' academic outcomes (Freeman, 1924; Parsons, 1959; Coleman et. al, 1966; DiMaggio, 1982; McLaren, 1994; Giroux, 1997) were mostly quantitative in nature. The majority of these scholars seemed to take the popular stance of placing blame on schools, families, and on society and of cultural deficitness. They tended to purport a unitary and reductionist view of minority students as inert individuals acted upon by external social forces and the

achievement variables as outcome of only social causation (Brewer, 2000). Instead of recognizing these students as proactive individuals capable of shaping their academic environment, which in turn shapes their educational outcomes and empowering them to use their inner strength (protective factors of personal agency, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-discipline and self-esteem) in changing their plight, these studies represent minority and low SES high school students as passive-reactive individuals who intentionally choose academic failure in opposition to systemic inequality and discrimination that devalue their culture (Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu & Simmons, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999; Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983).

These studies explained minority and economically disadvantaged students' academic failure as a conscious act aimed at establishing their cultural identity. Although well written and convincing, these studies are provocative in evoking questions regarding why these students would choose academic failure instead of academic achievement as oppositional strategies. These and other studies of their kind represent minority students as inactive individuals incapable of positively influencing their school experiences and academic status. Throughout this study, I viewed minority and low SES students as agentic individuals capable of choosing oppositional strategies that could empower them to positively challenge the unequal social structure that their academic failure enhances and reproduces. I examined students, teachers, and administrators' behaviors as well as school processes, procedures, and policies and how these practices create and sustain poor educational outcome among minority high school students. Only the interpretive paradigm could afford me the lens to explore these assumptions through the lived

experiences and stories of the group of students mostly affected by the myth of academic achievement gap, cultural identity, and oppositional behaviors.

Wholistic Humanistic Perspective

Finally, the use of an integrated wholistic and humanistic perspective of human development, learning and academic achievement as a framework for analyzing and evaluating high school students' academic achievement suggests a deviation from traditional methods of conceptualizing students' educational outcomes. This move introduced a critical stance into my study. Although diverse and divergent in its traditions, critical theory is comprised of "theoretical approaches to reality and rationality that view social facts, not as inevitable constraints on human freedom, but as pieces of history that can be changed" (Agger, 1991, p. 5). It targets social theories that reduce the social world into patterns of cause and effects and argues that such representations are not only undesirable, but also philosophically impossible (Agger, 1991).

At the core of the wholistic humanistic framework is the belief that individual development; learning and academic outcome are not fixed entities and that the individual has the innate ability to shape her or his developmental outcome through the individual's influence on her/his environment and vice versa. Hence, Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Bandura (1986) assert that individuals are active producers of their own outcome through their influence on their environment, which into turn influences their outcomes. Implicitly, the wholistic humanistic paradigm recognizes that oppression is multifaceted and that focusing on only one type of oppression at the expense of the other "often elides the interconnections among them" (Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg,

2011, p. 164). It purports that individuals could become their own oppressors through their actions and/or inactions that reproduce their oppression.

By applying critical theory traditions to this ethnographic case study, I recognized school as a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation (Merriam, 1998) and students, teacher, and school administrators as active, creative, agentic and knowledgeable individuals who in concert with the institution called school reproduce the social order (Brewer, 2000). Thus, I viewed the prior methods of conceptualizing and assessing students' academic achievement as systemic ways of perpetuating subordination and marginalization of the poor and less privileged by subtly divesting them of personal agency, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-esteem. Researchers identify these protective factors as capable of buffering disadvantaged students against poverty-generated adversities such as academic failure (Bernard, 1991; Wang et al., 1998).

Critical theorists focus on integrating theory, practice and inquiry with a "historically grounded understanding of contemporary social, political, and cultural issue" (Hebert & Beardsley, 2009, p. 87). The goal of critical theory research is to explicate unconscious belief systems, free individuals by providing alternative belief systems through self-reflection and social action, and constantly challenge and question societal values and practices (McLaren, 1994; Freire, 1978; Hebert & Beardsley, 2009). Although critical theory has been criticized for its self-serving nature and over presumption in believing that it could emancipate the poor and marginalized of the society (Murillo, 1999); it is my hope that, through its utilization of the wholistic humanistic paradigm, this study would enable both students and educational practitioners

to begin thinking of education as the development of the personhood and of academic or educational failure as a failure in providing an education that promotes the human development, well-being, and dignity of all students. For, it is only in this sense that education becomes emancipatory and self-liberating.

Research Questions

In keeping with its qualitative and critical ethnographic case study nature, the processes and procedures of this study continued to evolve over the course of the research. From the pre-phase components of this study to the writing and reporting of its findings, I indulged in constant re-evaluation of the research questions, methodological approach, and findings of the study. Cognizant of the fact that research questions are subject to change as the research process unfolds (Glesne, 2011), my initial research questions were:

1. How do minority and low SES students explain academic achievement and the achievement gap?
    - How are bioecological systems, habitus, and sociocognitive theories of human development and achievement reflected in their stories of achievement and the achievement gap?
2. What are the reasons for minority and low SES students' indulgent in overt academic disabling behaviors?
    - How are bioecological systems, habitus, and sociocognitive theories of human development and achievement reflected in their stories of achievement enabling and/or disabling behaviors?

3. How do high performing and academically successful minority and low SES students perceive and make sense of school and schooling?
    - How do these academically successful minority and low SES students' stories of remaining academically focused and achievement driven reflect practices of bioecological systems, habitus, and sociocognitive theories of human development and achievement?

However, in light of advice obtained from my committee members, as well as the emergent codes, patterns and themes that I developed as I collected and analyzed data. The final research questions are:

1 How do minority and low SES high school students perceive and make sense of school and schooling?
    - What mechanisms undergird their perception and sensemaking of school and schooling?

2 How does the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures impact student academic behavior, school culture, and student's academic outcome?
    - How does each of these components (person characteristics and school characteristics) influence student learning and academic outcome?

As I explored the navigation and deployment of learning and academic achievement as an interactional event, I methodologically positioned this study within the critical ethnographic case study and critical humanism frameworks. Whereas critical ethnography examines hidden meanings of everyday cultural practices that lend itself to the creation of inequitable conditions (Creswell, 2007), critical humanism explores

cultural practices and dehumanizing assumptions, beliefs and values (Butler, 2000; Aloni, 1999). Guided by the tenets of these two paradigms, I selected a research site in which the phenomenon of minority and low SES high school students' educational underperformance intensely plays out. Below is a description of the site and participant selection strategies and justifications, as well as the setting of the study and its participants.

Site Selection Strategy and Justification

Miles and Huberman (1994) note that sample selection is conceptually driven either by the theoretical framework, which underpins the research questions from the outset or by an evolving theory, which is driven inductively from data as the research proceeds. Hence, my purposes, research questions, and theoretical framework necessitated the use of a selective or purposeful sampling strategy in choosing a site for this study. While Glaser (1978) defined selective sampling as a calculated decision to sample a specific locale according to a preconceived, but reasonable initial set of dimensions such as time, space, identity, power or assumptions, which are worked out in advance for a study, Schatzman & Strauss (1973) described it as a practical necessity that is "shaped by the researcher's time, framework, starting and developing interests, as well as by "any restrictions placed upon the researcher's observations by the hosts" (p. 39). The extenuating conditions for selective sampling lent themselves to this study's site selection strategy.

Schatzman and Strauss's (1973) description of selective sampling makes it similar to purposeful sampling, which Patton (1990) posits that its "logic and power lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 169). Patton described

information-rich cases as "those cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). Drawing from Glazer's (1978), Schatzman and Strauss' (1973), and Patton's (1990) recommendations, I selected an urban high school where the phenomenon of academic achievement gap intensely manifests, as the setting for this study.

Participants Selection Strategy and Justification

As an ethnographic study that focuses on understanding a cultural group, the selection of a study site invariably becomes the selection of participants because the entire cultural group is observed and studied. However, doing ethnography also requires rapport with some members of the cultural group who participate as direct informants in the study (Berreman, 1962). In keeping with my site selection strategy and knowledge regarding the emergent nature of qualitative research methodology, I planned to use theoretical, opportunistic or emergent, and confirming and disconfirming cases sampling strategies in selecting direct informants whose input would explicate the cultural codes, language, and assumptions surrounding the phenomenon as well as inform the data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the findings of this study.

In making the decision to use these three sampling strategies, I reasoned that theoretical sampling with its concept-based focus (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) would allow me to select informants who had directly or indirectly experienced learning and academic high performance and/or underperformance; Opportunistic or emergent sampling, which involves on-the-spot decision about sampling while data collection is in progress (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) would enable me to recruit new informants as the study process unfolded. Confirming and disconfirming cases sampling strategy, which

refers to an on-going exploration of data for emergent patterns that gradually transforms into confirmatory fieldwork (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002), would grant me the opportunity to cross-check emergent ideas from the data corpus, confirm and/or disconfirm the importance and meaning of possible patterns, as well as check for the availability of emergent findings with new data and additional information from both confirming and disconfirming cases.

However, once in the field, I altered the sampling strategy to include snowballing, whereby teacher and student informants I selected using the aforementioned theoretical sampling requirements introduced me to other teachers and students they believed have great insight into the culture of the research setting. Hence, through theoretical sampling and snowballing I recruited informants who were culturally aware of the lived experiences of the students and staff of FHS. Similarly, using confirming and disconfirming cases sampling strategy, I carefully recruited both academically successful and unsuccessful students based on their academic placement, college prep and/or honors/advance placement. Through snowballing, teachers and students helped me to identify students in the respective tracks who were willing to participate in the study as direct informants. Through these four sampling strategies, I gathered thick-rich data that covered the depth and breadth of my inquiry and provided insights into the enigma of FHS students' academic behaviors and persistent low educational outcome that I will discuss in the findings section of this study.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

As Brewer (2000) observed, "A central feature of any research design is the formulation of the topic and the choice of the methods to pursue it" (p.58). Within

ethnography, topic and method often go together. As a style of research distinguished by primarily its objectives—the understanding of social meanings and activities of people in a given setting—and its approaches, which involve close association with, and often participation in, the research setting, ethnography requires the use of several methods to access meaning, observe behaviors, and work closely with informants. These methods include the triangulation of multiple data sources such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, analysis of personal documents, as well as discourse analysis of natural languages and journals (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1970; Brewer, 2000). Given my study's focus on the how inner city high school students make sense of school and schooling and the role of the interaction between person and context in this sensemaking, as well as in keeping with the ethnographic traditions, I selected data sources that would provide the thick, rich description that Geertz (1973) identified as the hallmark of any ethnography.

From September 2013 to December 2014, I generated the following sources of data:

1. 117 semi-structured and unstructured interviews with student informant, which ranged from 15 minutes to 40 minutes and averaged 36 minutes.
2. 1 focus group with participating seniors that lasted 75 minutes.
3. 24 semi-structure and unstructured interviews with faculty informant, which ranged from 15 minutes to 75 minutes and averaged 53 minutes.
4. 5 classroom observations that lasted 60 minutes each.
5. 3 student led classroom discussions that lasted 25 minutes each.

6. 50 students' journals on school, schooling, and academic achievement, which ranged from 1/3 page to 1 page with a total of 15 hand written pages.
7. Documents on school programs, policies, and procedure.
8. 158 pages of typed field notes focused on student, teacher, and administrative behaviors as well as faculty meets and professional development sessions.
9. 30 pages personal journal and diary.

Focus Group Data

I used focus group interview to explore my participants' shared understanding and experiences with school, schooling, and academic achievement and/or lack of achievement in this space. While Schutt (2003) defines focus group "as an interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals formed by an investigator and led in a group discussion on some particular topic or topics" (p. 144), Kairuz, Crump and O'Brien (2007) refer to it as a group discussion in order to identify perceptions, thoughts and impressions of a selected group of people regarding a specific topic of investigations. Stated differently, focus group interview is a guided or unguided group discussion addressing particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and to the researcher (Edmund, 2000). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2008) simply referred to it as a "collective conversation" (p. 375) that can be either small or large.

As Cook & Crang (1995) posited, a focus group is not simply an avenue for obtaining accounts of individuals. Rather, it is a means for negotiating meanings through intra- and inter-personal debates and for exploring and examining what people think, how they think, and why they think the way they do about issues of importance to them without pressuring them into making decisions or reaching a consensus (Liamputtong,

2011). Drawing from Kairuz, Crump and O'Brien (2007) as well as Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2008) I formed a heterogeneous eight-members focus group of seniors to conduct a collective conversation around the issues of school, schooling, academic achievement and lack of achievement in FHS. Their seventy-five minutes deliberation, which produced seventeen typed single-spaced pages of transcript, informed the key informants' initial interview protocol.

According to Liamputtong (2011), focus group interview prioritizes interaction. Through interaction, focus group participants create a "synergistic group effect" (Berg, 2007; Sussman, et al., 1991; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). This synergy allows participants to draw from one another's ideas or to brainstorm collectively with other members of the group and leads to the generation of a far larger number of ideas, issues, topics, and solutions to problems than is possible through individual interviews and observations (Berg, 2007; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). In this study, the discussion between and among the focus group participants not only afforded me the opportunity to hear issues, which may not have emerged in my interaction with each participant alone, but it also enabled me to place more emphasis on the perspectives of the participants than my own viewpoints (Gaiser, 2008).

As a group endeavor, focus group is an inviting method for researchers who are working from "power-sensitive" theoretical perspectives in that it reduces the imbalance in power relationships between the researcher and participants that grants the researcher the "authoritative voice" (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, focus groups create data from multiple voices' (Madriz 2003). They provide an opportunity for researchers to listen to local voices and give 'voice' to the research participants by affording them

opportunity to define what is relevant and important to the understanding of their shared lived experiences (Liamputtong, 2011). Through this focus on participants' perspectives, focus group interview allowed me to pay close attention to the needs of FHS students who have little or no societal voice, while, to some extent, reducing my visibility as students prompted, probed, argued and counter-argued their understandings and interpretations of issues pertinent to them in the construction and reconstruction of their future through "the institution" called school "that everyone must partake" (focus group data, 2014) and the phenomenon of the achievement gap as it is performed in FHS. The collective conversation and deliberation among the focus group participants granted me the opportunity to appreciate the way students see and negotiate their own reality as well as to get closer to the data on students' sensemaking of school, schooling, and academic achievement (Ivanoff & Hultberg 2006).

Although focus group has been identified as an unsuitable tool for in-depth access to and understanding of the participants' experiences (Hopkins, 2007) they may not actively engage all participants in the discussion, especially in institutional contexts, such as the workplace or schools; however, as a social network group, focus group enabled me to discover "how accounts are articulated, censured, opposed, and changed through social interaction and how this relates to peer communication and group norms" (Kitzinger 2005, p. 58). Hence, the heterogeneous group of male and female AP and CP students helped me to examine how students' understanding and interpretation of school processes, policies, and procedures differ by social groups (such as age and gender) and academic tracks in addition to offering me possibilities for exploring "the gap between

what students, teachers, and administrators say and what they actually do (Conradson 2005).

Additionally, focus group allowed me to attend to participants' collective feelings and thoughts about academic achievement and the achievement gap as they share their experiences and views with each other in conversation. Finally, the use of focus group enabled me to better understand how the members of FHS cultural group arrive at, or alter their conclusions about student learning and academic performance. It granted me access to the interactional clues among and between members of this culture-sharing group and permitted me to gather a large amount of cross-sectional information from a potentially more experienced group, twelfth grade students, who have been in this space the longest. Appendix C and D are the interview protocol for focus group and direct informants as well as their relationship to the research questions.

Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interviews

While Kvale (1996) describes interview as "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest" (p. 14), Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) explain 'the interview' as "not simply concerned with collecting data about life." Rather, the interview is a part of life itself, and its human embeddedness is inevitable (p. 267). The research interview, then, is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through dialogue (Kvale, 1996). Through semi-structured and unstructured interviews, I asked the forty-five key informants evocative questions that got them involved into discussing their views and perceptions that addressed the focal points my study, thereby revealing their understanding and experiences with school, schooling, students, teacher and administrative behaviors, and the achievement gap.

Semi-structured interview refers to a list of predetermined open-ended questions that are generally organized around key themes and issues pertinent to the research topic, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kajornboon, 2005). Corbetta (2003) describes semi-structured interview as one, which the interviewer determines the order and wording of the questions, the appropriateness of the questions, and the method and the progression of the conversation, that is, when to ask new question or to probe for explanation, clarification and depth. Semi-structured interview is usually scheduled in advance and at a designated time and place outside of everyday events (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Its flexible structure gives the researcher opportunities to probe for views and opinions of the interviewee (Kajornboon, 2005).

Following Corbetta and DiCicco-Bloom's recommendations, I prepared a twenty-five-interview protocol for student and a twenty-interview protocol for teachers from which I polled and probed during my scheduled initial interviews with each of the key informants. Nevertheless, as an emergent document, the protocols were constantly modified as the need arose. After the initial interview with the key informants, subsequent interview protocols drew from emergent questions, patterns, and themes from both the key informants' data and the other pertinent issues that were unfolding from the study. Hence, Semi-structured interviews enabled me to probe deeper into given situations and to explain or rephrase my questions if the respondents were not clear about the questions (Kajornboon, 2005).

Having key themes and sub question in advance gave me a sense of order and granted me a quick protocol from which I drew questions for unplanned encounters

(David & Sutton, 2004). Throughout the study, I tape-recorded every semi-structured interview I had with each key informant except one person who refused to be recorded. Additionally, I aligned all the semi-structure interview questions with this study's research question (see Appendix D), as well as its underlying epistemic and ontologic assumption. Furthermore, the straight forward questions (How old are you? Which track are you in, CP, Honors, or AP? How many years have you been teaching? How many of those years are spent in FHS?) enabled me to collect information that I used in developing a rich, thick description of the participants and the research site (Hatch, 2002). Overall, I conducted seventy-eight semi-structured interviews with the key informant to this study.

On the other hand, unstructured interview is non-directed, flexible and more casual than semi-structured interview (Kajornboon, 2005). I used the unstructured interviews or what I refer to, throughout this document, as on-the-spot conversation to obtain in-depth information from both informant and non-informant participants within the setting of the study. These on-the-spot conversations happened more frequently than planned interviews and discussion. As unstructured interview, they occurred at any time and any place that my phenomenon of interest manifested. There was no preset interview guide. Rather, I followed the direction of the conversation and asked questions that explicated, deepened and/or provided more insight in respondents' opinions and knowledge as well as sharing of theirs' or others' lived experiences with the phenomenon (Gray, 2004; Kajornboon, 2005). Each unstructured interview was different as I encouraged the respondent to speak openly and frankly and to give as much detail as possible on the subject of interest. Hence, the unstructured interviews were not tap-

recorded; instead, I embedded them into my field and observation notes. Overall, I engaged in thirty-six on the-spot conversations with non-key informant participants and three on-the-spot conversations with the key informants.

Irrespective of the intellectual rigor involved in concurrently listening, communicating, facilitating, thinking, processing, and carefully asking non-intimidating questions as well as rephrasing questions properly and knowing when to probe or prompt, the flexibility of semi-structured and unstructured interview enabled me to gather rich, thick information on my phenomenon of interest and to explore the underlying motives of my participants' actions and inactions by revealing their deep-seated and subconscious feelings.

Observational Fieldnotes, Reflexive Journals and Diaries

In addition to the audio recording and transcription of all audio recorded data, I maintained observational field notes pertinent to each event I observed as well as any spontaneous interaction with participants. As Marshall and Rossman (2011) posit, "observation is central to qualitative research" and "fieldnotes are "detailed, nonjudgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed written down or talked to a tape recorder" (p.139). Participant observation is the hob of ethnographies. It encompasses all activities that enable the researcher to get to know the setting and people within the setting, to learn the routines, and to record actions and interactions including using checklists to tick off pre-established actions. Field notes are the documentation of what was observed, and/or felt during and after observation (Merriam, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Accordingly, my observational field notes comprised of a combination of what Merriam (1998) refer to as observer commentary—field notes that include "the

researcher's feeling, reaction, hunches, initial interpretations, and working hypotheses" (p. 106), and what Marshall & Rossman (2011) describe as a "systemic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting" (p. 139).

Fine (2003) defines participant observation as the process of becoming a part of the community, while observing their behaviors and activities and assert that ethnography is most effective when one observes the group being studied in settings that enable her or him to "explore the organized routines of behavior" (p. 41). Although participant observation is an ethnographic process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to blend into a community so that its members will act naturally (Bernard, 1994), it is also a process of learning to remove oneself from the setting or community, in other words, making the familiar strange in order to immerse oneself in the data, understand what is going on, and to be able to write about it (Bernard, 1994).

Hence, as I brokered relationships with key gatekeepers and participants, negotiated and renegotiated my multiple statuses as researcher, participant, and audience of this study, I determined to position myself as a participant-observer, a position that allowed for continuous reflexivity as I consistently struggled to make the familiar strange, while at the same time maintaining a familiar relationship with the participants as the research unfolds. In order to achieve this unnatural position, I kept a daily reflexive journal (Dairy) through which I monitored my words, actions, and inactions as I navigated my multiple statuses within the setting. Consequently, through observational field notes, I was able to story my interactions with the setting, which I later unpacked in my research diary for evidences of self-intrusion, superimposition, and/or presuppositions that might have surreptitiously infiltrated into the data.

Similarly, I used field notes to record structured and unstructured event occurring in the research setting as I observed them. Hence, as I created and recorded my observation of activities, ceremonies as well as individual and collective behaviors occurring in the setting, I attended to formal and informal conversations along with verbal and nonverbal communications with and within participants and the setting. Knowing that tape recording would not capture all the nonverbal cues, I took copious notes on participants' body language, facial expressions, and pauses during interviews and observations. Thus, my observational notes often included various symbols that represent variety of nonverbal cues that my participants exhibited during interviews, formal and informal conversations and observations. I enclosed these symbols within a parenthesis to delineate them from verbal cues such as laughing and yawning that the audio recorder could capture.

For instance, I wrote the following during an interview with one of my key informants, Kiesha, as she explains why FHS students do not care about learning: (1) [spins round twice with both hand raised while speaking] "Well finally;" (2) [suddenly stops spinning] (3) [pauses for about 5 seconds] (4) [drops head and gradually raising it as she speaks] "Well, actually;" (5) [places palm on lap] "and that's when;" (6) [eyes raised][shaking head] "You talking more about dress code;" (7) [resumed spinning] "I think they worry;" (8) [stops spinning and smiles] "That's how I feel." In order to align the nonverbal cues to verbal cues that follow them, I included in my notes the first couple of words the participant said concurrently with the nonverbal or after the nonverbal. I attended to nonverbal communications because I believe that they reveal the unspoken feeling of the speaker, complement and/or explicate the spoken words, and since audio

recording does not capture these, missing them would imply missing major aspect of data that is relevant to the study.

Often, I began each formal observation with a preamble that provided a background for the observation, a positioning of the setting and in-depth description of the observation scene, and a notation of the physical appearance, equipment, and/or documents that were present in the scene and the targeted phenomenon as it relates to my study. I would then turn on my tape recorder to capture the verbal interactions, while I take copious notes that focuses on the nonverbal cues and on-the-spot hunches, insights, questions and/or emotions that I encountered within the scene. Appendix E is a sample of the observational notes for this study. As I transition from observation to observations, I took some time to document any unfolding insights and questions as they relate to my research questions. Throughout the observation and interview processes, I remained aware of how my presence could impact the data I am generating and worked cautiously, after each session to unpack these influences through reflexive journals. Appendix F is an excerpt from one of my reflexive journals after an informal conversation with a participant.

Correspondingly, field notes enabled me to keep details of events, my reaction to events, and changes in my view and perception of my study's phenomenon and subjects over time. My observation field notes and reflexive journals served as a melting pot for all the different ingredients in the research project—prior experiences, observations, readings, ideas—as well as a means of capturing the resulting interplay between these elements. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) allude to this function of the research field notes and journals when they referred to the researcher's notes as "the vehicle for ordered

creativity" (p. 105), stressed that note-taking and research diary keeping are much more than a mechanical means of storing information for later retrieval, and argued that the "researcher requires recording tactics that will provide him *or her* with an ongoing, developmental dialogue" (p. 94).

Drawing from Schatzman and Strauss, I also maintained a personal weekly research diary where I disaggregated the observational fieldnotes and musings from the transcription of interview data into theoretical, and methodological notes. At the end of each week, I reviewed the research diary noting the transformations that might have occurred in the theoretical framework and methodological designs through emergent patterns. The research diary includes exact quotes from participants that speak to or detracts from the theoretical framework and my personal musings on the data through which I connect it to other theories and exit literature. Appendix G is a sample of my research diary.

The combination of observational field notes, reflexive journal, and research diary enabled me to keep track of the emergent features, themes, and characteristics of the research setting, participants, and myself, as I muddled through the messy act of qualitative data collection and analysis. Whereas daily observational notes helped me to keep a chronological account of the research processes and events, the reflexive journal allowed me to track my emotional ups and downs, and a weekly research diary provided a coherent record of the emergent ideas, information, activities, and my reflective thoughts as they relate to the theoretical framework and methodologies.

Data Analysis Procedure

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) define analysis as the process a researcher uses to reduce data into a story and as the researcher's interpretation of the data. Data analysis is a process of reducing large amount of collected data into smaller units in order to make sense of them (Kawulich, 2004). It is a challenging and exciting stage of the qualitative research process that requires a mix of creativity, systematic searching, and a blend of inspiration and diligent detection (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2003). Data analysis is an inherent and ongoing part of qualitative research (Grbich, 2013; Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2003) that involves complex action of moving back and forth between data and concepts and between description and interpretation using both inductive and deductive reasoning (Merriam, 1998). Miles (1979) refers to the complex nature of qualitative data as an attractive nuisance and recommends that data be reduced into manageable units through sifting, labeling, ordering, or even reducing them into key themes, concepts, or categories before embarking on full analysis and interpretation of data.

Following Miles advice, I began the analytic process of this study through what I called segmental analysis of data, a process whereby I transcribed and hand coded each data segment line-by-line by immediately after I collected it. I began from an emic[18] perspective and worked my way through emergent codes and patterns within each data corpus.[19] First, I transcribed each data segment[20] within two days of collecting it. The

[18] An emic approach to data is an insider, inductive, or bottom-up approach to data that takes as its starting point the perspective and words of research participants. In taking an emic perspective, I put aside prior theories and assumptions in order to allow the participants and data to speak to theories and assumptions as well as to allow themes, patterns, and concepts to emerge from the participant and the data.
[19] In this document, I use data corpus to refer to a large collection or body of data generated from this study.

transcription process occurred concurrently with the first with the first cycle coding and analysis as I was still generating data for the study. During transcription, I listened and re-listened to the recording and transcribed verbatim everything I heard. I also included in each transcript the accompanying nonverbal cues that I captured on my field notes. I reviewed each transcript and recording again and again adding and correcting any error in the verbatim transcript.

Second, similar to other qualitative approaches, I took an interpretive and emergent approach to analyzing the data generated for this study. I paid attention to each participant's spoken and unspoken words, actions, and inactions that spoke to the research questions across the data set. Hence, I hand coded each interview data immediately after I completed the transcription, noting features and patterns that emerge across the data. I used invivo[21] codes to delineate participants' words and statements that I thought needed further analysis and exploration as the study unfolded as well as words and statements that spoke directly to the participant's sensemaking of school and the bidirectional interaction between person and context.

Third, I used descriptive codes to quickly document what I thought the participant was saying and sought emergent patterns within the data using pattern coding. Through invivo, descriptive[22] and pattern[23] coding, I familiarized myself with the content of each data segment before engaging in holistic coding and data analysis, which began after

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[20] Data segment refers to individual data collected each participant interview, focus group, observation, and/or document.
[21] In Vivo codes refer to words or short phrases from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, the terms used by participants themselves (Saldana, 2009).
[22] Descriptive codes refer to a short phrase or word that summarizes the basic topic of a qualitative data (Saldana, 2009).
[23] Pattern codes refer to explanatory or inferential codes that identify an emergent theme, configuration or explanation. Pattern codes pull together a lot of materials into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis (Saldana, 2009).

immediately I completed the first formal interviews and observation. This was a repetitive process that I carried out every time I collected new data until I reached data saturation and then embarked on a full analysis and interpretation of the entire data corpus.

The invivo, descriptive, and pattern codes that emerged from the segmental analysis were many and varied by participant and data source. Through these codes and patterns, I created initial codes, which I transferred to the data corpus during the intensive coding and analysis of the entire data set. The segmental analysis enabled me to plan follow-up interviews with key informants. Since this group of participants played the roles of observers and observed, in this study, their first interview served as an inlet into their personal sensemaking of school and schooling as it played out in the study's setting as well as their perceptions of others' sensemaking of school and schooling in the context.

In separately coding and analyzing each of the key informants' first individual contribution to the study, I worked to separate their personal values, beliefs, and assumptions about school and schooling as well as their understanding of the context from their presumed collective values, beliefs and assumption about school, schooling, and the context, attending closely to any ambivalence and/or ambiguity inherent in individual transcripts. I took up this notion in my first follow-up interview with the key informants, probing for explication and enlightenment into sources of the ambivalence and/or ambiguity about school, school processes, policies, and procedures that I identified within their narratives. Throughout this first step, I took notes as I reflected on the sections that I found striking and provocative (Replay, 2007).

I began the intensive analysis and interpretation of the data generated in this study by, first re-reading the 389 pages of transcript in their entirety, but this time as a single narrative. I annotated, reflected, and journaled as I read the document noting salient themes, motifs, symbols and metaphors that constituted the story of FHS students, faculty and staff about school, schooling and academic achievement as they are deployed and navigated at FHS. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Bandura (1977) individuals are both producers and products of their environment. Hence, this narrative reading of the data set as a single document gave me a holistic view of the data, while allowing me to position FHS as a system, a case that must be attended to first as a whole before seeking a comprehensive understanding of its component parts.

Next, I read the field notes, students' journals, and my personal journal and diary to familiarize myself with their content and to take mental notes on the relations within the data sets. As I read each data set, I bracketed relationships and differences with apriori descriptive codes that I generated through segmental analysis. This bracketing allowed me to come back later to identify and connect cross-sectional and non-cross-sectional patterns, concepts, and themes within the data set (Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003). Once I finished the narrative reading of each data unit, I once again disaggregated the data corpus to its component parts: personal interview, focus group, discussion, observations, fieldnotes and diaries, and memos, using attribute coding (Saldana, 2009). I imported the files into NViVo 10, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), which enabled me to reduce and organize the data by interview questions. Because the students' journals were hand-written, I did not upload them into NVivo; rather I coded them as hard documents with other documents I collected from the site.

Using NVivo 10, I re-read and re-coded the entire data set labeling data segments, noting patterns from participants' words and from concepts drawn from the theoretical framework, student achievement literature, and developmental and humanistic psychology. Recognizing that my own positionality influences the way in which I engage in any analysis process, I decided to begin by analyzing my research journal and diaries since those were the data in which I reflected on my presuppositions and recorded my initial hunches. This first holistic coding of the data set generated forty-five codes, which I worked through three additional coding cycles to condense to eight major categories with various sub-categories. Table 5.1 list of initial in vivo and descriptive codes that I generated during first cycle coding, while Table 5.2 is a list of the initial forty-five emergent categories.

Table 5.1. Initial Codes

Invivo	Descriptive	Invivo	Descriptive
"Not everybody wants to be here"	Wants to be	"school is a joke"	Meaning/purpose of school
"Welfare"	forced to be	"A place to hang out"	School is for socialization
"tomorrow is not a promise"	rather be	"something to do"	School is a past time activity
"SMASH team"	Blames school/ Exonerates govt.	"getting up early," "long hours." And long classes.	Length of schooling and waking time
"Settlement"	Disabling/divesting policies/	"School doesn't balance out"	School is an irony
"School drama"	Waste of instructional time	"the school lacks spirit"/its very boring	Low moral/apathy
"Plug in"	"administrators prevent schooling"	"Don't do homework,"	Apathy/laziness
"not mentally ready"	Lacks perquisite skills	"Don't study"/lazy"	Apathy/laziness
"Lacks motivation"	apathetic	"Don't wana work"/lazy	Apathy/laziness
"can't swim in	Handicapping	"wana laugh and	School is a joke

freezing waters”	environment	joke”	
“betting the system”	Handicapping behavior/settlement for	“School is an environment”	Bidirectional interaction
“Caught up”	Settlement for/joining-in	“You can’t make someone learn”	Mindset affect learning
“grit and determination”	Success is having grit;	“You can’t force knowledge”	Mindset affects learning
“Handouts”	Handicapping policies	“System has gotten lot easier to pass”	Handout/settlement
“Don’t discipline/won’t discipline/look class disruption as a joke”	Positive reinforcement for unwanted behavior	“a bunch of negative mindset”/”punch bag”	Mindset affects learning

Table 5.2: Initial 45 Emergent Categories		
Academic Achievement	Reason for lack of achievement	Staying focused
Attitude	Race and segregation	Problem with students
“Welfare”	My dream	Problem with school
caring	Learning	School rules and policies
“SMASH team”	Silencing students	School and society
“Settlement”	Definition of school	Why student don’t do academic work
Questioning loyalty	Waste of instructional time	What school needs
How school reduces disruption of learning	“administrators prevent schooling”	Meaning of high school
Importance of education	Lacks perquisite skills	Why school is a joke
“Lacks motivation”	Environment	Why students act up in class
“can’t swim in freezing waters”	Experience with school	Why students fail tests and quizzes
“betting the system”	Settlement for/joining-in	Why students don’t like coming to school
“Caught up”	FHS vs. other schools	“You can’t force knowledge”
challenges		Why student get written up
“Handouts”	S300	School drama
Don’t Like		

Beginning with my first research question—How do minority and low SES students perceive and make sense of school and schooling?—I re-coded each of the eight categories with their accompanying sub-categories selecting specific portions of the transcripts for a closer and iterative analysis. As I carefully searched for evidences of students' perception and sensemaking of school, I noted how their sensemaking was informed by: (1) school processes and societal events, (2) habitus, and (3) personal agency and self-efficacy. I continued coding and re-coding the data looking for patterns and creating new categories and concepts about students sensemaking of school and the sources of their inferences and conclusion about the meaning of school and schooling from emergent patterns. I coded backward and forward using inductive and deductive iteration. Finally, after identifying pattern and variable across the data, as well as attending to sequential and non-sequential relationships within the data set, I formed tentative explanations about students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling and the role of process, person, context, and time, (PPCT) in their sensemaking.

I repeated the process again, focusing on the bidirectional interaction between person and context. First, I noted student and school characteristics that emerged from the data and then worked to identify how: (1) student characteristics influence student learning and academic outcome, (2) school characteristics influence student learning and academic outcome, and (3) student and school characteristics influence students' academic behaviors and school culture. Again, I formed tentative explanations about the bidirectional interaction between student characteristics and school culture as well as their interactional effect on student learning, academic behaviors, and academic outcome

as they emerged from the data and began writing up my findings. As I worked, I paid particular attention to the epistemic and ontological claim of the study's approach, noting where personal agency, self-efficacy, habitus, context and time were made relevant in the participants' stories. I compared the tentative explanations across the data corpus, as well as their relationship to the broader bodies of literature until I reached a "conclusive" iteration of findings. As I generated the tentative explanations, I bore in mind that "interpretations themselves are always contextualized and provisional. There is always the possibility of a new interpretation" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 165).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Although methodologically delineating the nature of the data collection and analysis procedures is an important step in any research process, it is equally important to specify the measures taken to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness in qualitative research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). However, as Glesne (2011) posits, "We cannot create criteria to ensure that something is true or accurate if we believe concepts are socially constructed" (p. 49). Hence, in as much as I want to be believable, I also know that knowledge is not one-dimensional and no one perspective is entirely right (Miller, 2000; Ellingson, 2009). Reality is a socially constructed dance that no one person makes and so are academic achievement, learning, and academic behaviors. Aware of this epistemic implication as well as my positionality and partiality, I approached the interpretation of my data as an emergent process, thus grounding my findings in the data corpus and intentionally seeking ways to claim plausibility and credibility for my work. Further, to ascertain the trustworthiness of my work, I carried out specific activities that

align with the theoretical perspectives of ethnographic case study with critical orientation to the analysis (Ager, 1991).

First, I acknowledge the need for reflexivity in the research process, recognizing that knowledge is partial and no single viewpoint is completely right or wrong (Noblit, 1999). Hence, all research; be it quantitative or qualitative has some layer of subjectivity. Acknowledging such, I claim partial knowledge about my phenomenon even as I have rigorously studied it. Thus, I situate my interpretation as one of many possible explanations of how the academic achievement and subsequent educational outcome of minority and low SES students is performed in an inner city school. Through memoing, journaling, recording, and electronically saving each analytical and theoretical decision, I created an audit trail that allows any outside researcher to review and become familiar with my decision-making processes and my interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I also preserved my data set for easy accessibility and verification to ascertain its existence and the consistency of my interpretations within the data corpus (Guba, 1981).

Second, with participants' stories being understood as having shifting and multiple meanings (Arzubiaga et al., 2008; Allison & Pomeroy, 2000), I consciously sought alternative cases and explanations (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011). In seeking out negative instances/disconfirming cases or variability, I attended to inconsistencies and diversity within key informants' stories with regards to my research questions and theoretical framework. Additionally, I member-checked all interviewed transcripts with their respective participants for correction and/or approval before embarking on intensive analysis and interpretation of data.

Third, I supported each of my explanations with detailed evidence and explications, showing how the participants' stories relate to the given claim. By meticulously and transparently presenting how excerpts from the data corpus support each of my claims, I provided space for the reader to evaluate my claims (Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Tisdale, 2004). Also, throughout the findings and discussion chapters, I incorporated my positionality, at times quoting directly from my research journal and diary. I intentionally did this to demonstrate trustworthiness and relational ethics to my audience (Guba, 1981; Lather, 1986).

Finally, cognizant of my positionality and the fact that triangulation is an inherent part of ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 1973), I chose to use the concept of crystallization to describe my intentional use of multiple theoretical perspectives as well as multiple sources of data and analysis in my struggle to enhance trustworthiness without compromising the ontological and epistemic assumptions of the study. Both Richardson (2007) and Ellingson (2009), described crystallization as the combination of multiple forms of data-collection methods, sources of investigation, multiple theoretical perspectives, data analysis methods, and representational forms. According to them, knowledge is inexhaustible; crystallization enables qualitative researchers to claim partial knowledge of a phenomenon even when they have acquired a deepened, complex, and thorough understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more but doubt what we know because we believe that there is always more to be known (Richardson, 2000).

Hence, through crystallization I evaluated the participants' sensemaking of school, academic behaviors and academic achievement through an integrated framework that comprises of multiple theoretical perspectives and multiple data-collection methods.

In my use of crystallization, I acknowledge that there are many sides from which to approach the world and a given phenomenon. Hence, aligned Richardson (2000), I assert that we do not triangulate data; rather we crystallize it. Like a crystal, crystallization combines multidimensionalities and angles of approaches to a given phenomenon thereby recognizing the fact that what one sees when she or he looks at a phenomenon depends on how she or he views it and how she or he holds it to the light (Janesick, 2000 in Ellingson, 2009).

Consequently, utilizing the concept of crystallization (instead of triangulation) as a means of establishing trustworthiness allowed me to situate myself as the researcher and the research instrument of this study and to acknowledge the limitations within this study given my personal limitations, subjectivity and positionality. However, through constant reflection, thick rich descriptions, member checking; prolonged engagement in the site; persistent observation, and negative case analysis; constant reflexivity and journaling, I remained keenly aware of who I am vis-avis the study and the study's participants and how this mat have impacted the study's findings if not monitored (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, I worked to uphold the ethical obligations relevant to this research study. With a commitment to protecting my participants, I adhered to all the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board at The University of South Carolina, Columbia. I acknowledge that there is no direct relationship between ethics committee approval of a research project and what actually happens in the research process, as the committee does not have direct control over what the researcher does in the field. Hence,

"responsibility falls back to the researchers, themselves. They are the ones on whom the conduct of ethical research depends (Guillemmim & Gillam, 2004, p. 269).

Consequent upon this, before beginning the study, I ensured that all participants involved in the study as direct informants: (1) had all the information they needed to make informed decision regarding their participation in the study (2) received, signed and returned an informed consent form attesting to their knowledge of the procedures, risks, and benefits available to them as a result of participating in the study as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time they no longer feel like continuing, (3) I assured the participants of their safety and the safety of the information they share with me by providing and maintaining confidentiality of participants' information throughout the study and after the study.

In order to increase confidentiality, all participants in the study received a pseudonym through blind selection of names from a hat. Similarly, all data collected for the study was be labeled and stowed away in a secure file cabinet at my house and on my personal computer. Each of the electronic data generated from the study was titled, dated and saved both as word documents, audio files, and as pdf files. Storing the electronic documents as pdf files enhanced the authenticity and limited accidental alteration of the data. Finally, cognizant of the power deferential between the research participants and I, I aimed to interrogate my own power across structure, discourse, and practice, while engaging in recursive reflexivity (Pillow, 2003; Noblit et al., 2004). As I reflectively considered my assumptions, I worked to protect the participants, myself, and the integrity of this study. While doing so, I did not adopt or solicit for a reflexive space that is devoid of complexities, instead I recognize that the reflexive space of inquiry is not one that seek

"a comfortable, transcendent end-point," but is always "messy" and leaves "us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research" (Pillow, 2003, p. 193).

Chapter Summary

The complex nature of the phenomenon of interest, the research questions and the purpose of the study as well as utilization of an integrated holistic humanistic paradigm for this study justifies my choice of a critical ethnographic case study qualitative design as the methodological approach to this study. Ethnographic case study enabled me to explore, develop and describe the participants' shared beliefs, behaviors and experiences with achievement and the achievement gap, while allowing me to extrapolate meaning from the participants' shared culture of achievement about the meaning and nature of the achievement gap. Moreover, my critical lens enabled me to examine the mechanisms of power and domination that subtly divest minority and economically disadvantaged students of academic self-efficacy, discipline, and hard work needed to succeed in school. Above all, the critical lens enabled me to critically develop and describe emergent themes, ideas, beliefs, and symbols prevalent in the participants' shared experiences about school, learning and academic achievement in comparison to generally accepted beliefs and practices around minority and low SES students' academic achievement and the achievement gap.

Chapter VI

Study Setting and Participant

The setting of this study is Freedom High School (pseudonym), a comprehensive urban public high school in the U. S. south. Freedom High School (FHS) has a rich legacy of having served the educational needs of its metropolis for over a hundred years. Over time, the demographics and educating power of FHS as the one-time Ivy League high school of its city and surrounding towns dwindled, mirroring the changes in social, economic, and political composition of its constituency and the larger society. Currently, FHS is classified as one of the struggling schools in the area, even though it forcefully seeks to improve student learning and educational outcome through the implementation of No Child Left Behind's (NCBL) mandates of strict accountability for the education of all students. The goal of the school is to help its students "to master numeracy and literary skills; demonstrate high-order thinking skills, social skills, and character traits necessary to be*come* contributing citizens in a global economy, and *to become* life-long learners empowered to continue exploring their interests and passion" (School Renewal Plan, 2013, p. 8; italicized not in the original).

Snapshot of Student Demography and Academic Performance Over Five Years

At the time of the study (2013-2014), FHS was a predominantly minority school that had facilitated the education of approximately 800 high school students within the area, for over five years. The demographic composition of its student body in 2013 was 87% black, 11% Hispanic and other minority groups, and 2% white. Within this

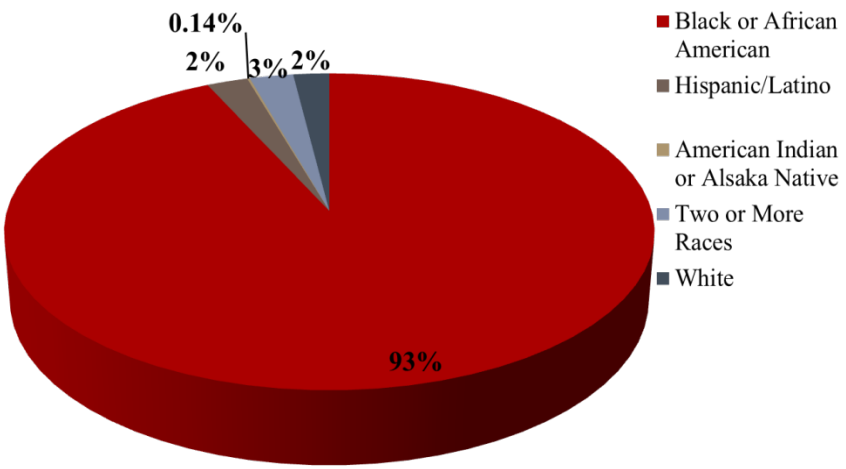
demography were 18% special education (SPED) and 6% limited English proficiency (LEP) students. Table 6.1 is a five-year representation of the demographics of FHS student body by race and ethnicity as well as SPED and LEP students, while figure 6.1 is a pie chart representation of the demographics in 2014.

Table 6.1: Five Years Demographics of FHS Student Body by Race and Ethnicity

Year	Black	White	Other	Free/RL	SPED.	LEP
2009	92.8%	3.4%	3.9%	59.2%	14.1%	NA
2010	91.6 %	2.9%	5.5%	64.7%	13.1%	NA
2011	90.4%	1.7%	7.9%	74.7%	14.3%	4.6%
2012	88.1 %	2.2%	9.7%	69.1%	15.7%	6.2%
2013	86.6 %	2.2%	11.0%	68.5%	17.8%	6.2%

In addition, demographic changes had reduced FHS to a high poverty, high mobility school. The majority of its student body lived in either apartment complexes, subsidized housing units, or hotel rooms. Few live in the established neighborhoods around the school. At the time of the study, 67% of the student body received free/reduced lunch, and 91.1% attended school regularly. Table 6.2 is a record of students' attendance rate and free and reduced lunch status over a period of five years.

State and national report cards provide a standardized assessment of the educational performance of the nation's children and the efficacy of schools in meeting students' educational needs based on state and national goals. The 2009-2013 state's public school report card rated FHS as a failing school for three consecutive years



Free/RL 67%
SPED 21%
LEP 7%

Figure 6.1: 2014 Demographics of Student Body Race and Ethnicity

Table 6.2: FHS Student Attendance Rate and Free/Reduced Lunch for Five Years

Year	Attendance Rate in %	Free/RL in %
2009	95.1	59.2%
2010	95.1	64.7%
2011	92.8	74.7%
2012	92.7	69.1%
2013	91.1	68.5%

because it received a "not met" status on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a national measure of school effectiveness in educating its' students and because it scored average

and below average on absolute rating, and At-Risk on growth rating. Additionally, FHS met NCLB's criteria for a failing school based on its high dropout rate, low eligibility for Life Scholarship, high truancy, and lack of academic improvement measured through High School Assessment Program (HSAP) and End of Course Examination Program (EOCEP) passage rates. Table 6.3 is the AYP matrix; table 6.4 is the state report card, table 6.5 is the students' performance on EOCEP, while table 6.6 is on-time HSAP and longitudinal HSAP passage rates over a five-year period.

Table 6.3: FHS AYP Rating Over A Five-Year Period

Measure	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Met/Not Met (AYP)	Not Met	Not Met	Not Met	NA	NA
Objective Met/Total	6/13	6/13	6/13	NA/NA	NA/NA
Compliance Index	46.2	46.2	46.2	NA	NA
ELA Goal	71.3	71.3	71.3	NA	NA
Math Goal	70.0	70.0	70.0	NA	NA
On-Time Graduation Rate	64.7	62.4	71.1	72.0	71.3

College Board (a for-profit organization) is another institution that provides a standardized assessment of students' academic performance and college readiness through students' performance on Advance placement (AP) examination, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and American College Test (ACT). Below is a snapshot of FHS students' average performance scores on AP, SAT, and ACT examinations.

Table 6.4: FHS State Report Card Rating Over A Five-Year Period					
Rating/Index	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Absolute Rating	A	A	A	A	A
Absolute Index	3.00	3.00	2.80	3.00	3.00
Growth Rating	AR	AR	AR	A	B
Growth Index	-0.40	-0.40	-0.20	0.20	0.00

Definition of School Rating Terms:

Excellent (E)- School performance substantially exceeds the standards for progress toward the 2020 state performance goal.

Good (G)- School performance exceeds the standards for progress toward the 2020 state performance vision.

Average (A)- School performance meets the standards for progress toward the toward the 2020 state performance vision.

Below Average (B)- School is in jeopardy of not meeting the standards for progress toward the 2020 state performance vision.

At-Risk (AR)- School performance fails to meet the standard for progress toward the 2020 performance vision.

Table 6.5: Students' Performance on EOC Over A Five-Year Period					
Subject	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Algebra 1	51.9	67.1	83.6	62.1	71.3
Biology	NA	NA	40.0	57.2	58.2
English 1	49.5	62.2	58.8	57.6	61.7
U.S. History	26.9	23.3	19.9	34.4	40.7

Table 6.6: Students' Performance on on-Time and Longitudinal HSAP Over A Five-Years Period					
Cohort	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
First Time Takers	71.6	66.9	61.1	64.6	66.3
Longitudinal Takers	91.5	87.2	90.6	87.0	87.3

Table 6.7: Average AP Exam Scores Over A Five-Year Period					
Year	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
% Passed	9.2	8.8	13.9	9.1	11.2

Advanced Placement (AP) exam scores range from 1 to 5 where 3, 4, and 5 are passing scores.

Table 6.8: Average SAT Scores Over A Five-Year Period					
Subject	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Math	428	409	417	417	429
Critical Reading	408	389	423	405	451
Writing	389	394	397	383	432
Total	**1225**	**1192**	**1237**	**1205**	**1313**

SAT subject scores range from 200 to 800.

Table 6.9: Average ACT Scores over A Five-Year Period					
Subject	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
English	14.7	14.5	17.1	14.8	16.9
Math	16.8	17.1	17.5	17.6	17.5
Reading	16.2	16.8	17.7	15.9	17.2
Science	16.7	17.7	15.9	17.2	16.6
Composite	**16.3**	**16.1**	**17.3**	**16.3**	**17.7**

ACT scores range from a scale of 1.0 to 36.0.

Curriculum and Instructional Programs

In the area of curriculum and instructional programs, FHS has a wide variety of curricular and extra-curricular programs as well as a plethora of instructional programs

and policies to provide students with "extensive real-world experiences and to enhance their preparedness for competing in a global society" (School Renewal Plan 2014-15 through 2018-19). The curricular programs include: The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEMs) Academies, College Preparatory (CP), Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors programs, Fine Arts, Air Force Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps (AFJROTC), Career and Technology Education (CATE), Special Education and Limited English Proficiency programs, in addition to a worked-based apprenticeship program that is furnished through the district's well-established career center.

Extra-curricular activities available to FHS students include, Fine Arts programs in music, dance, art, and theatre; comprehensive athletic programs, SOAR after school tutorial, AFJROTC expeditions, teacher cadet, Yearbook publication, student council, and PBIS. In 2015, FHS added a 21st Century Community Learning Center (Community in Schools or CIS) in the continuous effort to improve its students' learning and academic performance. Appendix H contains a comprehensive list of curricular and extra-curricular activities available to FHS students.

In addition, a surfeit of instructional programs, policies, and processes aimed at promoting student learning and academic performance exist in FHS. These programs, policies, and procedures include, but are not limited to school-wide after school tutorials, enrichment and advisory programs, credit enhancement (teacher and/or administrator initiated credit-based incentives for targeted behaviors) and credit recovery programs; make-up and redo policies, minimum 60 and no zero grading policies, virtual school, online academic support and test preparatory programs as well as school-wide Drop

Everything and Read, and numeracy Friday. Some of the procedures adopted to enhance student learning through instructional deliver are weekly evaluation of lesson plans, classroom observations, professional learning communities and learning teams, data notebook and data wall, and increased professional development on pedagogy. Appendix I contains a list of instructional programs, policies, and processes available to the students.

Teacher and Administrator Quality

During the study, the professional staff of FHS was comprised of fifty-six teachers, four administrators, a dean of students, three counselors and a media center specialist. The school profile data shows that 75% of FHS teachers held advance degrees, 91% were highly qualified, and 5% were National Board certified. Teacher attendance and turnover rates were 95% and 18% respectively. Table 6.10 depicts teacher profile over a five-year continuum.

Table 6.10: Teacher Profile Across a Five-Year Period

Year	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Advanced Degree	71.2%	70.6%	64.0	72.0%	70.6%
Provisional Certificate	24.6%	22.0%	32%	N/AV	29.4%
Returning from Previous Year	77.6%	79.1%	83.1	83.6%	82.0%
Attendance	93.0%	94.2	93.5%	91.4%	94.4%

Through these resources (curricular and extra-curricular as well as instructional programs), FHS focused on implementing change, targeting strengths, as well as working to construct a continuous level of rigor through which it operationalized its mission of helping students to master numeracy and literacy skills and to demonstrate the higher-

order thinking skills, social skills, and character necessary to be contributing citizens in a global economy as well as life-long learners who will continue to explore their interest and passions. As stated in the 2013-2018 school renewal plan, "While imposing high academic expectations on students, the *faculty and staff* acknowledge the importance of teaching students to be responsible community member, respectful members of the society, and equipping them with tools to assist them on their path to self-actualization" (p. 8; italicized words were not in the original document).

Throughout this study, I described FSH as an inner city high school. Inner city school is a name that has been used profusely in student achievement literature to refer to urban schools in the northern and Mid-western states of the United States, but not in the South where racial and socioeconomic disparity push minority and economically disadvantaged students and their families into city schools with student body of similar characteristics. According to Farlex (2013), "inner city high schools" refer to high schools located in "usually older, central part of a city that is especially characterized by crowded neighborhoods in which low-income, but often minority groups predominate" (p. 1). An inner city high school is normally distinguished by its diversity in student body and high population of minority and low SES students.

Orfield et al, (2004) identified inner city schools as high poverty schools and described them as schools characterized by a host of problems, including lower levels of competition from peers, less qualified and experienced teachers, narrower and less advanced course selection, more turnover during the year, and students with many health and emotional problems related to poverty and to living in ghetto or barrio conditions. Interestingly, the metaphor for inner city high school in this country has been people of

color because of the high representation of this group of student in such schools as well as their high academic failure and dropout rate from such schools (Orfield et al., 2004). When compared with suburban high schools on high failure and dropout rate, inner city high schools are unique in their racial and ethnic diversity and thus, the best site for exploring the phenomenon of minority and low SES students' learning and academic achievement. Although associated originally with large cities up North, inner city schools in the South share the same characteristics with their northern counterparts except that in the South, most of these schools are located within the old city limits and have greater percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch when compared to the median average for either the school district or the state (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012)

FHS meets these characteristics of inner city school. It serves predominantly minority and low SES student body. It has high intergroup and intragroup academic and economic disparity between and among its students, and it is located at the outskirts of an old metropolis. Additionally, FHS experiences high mobility and high dropout rate among students of color, high teacher and administrator attrition, and serves a high population of special needs students.

I chose FHS for this study not only because of its national and state ratings as a failing school, but also because the phenomenon of minority and low SES high school students' academic underperformance manifested intensely in FHS. As depicted in the epilogue, programs, policies, and procedures adopted to improve student learning and academic achievement in this space always yield confounding results that debilitate instead of strengthening student learning and academic performance, even when such programs are piloted and proven as effective in other schools, "schools like ours."

Gaining Access into FHS

Since the aim of this study is to explore minority and low SES students sensemaking of school, schooling, and academic achievement as well as the mechanisms through which they construct their meaning of school, schooling and academic success, I gave particular attention to the type of setting in which the data might be available. Further, with a broader interest in understanding FHS students' academic behavior and how it relates to the confounding feedbacks that results from well-intended programs, policies, and procedures adopted to improve FHS students' learning and academic outcomes, I sent a written request to the principal of the school explaining my research interest and asking for permission to conduct the study in her school. She directed me to the district's Department of Accountability, Assessment, Research and Evaluation (AARE) where I completed and submitted a research proposal application and accompanying documentation. I began recruiting participants for the study immediately after the District Research Committee (DRC) approved the research via a letter of approval.

Participants

Although this is an ethnographic case study that focused on understanding a cultural group's sense-making of schooling, learning, and academic achievement within a single school, using the aforementioned participant selection strategies, I recruited into the study heterogeneous tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade inner city minority and low SES high school students, and some schoolteachers within the school as direct informants. In the early phase of the study, I planned to include twelve tenth graders (six college preparatory and six honors), twelve eleventh graders (six college preparatory and

six honors), and twelve twelfth graders (all college preparatory) as well as sixteen faculty members (eight classroom teachers, four hall monitors, and four administrators) in the study as direct or key informants. Each set of participants would be comprised of equal numbers of males and females. Both faculty and student participants must have been in the school for at least two years. Out of the twelve twelfth grade students, four would participate in individual interviews, while eight would be focus group discussion members.

Nevertheless, as I entered the field, this blueprint was modified several times to accommodate emergent events and situations—modifications which reduced the number of direct informant from fifty-six participants to forty-five. For instance, due to administrators' attrition, only the principal and the dean of students were eligible for the study. Also, instead of twelve juniors, only eight (four boys and four girls; two college preparatory and six Advanced Placement) students directly participated in the study. In addition, more seniors (fifteen; eight girls and seven boys) than originally planned participated in the study. Overall, forty-five participants (33 students and 12 faculty members) engaged in the study as key informants. All participants were black or African Americans. Appendix J contains the participants' profile.

I intentionally generated a wide pool of direct informants in an effort to create a holistic representation of all aspects of the school's life. Given my interests in student's sensemaking of school and schooling as well as the bidirectional interaction between person and context in the construction of knowledge and educational outcome, I focused on the behaviors of students, administrators, tutorial and non-tutorial members of the school. Correspondingly, my key informants were classified into four categories namely:

Category 1: students, Category 2: teachers, Category 3: Administration and Category 4: Hall monitors. Figure 6.2 is a diagrammatic representation of informants' classification.

The group of student informants was comprised of thirty-three multi-grade and multi-track students between the ages of fifteen and twenty years. Sixteen of them were males, while seventeen were females. These students supplied their perspectives on the phenomenon and the study's purpose; as well as explicated cultural codes and language that I acquired through random interviews and observation of the entire student body. Table 6.11 depicts the demographic information of the student informants.

On the other hand, the twelve faculty and staff informants consisted of two administrators, seven classroom teachers, and three hall monitors with diverse teaching experiences in variety of contexts. Besides their knowledge of students learning, academic behaviors, and academic performance in this space, these faculty and staff members enriched the study with their shared lived experiences with school processes, policies, and procedures. Table 6.12 shows the demographic information of faculty and staff informants.

Collectively, these key informants served as co-investigators[24] through whose accounts I constantly checked my assumptions, analysis, and interpretations of my personal observations, and documents collected from the study site. The integration of these different sources of data provided a comprehensive understanding of the unified variables needed in understanding minority and economically disadvantaged students' learning, academic behaviors and the achievement gap, which the wholistic humanistic model (WHM) of individual development and achievement seeks to foster.

[24] In this dissertation, I use the term co-investigator to describe direct informants' role of explaining, clarifying, and/or elaborating cultural codes, language, document, and artifacts I acquired from my interaction with the entire setting.

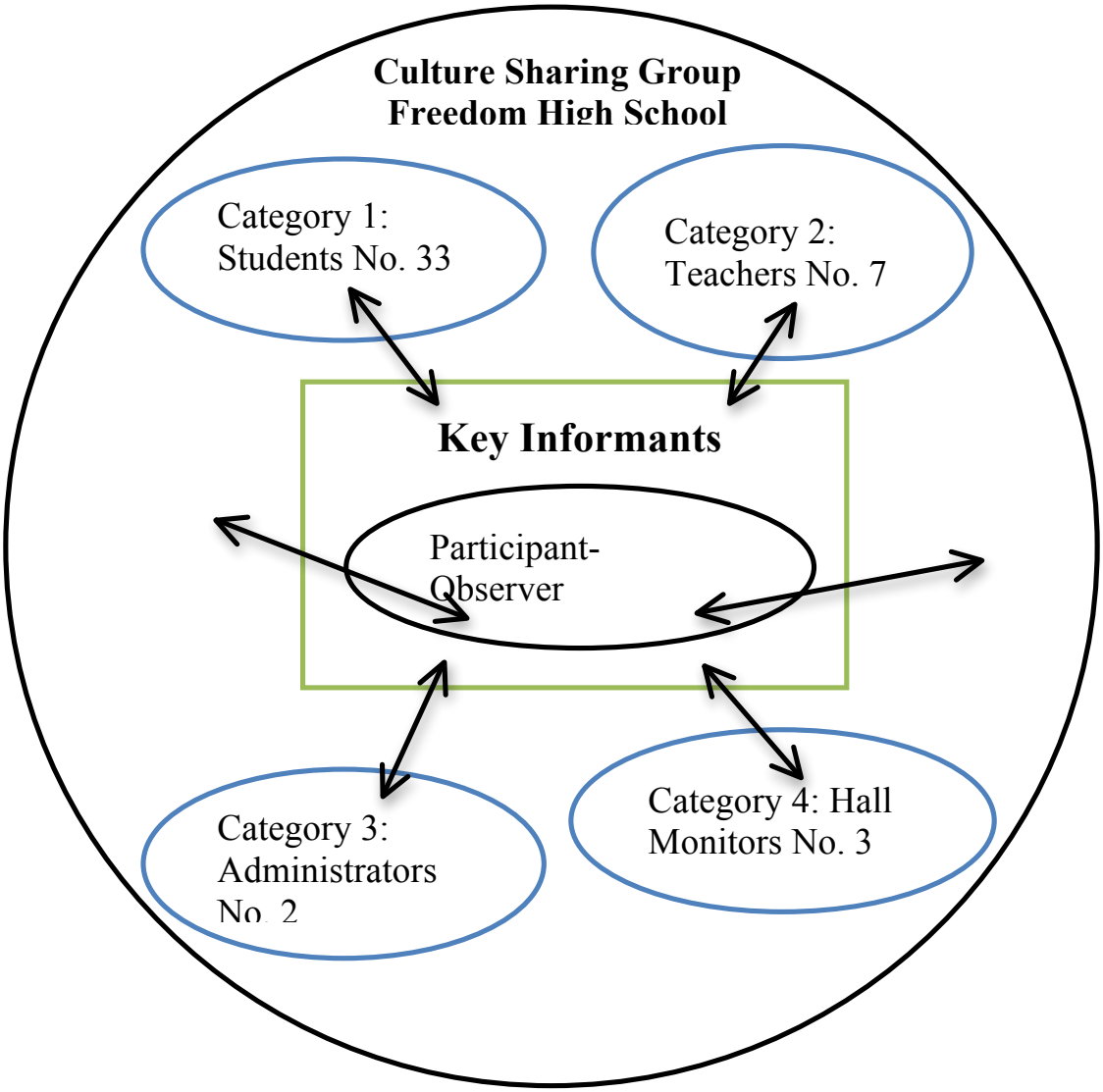


Figure 6.2: The Ethnographic Circle

Table 6.11 Student Informants' Profile						
	Participant's Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Grade-Level	Track	Type of Data
1.	Andy	M	18	12	CP	Focus Group
2.	Demonte	M	16	11	AP	Interview
3.	Glory	F	17	11	CP	Interview
4.	Jalisha	F	16	10	CP	Interview
5.	Janny	F	17	11	AP	Interview
6.	Jane	F	18	12	CP	Focus Group
7.	Janet	F	18	12	AP	Focus Group
8.	Jay	M	16	10	CP	Interview
9.	Jerry	M	15	10	HS	Interview
10.	John	M	15	10	CP	Interview
11.	Jose	F	17	11	AP	Interview
12.	Keni	F	18	12	CP	Interview
13.	Kiesha	F	16	10	CP	Interview
14.	Levu	M	18	12	CP	Interview
15.	Lui	M	18	12	CP	Interview
16.	Mai	F	18	12	CP	Interview
17.	Matt	M	17	11	AP	Interview
18.	Nick	M	18	12	CP	Interview
19.	Nico	M	16	10	HS	Interview
20.	Pep	F	16	10	HS	Interview
21.	Quan	M	18	12	AP	Interview
22.	Raul	M	20	12	CP	Interview
23.	Ron	M	18	12	CP	Focus Group
24.	Shade	F	16	10	HS	Interview
25.	Shon	M	18	11	CP	Interview
26.	Tie	F	18	12	CP	Focus Group
27.	Yade	F	18	12	CP	Focus Group
28.	Yali	M	15	10	CP	Interview
29.	Yan	F	17	11	AP	Interview
30.	Yani	F	18	12	AP	Focus Group
31.	Zack	M	17	11	AP	Interview
32.	Zaine	F	15	10	CP	Interview
33.	Zani	F	18	12	CP	Interview

Track represents participants' placement at the time s/he participated in the study. Because students can be placed in more than one track, for this study, participants' track was determined based on their core classes' placement (English, Math, Science, Social Studies). CP= College Preparatory Classes, HS= Honors, AP= Advanced Placement.

Table 6.12 Faculty and Staff Informants' Profile						
	Participant's Pseudonyms	Gender	Status	Teaching experience	Years on Site	Type of Data
1.	Angy	F	P	20	8 five as P	Interview
2.	Barry	M	HM	12	21	Interview
3.	Dean	M	DS	47	3	Interview
4.	Jaa	M	T	21	7	Interview
5.	Jason	M	HM	7	7	Interview
6.	Justy	F	T	19	8	Interview
7.	Kelly	F	T	37	15	Interview
8.	Loyld	M	T	7	6	Interview
9.	Meg	F	T	19	11	Interview
10.	Kayla	F	T	16	7	Interview
12.	Shay	F	HM/ISS	27	4	Interview
13.	Tasha	F	T	15	6	Interview

Status represents the role of the participant in the school at the time s/he participated in the study. P= principal, HM= Hall monitor, DS= Dean of student, T= Teacher and ISS=In school suspension supervisor.

Overview of Findings Chapters

I set out to explore, explicate, and describe students' sensemaking of school and school as well as the culture of school and schooling in the research site and how this culture generates students' academic behavior, otherwise academic achievement and lack of achievement. After attending to the behaviors of students, faculty and staff that occupy this space as well as the processes, policies, and procedures through which learning and academic achievement is ignited, nourished, and sustained in this space, the school culture emerged from the data corpus. I applied a theoretical framework to the data set to enable me to understand how this culture was created and sustained. Hence, this dissertation comprises of multiple studies and multiple perspectives. However, for the scope of this study, I focused only on students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling, the bidirectional interaction between person and context, and the role of this interaction in students' academic behavior and educational outcome.

As I collected and analyzed data and began sharing my interpretations with my key informants, I faced difficulty in deciding where to start and what to include or exclude from the discussion of the findings. Ultimately, in the first iteration of this work, the questions I took to the data and chose to explore and share with others point to my own commitments, as well as those revealed by the participants. Indeed, this study is "the storying into being of an account," where I both wrote and was written into all that I chose to share (Walkerdine, Lacey & Melody, 2002, p. 181).

Because my two research questions are intertwined, I used five broad interview questions to get at them. In the eight chapters that follow, I invite the reader to engage with and question the findings, as I seek to produce knowledge that is layered (Bochner,

2009) and suffused with multiple and competing perspectives (Noblit & Engles, 1999). In each chapter, I re-construct, in partial ways, a particular aspect of this dissertation. Chapter VII-XI, with its focus on students' interviews, focus group, journals, and observational field notes on students' behavior describe students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling while pointing to environmental conditions that influence their understanding and interpretations of the meaning of school and schooling.

Specifically, chapter VII focuses on students' definition and/or description of school and schooling, while chapter VIII presents students' explanation of academic achievement. Chapter IX discusses students' view of school policies and practices, their assessment of the implications of school policies, practices, and procedures for student learning and academic achievement, as well as the role of the policies and practices' in students' understanding and interpretation of the meaning and purpose of school and schooling. Chapter X focuses on faculty and staff's perception of school policies and practices along with their implications for student academic behaviors and academic achievement, and chapter XI explains students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling and the mechanisms that undergird their sensemaking of school and schooling.

Drawing upon the entire data corpus; students' and faculty interviews, focus group and class discussions, all observational field notes, school documents on policies, processes and procedures and researcher's journals and diaries, section two discusses the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures along with the role of this interaction in the navigation, deployment, and performance of student learning, academic achievement and educational outcome. While

chapter XII presents the school culture and climate, chapter XIII discuses student academic behaviors, and XIV provides the discussion, implications, and conclusion of the study.

Section One

Students' Perception and Sensemaking of School and Schooling

This section focuses on the findings related to my first research question: How do minority and low SES inner city high school students perceive and make sense of school and schooling and what factors influence their understanding and interpretation of the meaning of school and schooling? Throughout this section, I focus on students' words, actions, and inactions highlighting how they construct, interpret, navigate and perform school. Further, as I consider how covert and overt institutionalized practices, policies, and processes are enacted and lived through school and schooling, I work to complicate understanding of minority and low SES students' academic behaviors and educational outcomes, emphasizing the tension between institutionalized practices, policies, and processes and students' personhood.

I draw upon my analysis of the one hundred and seventeen students' semi-structured and unstructured interviews, focus group discussions, observational/field notes, student journals, and my research journal and diary entries. Each chapter encompasses my analysis, findings, and interpretations situated in students' discourse on the meaning of school, schooling, academic achievement, relationship between school policies, processes, and procedures and students' academic outcome, as well as what they think are the reason for the persistent lack of academic achievement among minority and low SES students.

Section Overview

In each chapter, I first present excerpts of data corpus from which I extracted my findings. Then, I consider explicitly how the participating students perceive, make sense of, and agentically manage and perform school, focusing on the goal of each interview question. Finally, I move to more clearly illustrate the ways in which FHS students perform school, while working to account for the role of process, person, context, and time in students' sensemaking of school and schooling. Because of the sensitivity of the findings presented in this study, I choose to report my findings on students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling and the factors that influence their sensemaking using narrative or storytelling style of writing. Hence, I allow the reader to meet the participants first, through excerpts from the data corpus, before encountering my deliberations and dialogue with the data.

Selecting Excerpts

In selecting excerpt for these chapters I had difficulties deciding where to begin and end and whether to include all the transcription conventions I used during my analysis process. Eventually, I decided to present enough evidence to allow my reader to create alternative interpretations (Hammersley, 2010), while also selecting excerpts that show the variability within the data set. As such, I invite the reader to engage critically with the excerpts and with my interpretations of them, as well as to re-interpret and proffer alternative understandings.

Chapter VII

Students' Definition and/or Description of School and Schooling

In order to better understand students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling I used five open-ended interview questions to lead participants to talk about the meaning of school and schooling to them. I followed-up each questions with probes on issues that emerged from the participant's responses. In what follows, I present excerpts of students' responses to three of the five-interview questions, my analysis of their responses and the interpretation I drew from them. I began each interview section by asking the participant(s) the following question: How would you define school? I believed that in responding to this question and probes arising from their responses, participants would directly or indirectly reveal their personal beliefs and assumptions about school situated in their experiences with school and schooling. Appendix K is the transcription Key.

Excerpts of Participants' Definition/Description of School and Schooling

In responding to the question on their definition and/or description of school and schooling, participants provided different meanings of school that ranged from conventional, school is a place where students go to learn, to unconventional, school is a place where students go to meet friends, eat, sleep, sell, and feel at home; as well as the confusion about the meaning and purposes of school and schooling that exists in the larger society. Below are some excerpts of participants' responses to this question:

M: How would you define school?

Tee: Ehmm, school is a place where you come to learn, of course, and you interact with other people like your peers, teachers, and just, I don't know, just feel like you are at home, but you learn also . . ."

Yali: I say the definition she gave is what school is supposed to be, but isn't what it turns out to be. . . .It is more of an enforced institution that everybody should have to partake in. It's, it's something that is supposed to be good, but it doesn't always work out that way, so"

M: Can you explain what you mean by that?

Yali: Not everybody wants to be here. Some people are here because they are required to, and because you got people who don't want to be here, it messes things up for those who want to be here and learn with a lot of issues. It's, it's something that is supposed to be good, but it doesn't always work out that way, so.

M: What do you think the government can do with regards to taking care of those who don't want to be here and whose presence because they are forced to be here messes things up for those who really want to learn?

Jane: I don't even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it is the school itself. We can't do anything at all and am not saying the school should send people away at the end of the day, some of the things that go on here is ridiculous

Tee: I mean but they are saying that it's something that we all should do, but they gona realize that you can't go anywhere without education. Am saying, you

know, Am a teenager and I have days I don't want to come to school, but if I don't come to school, it's gona make the United States look bad at the end of the day because we got all these other countries, like china they go to school how many times, six days a week? And like even though everything is what, made in china, made in china, am just saying, then so we don't come to school, it's like we gona be stupid and if we gona be stupid, it's like, there's not gona be jobs, there's not gona be interest to anybody. And it's like that people who don't want to go to school, and it's like the schools will have to make it like where everybody would like to come because I have in plenty classroom and it's like the teacher has this nasty attitude or something or kids are doing something to other kids and they don't wana be at school. It's all about who you are and what you wana do with yourself, and you have personal goals for yourself.

Quan: [Laughing] I don't think everybody should be like forced to come to school. If you don't wana be here, you are making it hard for other people to learn and it's kind of difficult when you are trying to pay attention in class and everybody is talking and everything else, I know everybody in this classroom has been in a situation like that, so, [yeah].

M: That has become a consistent theme of the discussion so far—people who are here against their wish and the disruption they cause to the learning of others who really want to be here and the call for school to do something about these people. What do you think school can do to/for these people, especially to get them to want to be here?

Jane: Stop being strict and quit worrying about things that don't need to be worried about. <I almost fell down the steps yesterday> because the thing lifted up and was trying to walk even though I had a classmate, her whole book is like thorn in-half, then I mean like they expect for us to wake every day and come to this. [year, they supposed] It's like, you know, like, they are worried about what we wear but at the end of the day we go to class and do not a dawn gone thing.

Quan: It kind of like lacks motivation like when you look at our school and you look at a place like, *Joy*, and we are in the same district, but hey, they get all these stuff, but when you come to this school, our school like this, it just kind of lacks motivation and you like why kids at *Joy* get to do this and that, but we are in the same school district and we don't get to do anything and it's just like they get newer textbook and we get the old textbooks (Focus group interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

The following are some excerpts of key informants responses to the question on how each of them defines school.

Keni: School is a place where you come to get your education. You meet Different people, like an environment for you to get away from everything and learn and to see what gona happen in the real world. What you gona actually have to go through after as you get out of school, like as adult, parent, and everything" (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 31, 2014).

Jalisha: Well, I mean I have been in school all my life so I guess school is just to prepare us for further more life. Or yeah, if you want to go to school after high

school. If you wana go to college. I guess they are preparing us for the basic things we need to know for life.

I: How would you describe your current school?

Jalisha: My current school, [speaks rapidly in high pitch] you come here to learn, but you probably leave here with much more than that [slows down and lower voice] Ehmm, it's not just that the principals and teachers are not trying to enforce, but you actually have to look at the students because students have a big effect on other students so, [pause/pondering] I think, this school, [pause/pondering] I think this school could listen more to the students because if you get a group of students that don't get in trouble, that much, and they ask for something, I, you should sit down with them and listen to them because after some time, they gona stop asking for thing, then things are gona start getting taken just because you feel as though if you are doing good, you get privileges.

I: You stated that here is a type of school where students come to learn, but leave with something else. May you give me some examples of what students might leave with apart from learning?

Jalisha: Some students don't even come here to learn. Some students come here [laughing] because it's the law so…oo as for <a lot of things going in the school such as{selling of things, typical things like drama, and rumors some kids come for that. Some kids know things are gona happen.}Things like that. Some kids come for that. Selling of contrabands all of that go on within the school, no they are not gona catch everybody, but just, you don't know the connections kids have these days within the school and so you don't know what they can make happen

so sometimes they come here just because maybe this is their best place during the day (S. Participant Interview, April 29, 2014; see transcription key for meaning of symbols).

Janny: School is where you learn, you gain an education, and it will be easier for when you graduate and if have a diploma than it is staying at home and not coming to school. Learning is, I guess broadens your horizon, I guess. It gets you thinking more and you get to notice, thinking. But learning you are in, it pays off, coming to high school (S. Participant Interview, Sept 30, 2014).

Zack: School? School, to me, is a place we come to learn and try to develop yourself. Whereas you can get a head in life because that is what education is for us to get ahead in.

I: How do you think your peers would define school:

Zack: Just a place to hang out. I mean you got some, you go the majority in there who actually likes school and wants to learn and want to be somebody, majority (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

Jay: Most of these students think school is the place for them to come and have fun, for them to come and see their friends, for them to come and meet, for them to come and eat, sleep. School for them is not, when teachers tell them to not come to school, they will be probably bored at home. I think school for them is just something to do. Yes, I think so, because they don't pay attention to grade and stuff, so it is something to do. For that several hours we are in school, they are probably see, like, they can't talk to no body or be on the phone. Like when

they are suspended, I know kids who are mad because they can't do nothing because everybody will be in school (SP Interview, April 1, 2014).

Kiesha: Like you have a free education, people don't take advantage that we have school, so they take it as a joke. It's like you rather pay to go to summer school than to get a free education while you are here? I rather choose free education because you have the chance to learn everything. You have a chance to get your grades up, you have a chance to pick a college to go to, you have a chance to get your diploma, you probably have a chance to get scholarship, but you take it as a joke, at the end you have to pay like $100.00 for a class? For summer school, I rather get the free education because I know, my mama told me she will never pay a $100 for a summer school where I could have been in school and gotten it for free (S. Participant Interview, Dec. 13, 2013).

I: How would you define school?

Nick: What do you mean?

I: Like how would you describe school or being in school?

Nick: Oh. I think it's good, you know, we have come a lot farther from where we were. You know I think, like generally, like the principals could care more about the students, you know, but I think where we were, from now, they have improved on that and discipline, and you know, having everybody get their grades, you know, they are better with that and you know, meeting with the students and telling them what they have to do. I think they have done a good job this year doing it. And so, so that nobody has to be unaware of what they have to do to succeed. So, I think they have come a long way.

I: When you talk of where we were, can you tell me a little bit of where we were before now?

Nick: Where we were, is like a few years ago, like we were bad. You know, our HSAP scores were low; you know kids generally didn't care. And you know, they didn't do a lot for the kids and they didn't keep us very informed like we needed to be. Basically, that's what I mean by that; we have come a long way.

I: How would you describe *the* students?

Nick: Us? Disrespectful, not everybody, but the majority. This is free, free to come and get an education, high school education, and teachers are taking out of their time to come and be here to help you. And the way that a lot of them talk to the teachers is very wrong, it's very disrespectful, you know, and they are only here to help you and to me you're sagging your pants, rolling your eyes on them, cursing them out, they don't deserve that.

I: You mentioned that the school is free; do you think the students take advantage or the opportunity of that free education?

Nick: Of course they don't. Instead taking advantage of the free education, they wana talk to the girls, take their numbers, instead of focusing in class, and then you never know, you might lose this and then you start paying for school besides college. You never know, you have to start doing that, that's why every second you step into this building; you need to take advantage of it. Take advantage (SP Interview, Dec. 13, 2013).

Analysis, Findings and Interpretations

Several patterns that allude to participants understanding and interpretations of the meanings and purposes of school emerged from their definition and/or description of school and schooling. I organize and share these patterns under two broad categories that pervade the data: (1) What "school is supposed to be" and (2) what "school actually is." Table 7. 1 depicts the various definitions/meanings of school teased out of the data.

Table 7.1: Students' Definition of School and Schooling	
School Is Supposed to Be	**School Actually Is**
School is a place for education, interaction, and relaxation	School is an enforced institution that everybody must partake
Schooling is learning that broadens ones horizons, that is, one's mental perception, experience, and interest	School is a place of learning, eating, selling, and sleeping
Schooling generates economic mobility and self-development.	Just a past time, something used to fill empty space
School is a place of "learning	Something to do
Schooling is a preparation for life and for adulthood	Just a place to hang out
	School is a joke

School is Supposed to be, But Has Not Always Been

Throughout the data set, in sharing their personal and collective definition/description of school, participants showed diverse interpretation of the meanings and purposes of school and schooling. In responding to the interview questions: "How would you define school?" Almost all the participants connected their supposed meaning of school to education, socialization, personal development and economic mobility. However, they also suggested that this has not always been the case in their experiences with school and schooling.

Hence, Tee states, "School is a place where one comes to learn, of course, and you interact with other people like your peers, teachers, and just, I don't know, just feel like you are at home, but you learn also . . ." Responding to Tee's definition of school, Yali notes, "I say the definition she gave is what school is supposed to be, but isn't what it turns out to be. . . .It is more of an enforced institution, which everybody should have to partake in. It's something that is supposed to be good, but it doesn't always work out that way, so" (Focus group interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

Like Tee, Keni sees school as a place where one goes to get educated and to socialize. However, she also refers to school as an "environment" where one escapes from everything, in order to "learn and to see what gona happen in the real world. What *one* gona actually have to go through after as *s/he* gets out of school, like as adult, parent, and everything" (Participant Interview, Mar. 31, 2014). Here, Keni moves the discourse on the meaning and purpose of school, especially high school, away from just book learning (academics) to include real world experience and preparation for adulthood in the real world.

Hence, school is not just a place for learning, but also a preparation for life in the real world and for adulthood. Does she mean that school is not the real world? Or that school bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood? If yes, which level of schooling does she imply, middle or high school? I took up this in my follow-up interview with Keni and she stated that she was referring to high. If this is the case, ***high school students then, are liminals, neither children nor adults, in which case high school becomes a middle-ground, the intermediary that helps students to transition from childhood into adulthood***. As liminals, high school students are betwixt and

between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, customs, conventions, and ceremonies" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Also liminals, they are the frontiersmen who in concert with the "other," social and political environments, reproduce their liminality.

Concurring with Keni, Jalisha notes, "school is just to prepare us for further more life, or yeah, if you want to go to school after high school, if you wana go to college. I guess they are preparing us for the *basic things we need to know for life.*" In other words, Jalisha believes that ***it is the role of schools to provide every student with the fundamental skills needed not just for survival, but for a fulfilling life, "more life."*** Nevertheless, she believes that even though students come to school to learn, there is more to schooling than just learning about life, "You come here to learn, but you probably leave here with so much more than that, but really, I think people, they let other people get in their head about what they should and shouldn't do, but everybody doesn't have the same interest and everybody don't [sic] feel the same way about school or, you know, making a good living for themselves, so I think people just fall off track on what they want and what they need as far as living wise. You probably have to learn for yourself of what is important in school" (S. Participant Interview, April 29, 2014).

Again, Jalisha ***insinuates another aspect of school, the learning that arises from the interactional function of school and possible disillusionment that derives from it***, an idea that is developed in the section on what school actually is. Similarly, both Janny and Zack identify school as, a place to learn, to get an education. However, while Janny sees ***the reward for schooling as learning that broadens ones horizons, one's mental perception, experience, and interest***, Zack sees ***the reward for schooling as self-development and economic mobility***.

Overall, five overarching meanings and purposes of school and schooling emerged from the data: (1) School is a place for education, interaction, and relaxation. (2) School is an enforced institution that everybody must partake. (3) Schooling is a preparation for life and for adulthood. (4) Schooling is learning that broadens ones horizons, that is, ones mental perception, experience, and interest. (5) Schooling generates economic mobility and self-development.

Although all the participants seemed to agree with the conventional meaning of schools and schooling, education, socialization, and economic mobility (Sadovnik et al, 2013), a careful reading, listening, and analyzing of the transcripts, audio recordings and the verbal and non-verbal cues within the tape and my interview notes revealed a subtle undertone of disappointment and shattered hopes that seemed to contradict the participants' identified meanings and purposes of school and schooling. This undertone led me into deeply searching the data set for hidden meanings and purposes of school and how those meanings and purposes are construed. Taking Yali's lead, in the focus group discussion, "I say the definition she gave is what school is supposed to be, but isn't what it turns out to be. . . . It's, it's something that is supposed to be good, but it doesn't always work out that way, so," I sought for what school actually means within the data set. Below are my findings.

School Actually Is…

Yali provides a different understanding of the meaning of school that seemed to subtly pervade the entire data corpus as participants speak about their experiences within the study site. She explains the definition Tee gives of school as a place of learning, socialization, and relaxation as what school is supposed to be, but adds that school is

"more of an enforced institution that everyone should have to partake." When probed further about what she means, she declares, "Not everybody wants to be here. Some people are here because they are required to, and because you got people who don't want to be here, it messes up things for those who want to be here and learn with a lot of issues." Again, the Yali ***questions the normative ideology of compulsory education, pointing to the danger inherent in forcing everybody to go to school.***

Continuing with the idea of school as an "enforced institution," Quan states, "I don't think everybody should be, like, forced to come to school. If you don't wana be here, you are making it hard for other people to learn, and it's kind of difficult when you are trying to pay attention in class and everybody is talking and everything else." The rest of the of the focus group members concurred, "yeah." Hence, ***high school students who feel coerced into going and remaining in school rebel against the system that infringes upon their freedom of choice through disruption and willful failure,*** concepts that fully develop later in the study.

Although none of the student key informants identified school as an "enforced institutions," in their personal interviews, majority of them acknowledged that FHS students come to school for different reasons, as the following excerpt portrays.

> Some students don't even come here to learn. Some students come here because it's the law so…oo, as for a lot of things going in the school such as selling of things, typical things like drama, and rumors some kids come for that. Some kids know things are gona happen. Things like that. Some kids come for that. Selling of contrabands all of that go on within the school, no they are not gona catch everybody, but just, you don't know the connections kids have these days within

> the school and so you don't know what they can make happen so sometimes they come here just because, maybe, this is their best place during the day" (Jalisha, S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

Here, Jalisha explicates what she meant when she stated "You come here to learn, but you probably leave here with so much more than that, but really, I think people, they let other people get in their head about what they should and shouldn't do, but everybody doesn't have the same interest and everybody *doesn't* feel the same way about school or, you know, making a good living for themselves, so I think people just fall off track on what they want and what they need as far as living wise." Taken together, these two excerpts paint the picture of the complexity inherent in the meaning and role of school and schooling. Ending this thought with the phrase, "*You probably have to learn for yourself of what is important in school*" introduces the everyday choices high school students in this space have to make in navigating and performing school. It also introduces the role of person and context in student learning and academic outcome.

Still discussing the meaning and purpose of school and schooling for FHS students, Jay explains,

> Most of these students think school is the place for them to come and have fun, for them to come and see their friends, for them to come and meet, for them to come and eat, sleep. School for them is not, when teachers tell them to not come to school, they will be probably bored at home. *I think school for them is just something to do. Yes, I think so, because they don't pay attention to grade and stuff, so it is something to do.* For that several hours we are in school, they are probably see, like, they can't talk to no body or be on the phone. Like when they

> are suspended, I know kids who are mad because they can't do nothing because everybody will be in school (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

In describing FHS students' thought about school, Jay ***reduces school and schooling to nothingness, a past time activity, "just something to do."*** Whereas Yali calls our attention to students who come to school because they are forced by the law to do so and the danger these students pose to the learning and academic achievement of other students, Jalisha and Jay remind us that ***students who willingly come to school, but without a mindset for learning are equally dangerous to the learning and academic achievement of other students who are in school to learn***. This concept fully develops as participants indict the school for the behavior of the students. Hence, when asked what the government can do to help students who do not want to be in school, but are forced by the law to be in school, Jane states "I don't even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it is the school itself. We can't do anything at all and am not saying the school should send people away, at the end of the day, some of the things that go on here is ridiculous" (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014). This idea of school being responsible for leading students who feel forced to come to school or do not see the usefulness of school to a change in attitude about school through its policies, practices and procedure would develop in the section on the relationship between school rules, policies, and procedures and student academic behavior and academic outcome.

For the meantime, ***the concept of free and compulsory education*** resurfaces as both Kiesha and Nick discuss students' nonchalant attitude toward school and schooling. Kiesha observes,

> Like you have a free education, people don't take advantage that we have school, so *they take it as a joke.* It's like you rather pay to go to summer school than to get a free education while you are here? I rather choose free education because you have the chance to learn everything. You have a chance to get your grades up, you have a chance to pick a college to go to, you have a chance to get your diploma, you probably have a chance to get scholarship, *but you take it as a joke,* at the end you have to pay like $100.00 for a class? For summer school, I rather get the free education because I know, my mama told me she will never pay a $100 for a summer school where I could have been in school and gotten it for free (S. Participant Interview, Dec. 13, 2013),

and Nick affirms, "Of course they don't. Instead of taking advantage of the free education, they wana talk to the girls, take their numbers, instead of focusing in class, and then you never know, you might lose this and then you start paying for school besides college. You never know, you have to start doing that, that's why every second you step into this building; you need to take advantage of it. Take advantage!" (S. Participant Interview, Dec. 13, 2013). In expressing their feelings about students not taking advantage of the free and compulsory education, Kiesha and Nick reveal that FHS students "take school as a joke," a phrase Kiesha used two times in describing the students' attitude toward school. Quan explains why this academic behavior persists stating, "I think it's the culture of the school and the teachers are just accepting it, okay, am not going to do anything about it because it's gona fall right back to me and they still gona be in my class [yeah] maybe am just gona ignore it and act like I don't hear it. ***So, I think of the culture of the teachers' accepting the culture of the student acting up. And***

because the teachers accept it, the students gona keep doing it" (Focus Group Interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

A comparison of participants' identified meanings and purposes of school in category 1: What school should be, but has not always been, and their discussion of students' behavior in category 2: School actually is, portrays a paradox in students' understanding and interpretation of the meaning of school and schooling. Thus, School is a place of "learning," "eating," "selling," and "sleeping," or just a past time, something used to fill empty space, "Something to do," just a place to hang out," "so they take school as a joke." "They don't wana do work because they wana laugh and joke and think that's cool and try to fit in with people that's how I see it" (Tee, Feb. 20, 2014).

A closer look at the entire data corpus and particularly the excerpts presented here reveals three kinds of students in FHS namely: (a) students who actually come to school because they want to want to learn and achieve academically or what I would henceforth refer to as ***learning oriented students***, (b) students who do not want be in school, but come because they have nothing else to do or ***The rather be at school***, and (c) students who do not want to be in school, but are forced to be here by the law or ***The forced to be at school***. According to the participants, ***the rather be at school and the forced to be at school, mess up school for the learning oriented students***. Additionally, majority of FHS students believe that school is actually (1) a past time activity (2) something to do (3) a place to hang out (4) a joke. Table 7.2 presents the types of students in FHS.

Chapter Summary

Although majority of the student participants accept the supposed meaning of school as what it should be, they seem to believe more in the second definition of school

as an enforced institution. According to them, this particular nature of school warps it. They attribute the ineffectiveness of school in educating majority of its pupils to the fact that teenagers or young adults have no choice, but to go to school or face legal charges. Permeating this second definition of school is the idea of school as a joke, a thing to do, and/or a place to hang out.

Table 7.2: Three Types of Students in FHS	
Type of Students	**Definition**
Learning oriented students	Students who actually come to school because they want to want to learn and achieve academically.
The rather be at school	Students who do not want be in school, but come because they have nothing else to do.
The forced to be at school	Students who do not want to be in school, but are forced to be here by the law.

Similarly, student participants identify the purpose of schooling as *education for life, socialization, self-development*, *and getting ahead*, purposes that align with societal purposes of school and schooling, which prioritizes intellectual prowess, political, social, and economic mobility (Sadovnik et al., 2013). Again, the mundane purpose of school as the landing of good paying job and getting ahead in life excludes those who do not care about high paying jobs, getting head in the conventional way through going to school, and societal changes, a fact that figured prominently in the data set as students mused on the essence of school in the 21st century.

Chapter VIII

Students' Explanation of Academic Achievement

After listening to and probing the participants of this study for their definition/description of school, I further sought insight into their understanding and belief about academic achievement by asking how they would explain academic achievement and how they think their peers would explain academic achievement? Through this question, I explored each participant's personal and collective understanding and beliefs about school and schooling through their beliefs about academic achievement and their academic behaviors. I also used this question to explore factors that influence participants' sensemaking of school and schooling, especially the impact of person characteristics (personal agency, self-efficacy) and context on their understanding and interpretation of the meaning of school and schooling. First, I present excerpts of participants' responses to the question on how they and their peers explain academic achievement followed by my analysis, findings and interpretation of the findings. Appendix K is the transcription key.

Excerpts of Participants' Explanation of Academic Achievement

M: How would you explain academic achievement?

Quan: At Freedom High or

M: Yes. Let's begin with a general view and then here.

Jane: I think some teachers are too lenient and some are too hard. Like one of my teachers we don't do nothing there and suddenly she will jump up and expect us

to know everything and another one of my teachers, she gives us a test with literally three essays on it. And am sorry, I just don't feel like I was learning that way by writing three essays. It's not gona make me smart, it's not gona help pay my bill [yeah].

Tee: I agree because it's like, one teacher is like so lenient, the next teacher is like so hard and it's like, so we go to the teacher that is so hard and we are like, why are we doing this here and the teacher is like, they need to get their, whatever, their little program to like where they're like both of them are both hard or [I think I disagree] [**Jane:** something is ridiculous] like [all muttering, **Ron:** what is she talking about, [**Quan:** I don't know what they are talking about, disagreement and muttering increases][well]

M: Okay, (raising hand) [****] yes

Quan: I think academic achievement is measured by, I guess grades because like if you do good in class, it's supposed to be reflected in your grades in general statement, that's how achievement is, you know, you get good grades, make honor rolls, you make honor roll, you get high GPA, you get high GPA, you go to a good college that's how academic achievement is supposed to be. For like, I won't say getting a reward for something that you should already be doing, but I think you get a reward for achieving good grade that's something you are supposed to do.

Yali: Well, I kind of disagree. They say, I mean that is how it is supposed to be. If you get a good grade in class, it should reflect all the things you have learned. But actually I realized, if you are actually come to school to learn, then in a lot of

ways, grades don't really matter because the class I learn the most thing, you look at my report card, that's the class I have the lowest grade in and it's strange, but true. The class I got the highest grade, I don't do anything in. But you know, I don't know, but it took some time, because for a long period of time I just thought that academic achievement would be recognized by the highest test scores and the highest GPA, *but a lot of times some of your smartest students have some of the lower GPAs because they are actually learning and they are doing the work to learn not just to get a good grade.* I don't, you can't really reflect it off of like, say the top five percent in a graduating class because no lie, the top five in the *graduating* class are not some of the brightest. You'll be appalled by it, but it's the truth, so.

Ron: Yeah, they can be top five but are people that they just didn't even learn nothing, they just cheat and pass [**Yali:** yeah, they got the easy classes and they got straight through][**Tee:** like anybody can get a piece of paper and the answer [they cheat and copy]

M: Honey can you speak out? [**Janet:** me?] yeah

Janet: Well, I agree with her, I don't think, ehm, ehm, what the thing called? I don't think academic success is measured by grade because anybody can copy and cheat and get good grades [yeap] [**Quan:** lot of teachers, like I don't want to say they show favoritism, but, I mean a lot of teachers around here are okay, lets say you got an F and you are failing the class, you can go talk to Ms. *Angy* and shed a couple of tears and the next thing you know, you don't got do nothing, you only have to show up in that class and if your parents come here and act like a

fool because you are failing a class, the teachers will be like submit to that and say I have to do something about the failure because I will not only have their parents on my back, but also administration is on me and so, then again people are accepting the culture, and I think it is part of the whole the Freedom high culture because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that [things changed?] mmhm.

M: Yeah, talk a little bit about that experience, please.

Quan: Oh! Well, I came, well, I came from California at the end of my ninth grade. When, just comparing the two, the curriculum here is very easy. It's not tedious at all. I actually don't feel challenged. And actually when I just came here and after a year or two, I just got really like, honestly I got lazy because I just felt like you don't have to do a lot of work to get an A and to be honest, I haven't even taken my backpack off my car all year[**] and I still make the honor roll and {I don't know how that is happening, but it is working}. [**]

Tee: Yeah, and when students, they be nice to a teacher, it's like if you nice to a teacher, she is not gona fail you or like she is not gona make you a low grade in her class and I see that happen most of the times. Because I can go to a teacher's class and not do anything in there and somehow end up with an A or a B and am like okay am gone be real quiet, [**Ron:** yeah, I really don't] you show them respect [**Ron:** like my grade is straight average and I don't really be doing nothing. And I don't even try and like, if I try my grade would probably be As, I don't try, but my grade is just straight]

M: Mmhm!

Quan: I feel like the school doesn't motivate you to try [**Tee** yeah, like it does, it really does][what did you just say][all*******][Oh! No, I mean, it doesn't**][**Quan & Ron:**, take a break**]

M: What can the school do to motivate students to try? I hear all you're saying and I

Andy: I will say just all the rules and all the stuff that they have like really put kids down and they don't wana try, they don't come to school. They make you feel like you are not gona be able to like [**Quan:** especially it's really kind of like, like I said, if go to look at schools like Joy High, and I guess they need to do all these stuff, but they just kind of like have a nicer setting that when you go look at them it makes you to feel like why am I trying because you feel like no matter how hard I try, am not gona be up there with them.] [**Quan:**, yeap, you know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll.] [but as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me, I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot???.] [****][There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60?][All Yeah! Yeah, [**Yali:** District five[**Quan:** minimum grade] you get 40, that 40 will remain in your report card][**Quan:** and a lot of them redo policy especially like ehm, was this year? When we first started that[last two years[last year] year, but you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get was a 60. Yeah when I was in class with *Mr. Jaa*, I didn't do anything because I know I was

gona get a 60 and I know was gona pass with those 60s and so Am glad they took that off. Still I just feel like Ok. So I felt kinda like, redo policy, if I fail this, I can redo it, slight test, redo it.

The following are some excerpts of key informants responses to the question on how they and their peers explain academic achievement.

I: How would you define academic achievement?

Keni: I feel as if academic achievement is not just good grade. I feel like it can be anything from like helping somebody in the hall or like sports, and like, it's not just about grades, but it's basically doing what you have to do to maintain the school, When you actually can sit down and say like I really understand what is going on. When you can recite it back in your head, or do work on your own and you feel like you accomplished something. I feel like with academic success, it all about where you come from basically with African Americans because, with some students, if they come from a bad background, like, their family don't have a lot, or maybe they are the first child to graduate or maybe they are the first child to do this, that's like a drive to push them harder and whereas if you have like a parent that stays on you about getting your work done and stuff, that will be a drive to push you higher. And then there is the kids that don't really care because they don't have anybody to push them or because or like nobody in family did this, so I don't have to do it either. Like it depends on your mindset and where you come from and how you actually feels about achieving something because if you can be successful and you can achieve a lot, then you can be successful with your academics

and so it just depends on that person (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 31, 2014).

Kelisha: Academic achievement for me is if you know it. I will describe it as you know it, you get it, you can learn it, you get like that, you just have it like that in your brain. Achievement is like you got it and you can keep forward with it. Say if, like you didn't know a test and you studied really very hard, you might got the test, a good grade on it, but if you look at it again, you don't get it, it's not achieving in that thing. You just got it right there, you don't have it. I feel achievement you got to know it every time. Every time you see it, you know the answer (S. Participant Interview, Dec. 13, 2013).

Jay: To me academic achievement is when you feel like you did give the best you can and you complete the amount of school that you know you could do (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014)

Jerry: Academic achievement is "getting good grades, but not just getting the grades, but learning something that could be useful in your life. Getting good grades and graduating from high school (S. Participant Interview, April. 10, 2014)

Jose: Academic achievement means achieving, having good grades and being an honor roll student and making really good scores on the test. The grades show that, I learned what I needed to learn and I. Yeah in health, it's like, I don't know, ehmm, I do the work, but I have not really learned anything yet, because I don't think he checks our work. He just checks to see if we did it not really to see if we understand it and so I feel like I haven't learned anything yet. It makes me feel like he really doesn't care. He just wants us to pass. Like, it mostly seniors in there so he just wants to pass them on. I don't think they care. They just wana get

the grade so that they graduate and get out of school (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 27, 2014).

Analysis, Findings and Interpretations

Again, in responding to this question, participants provided different meanings and understandings about academic achievement that pointed to their perception and sensemaking of school and schooling along with factors that influence their construction of the meaning of school. All thirty-three-student participants used grade and grading to explain academic achievement. As one of them frankly puts it, "I mean there is no other way to put academic success instead of having good grade in school" (Yan, S. Participant Interview, Mar. 27, 2014). Similar to their definitions/descriptions of school and schooling, two major categories emerged from their understanding of grade and grading as a measure of academic achievement namely: (1) How grade and grading should be as a measure of academic achievement, but not how it is has been, and (2) how grade and grading actually has been in this space. Several concepts about grade and grading as a measure versus not a measure of academic achievement also emerged within each category. Below I organize and share these categories and their related findings.

How Grade and Grading Should Be As A Measure of Academic Achievement, But Has Not Always Been

Predominantly, the participants identify grade as evidence of what students know and are able to do. According to them, ***grade should reflect knowledge and learning***, while ***grading should focus on identifying what the student has learned and/or mastered how to do***. In Quan's thinking, academic achievement is measured by grade, if one does well in class, in other words, if one is learning in class, that learning or

knowledge gained should reflect in his/her grades. Generally, then, "achievement is, you know, you get good grades, you get good grades, you make honor rolls, you make honor rolls, you get high GPA, you get high GPA, you go to a good college that's how academic achievement is supposed to be."

Thus, Quan establishes a continuum of academic achievement, as it should be in the ideal world where grades are actually a true measure of academic success and achievement namely: ***Learning equals good grades, good grades equals high grade point average (GPA), high GPA equals honor roll and good college, and good college equals good job***—a continuum that appears to align with the philosophical assumptions that seem to undergird the current No child Left Behind (NCBL) measures of school success and teacher effectiveness. However, the problem with this linear explanation of academic achievement and/or learning and knowledge[25] (what student know and can do) based on letter grades is that it begs the questions of what constitutes learning? Who is responsible for student learning; teacher, student, school, or the entire society, and what happens when grades fail to reflect learning? These questions become more important in this era of data-driven decision-making in understanding student learning and academic progress, especially the question of what happens when students' grades do not reflect what they know and can do.

Continuing this linear understanding of grades as evidence of learning and mastery of skills, Jalisha explains academic achievement as when ones' grade shows it. Noting, it is

[25] Learning and knowledge in this document refers to students' mastery of course skills, concepts, and target standards assessed through their ability to apply these skills, concepts, and standards to novel situations.

> Not by just, I guess your attitude about school because some teachers don't always look at that but I think when you put up, forth your best effort and you make sure you are learning the materials not just, I guess getting a good grade, depending on what level you are because everybody is not the same level. Ehmm, I would say, just to make sure you understand the material because it will show throughout your grades not just doing the work or getting the work from your peers. I will say understanding the material. I do, I really do agree that it depends on what school you go to. Yeah, we are supposed to be learning the same thing depending on what grade you are in, but I----I really would like to say that it depends on what district and where your school is located that you get, am not gona say that you receive the best quality of learning, but you get probably high aspects of learning (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

Here, Jalisha alludes to some of the endemic problems in the achievement literature about grades and grading. ***Should grade and grading be based on student attitude toward school, student best effort, student learning, or student ability?*** (Guskey, 2004: Miller, 2009; Carifio & Carey, 2010). Nevertheless, she adds a caveat, "make sure you are learning the materials not just, I guess getting a good grade. . . . Just to make sure you understand the material because it will show throughout your grades not just doing the work or getting the work from your peers. I will say understanding the material." Through this stipulation and the change in her explanation of academic achievement as understanding the material, she implicates individual students in their own learning, while complicating the belief in letter grade as a true evidence of student learning, a concept that prefigures the participants' discussion of ***the irony of grading,***

grades and academic achievement (Carifio & Carey, 2010), based on their school and schooling experiences.

Additionally, Jalisha's explanation of why students should ensure that they are learning, not just getting good grades, "because it will show throughout your grades," begins to explicate what the participants imply by learning and academic achievement as it relates to grade, an understanding I interpret as a belief in ***learning as the ability to synthesize and transfer knowledge to multiple contexts or application of knowledge gained from a specific context to novel situations***. She also introduces the concept of the ***difference between learning and grade*** that suffused the data corpus. Finally, Jalisha adds that the relationship between learning or academic achievement and grade depends on school and school districts, "I do, I really do agree that it depends on what school you go to. Yeah, we are supposed to be learning the same thing depending on what grade you are in, but I----I really would like to say that it depends on what district and where your school is located that you get, am not gona say that you receive the best quality of learning, but you get probably high aspects of learning."

Through this statement, she implicates school districts' and schools' culture, vision, mission, and goals for the level of expectation and academic rigor that is embedded in the curriculum and reinforced through grading for mastery, not for the mediation of student failure, attrition and dropout rate (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Invariably, districts and schools set the expectations and yardstick for what constitutes knowledge and grading scale that aligns with knowledge and learning, students follow their lead. In other words, students can only be as serious about learning and acquisition of knowledge as their schools and school districts, "it must come from the top." She also

introduces the notion of ***differential education, curriculum, expectations, and grading*** as well as ***the dangers of grade manipulation*** that pervades the data corpus.

Finally, under the domain of what grade and grading should be as measure of learning and academic achievement, study participants identify ***grade as a reward for learning or academic achievement*** (Stipek, 1998). Once more, Quan introduces the idea of grade as a reward or incentivizing, insinuating another contested theory in student learning and academic achievement, the issue of student motivation; even though he "would not say" that one should get "a reward for something that you [sic] should already be doing." Again, he raises the question of ***internal versus external motivation in student learning and academic achievement*** (Stipek, 1998; Elliot & Zahn, 2008). Jose further complicates this notion of grade as a reward for learning as she talks about how she is trying to figure out why her grades say that she has learned and/or mastered the skills taught in her Health Education class, whereas she knows that she has not learned anything,

> Academic achievement means achieving, having good grades and being an honor roll student and making really good scores on the test. The grades show that, I learned what I needed to learn and I, Yeah in Health, it's like, I don't know, ehmm, I do the work, but I have not really learned anything yet, because I don't think he checks our work. He just checks to see if we did it not really to see if we understand it and so I feel like I haven't learned anything yet. It makes me feel like he really doesn't care. He just wants us to pass. Like, it mostly seniors in there so *he just wants to pass them on*. I don't think they care. They just wana get

the grade so that they graduate and get out of school (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 27, 2014).

Jose is not alone in her feelings about teachers not caring about their students' learning, as well as teachers just wanting to pass them on. In talking about her experiences with school, Yan notes, "I don't think I have been challenged enough in school, like some teachers take teaching seriously and some don't. It's different. When asked to what she meant by "haven't been challenged enough," she said, "Because, just this year, some of my classes is just like, ehmm, in my English class, I earn my grade, but in my science class, I can just sit there and do absolutely nothing and have a 100 in there." (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 27, 2014).

However, these revelations become unsettling as one cannot help, but wonder why teachers, who commit to educating students would want to pass them on without educating them. The concept of ***passing students on without educating them*** develops fully as I unpack the data in the section on what grade and grading actually is in FHS. Nonetheless, salient points that emerged from the section on grade and grading as a true measure of learning and academic success, but has no always been the case are (1) earned grade is supposed to reflect what student has learned and can do, (2) good grades (C and above) are not always evidence of student learning and mastery of concepts and skills, (3) the relationship between student learning and his/her letter grade varies by teacher, school, and school districts' practices, (4) teachers who care about their students' learning take time to grade and provide feedback to their students on the students' learning and academic progress through realistic grading.

Grade and Grading Actually Is . . .

The ***irony of grading, grades and academic achievement*** introduced in the preceding section remerges as Yali subtly refutes the idea of high grade as a symbol of learning and academic achievement stating, "Well I kind of disagree. They say, I mean, that is how it is supposed to be. If you get a good grade in class, it should reflect all the things you have learned. But actually I realized, if you are actually come to school to learn, then in a lot of ways, grades don't really matter because the class I learn the most thing, you look at my report card, that's the class I have the lowest grade in and it's strange." Once again, Yali re-echoes Jose in wondering why they make lower grades in classes they feel like they "learn the most" and vice versa.

This is quite ironic as one expects that students' best grades should come from classes in which they learned and mastered the concepts taught. Stretching this thought further, she introduces the idea of ***discrepancy between grade and GPA*** as well as ***the disconnect between pedagogy, assessment and student learning*** (Skalski & Romero, 2011) asserting, "But you know, I don't know, but it took some time, because for a long period of time I just thought that academic achievement would be recognized by the highest test scores and the highest GPA, ***but a lot of times some of your smartest students have some of the lower GPAs because they are actually learning and they are doing the work to learn not just to get a good grade***. I don't, you can't really reflect it off of like, say the top five percent in a graduating class because no lie, the top five in the *graduating* class are not some of the brightest. You'll be appalled by it, but it's the truth, so."

Affirming, Yali's assertion, Ron reveals how this top five percent, possibly came to be the top students of their class, "They can be top, but are people that just didn't even learn nothing, they just cheat and pass, they cheat and copy and they got the easy classes." Concurring, Janet adds, "I don't think academic success is measured by grade because anybody can copy and cheat and get good grades," while Quan explains, "Lots of teachers, like I don't want to say, they show favoritism," and Tee clarifies, "When students, they be nice to a teacher, it's like if you're nice to a teacher, she is not gona fail you or like she is not gona make you a low grade in her class, and I see that happen most of the times. Because I can go to a teacher's class and not do anything in there and somehow end up with an A or a B and am like okay am gone be real quiet." Ron confirms Tee's experience noting, "yeah, I really don't, you show them respect. Like my grade is straight average and I don't really be doing nothing and like, if I try my grade would probably be As, I don't try, but my grade is just straight."

In the above episodes, participants in discussing why grade is not a true measure of student learning and academic success revealed four types of grades obtainable in the study's setting namely: (1) ***Earned grade***, whereby learning oriented students work for learning by choosing challenging tasks and courses that enable them to broaden their horizons. This group of students accept their grade not as a symbol of academic success, but more of a feedback on their efforts and progress toward learning and mastery of given concepts and/or skills. Hence they use grade and grading to monitor and adjust their efforts in achieving their academic goals. Consequently, Yali, Gloria, Jalisha, Yan, and Yani explains academic achievement as "not just getting good grades, but actually putting in your best efforts and turning in your work, not half done, and to just go ahead

and get your grade, but to say am proud of my work and I actually did the work." Implicit in their explanation is the understanding that learning is more important than grade and students who are learning and mastering skills have a higher likelihood to earn high grades than those who are not learning and/or mastering skills because learning is recursive and transfers to multiple contexts.

(2) ***Easy grade***: Here, grade oriented and some rather be in school students choose easy classes and tasks over challenging courses and tasks so as to get easy 'As' and 'Bs'. Hence, AP students withdraw from the AP track, because the "AP courses are more work than the CP courses, while the CP classes are easy; a way to get an easy 'A' is to be in CP classes (Janny, Participant Interview, 2014) and students generally avoid challenging classes "Because usually challenging classes are like the ones with strict teachers and they think they gona be yelled at because they are not gona do their work." Yet, students attest to learning in these challenging classes because the teachers challenge them to earn their grades; instead of giving them grades and passing them on, "Like most people don't wana take Jaa, Meg, and Sandra, but they are good classes. We learn a lot in those classes. I don't know why anybody would not like to take them. They are hard teachers though."

(3) ***Stolen Grade:*** Again, grade oriented students get good grades by either cheating or copying from their peers who actually do the work. Jalisha introduced this concept of stolen grades in the previous section when she advised students who believe in grades as evidence of learning and academic success to ensure that they understand the material and not just "doing the work or getting the work from their peers." In this section, the issue of stolen grade takes center stage as participants indict top ranking

students who cannot defend their grades through any other means than class work, homework and class assessments, with cheating and copying their way to the top. Ron describes this group of students' as people that just didn't even learn anything, but earn good grades by cheating and copying without being caught.

(4) ***Given Grade:*** Teacher gives students grade just to pass them on, a practice that both Jose and Yan decry as they wonder why they get 'As' from teachers who taught them nothing. However, although Quan and Tee blame teacher favoritism and manipulation of student behavior for given grades, the most disturbing source of given grades manifests as students share, explicate, and implicate the school for persistent academic failure of its students outside this space. Table 8.1 contains FHS Students' understanding of Grade as a measure vs. not a measure of Academic Achievement.

In an effort to explain what he means by teachers showing favoritism, Quan continues,

> but, I mean a lot of teachers around here are okay, let's say you got an F and you are failing the class, you can go talk to Ms. Angy and shed a couple of tears and the next thing you know, you don't got do nothing, you only have to show up in that class and if your parents come here and act like a fool because you are failing a class. The teachers will be like submit to that and say I have to do something about the failure because I will not only have their parents on my back, but also administration is on me and so, then again people are accepting the culture, and I think it is part of the whole the Freedom high culture because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that [things changed?] (Focus Group Interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

Once more, Tee, Ron, and Quan's discussion of the various types of grades and grading practices obtainable in the research setting elucidates the question of why

Table 8.1. FHS Students' Understanding of Grade as a Measure vs. not a Measure of Academic Achievement	
How grade and grading should be as a measure of academic achievement, but not how it is has been	**How grade and grading actually is in this space**
Earned grade is supposed to reflect what student has learned and can do	**Earned Grade:** Learning oriented students work for learning by choosing challenging tasks and courses that enable them to broaden their horizons. This group of students accept their grade not as a symbol of academic success, but more of a feedback on their efforts and progress toward learning and mastery of given concepts and/or skills.
Good grades (C and above) are not always evidence of student learning and mastery of concepts and skills	**Easy Grade:** Grade oriented students choose easy classes and tasks over challenging courses and tasks so as to get easy As and Bs. Hence, AP students withdraw from the AP track, because the "AP courses are more work than the CP courses
The relationship between student learning and his/her letter grade varies by teacher, school, and school districts' practices	**Stolen Grade:** Grade oriented and some rather be in school students get good grades by either cheating or copying from their peers who actually do the work.
	Given Grade: Teacher gives students grade just to pass them on, a practice that both Jose and Yan decry as they wonder why they get As from teachers who taught them nothing.

teachers, who by profession, are supposed to be committed to educating student, would rather pass students on without educating them, a question that arose from Jose, Yan, and Yali's musings on how and why they and their peers receive mastery grades, "As and Bs," when they have neither learned nor mastered anything in those courses.

Not only does Quan's statement above indict students, parents, and school administrators for deskilling and divesting FHS students of ***quality and equitable education,*** he also introduces the concept of ***teacher bullying***[26] and ***distrust in teacher professionalism***, as well as raises the question of who, among the educational stakeholders has the professional expertise and credibility to plan, teach, evaluate, and provide accurate (useful) feedback on student learning and academic progress. Hence to avoid student, parent, and administrators' bullying, ***teachers "submit" to diluted curriculum, low expectations, checking student work for completion not for mastery, giving students grade for showing up in class and remaining quiet; not for participating in learning activities and mastering the learning goals, and allowing students to cheat and copy on exams and tests.*** Undoubtedly, these practices moot the promise of public education to minority and economically disenfranchised students, as it reduces the value of their educational certificates, the academic currency, which transforms to reduced economic capital credentials, thereby reproducing the status quo (Giroux, 1983). Additionally, these grading malpractices or grade manipulation explain the confounding feedback that arises from data-driven administrative decisions around teacher quality, pedagogy, and instructional programs (Skalski & Romero, 2011).

Students in the study's setting seem to fully understand this social reproductive role of school, but willingly join the system in the reproduction of societal inequality by aiding their own recycling through the system (Bourdieu, 1977; Bandura, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Hence, even when they know the ramifications of given grades

[26] Teacher bullying in this document refers to all covert and overt harassment, embarrassment, threats as well as verbal and emotional abuses that teachers receive from school administrators, parents and students who push teachers into the unethical conduct of giving students grades and moving them on, even when it is evident that such students have not learned and cannot perform the given concepts and skills.

on their academic life and future, they work for it. A tenth grade student portrayed this awareness of the social reproductive role of the educational system and students' willful participation in it as he addresses his teacher in a class meeting:

> **Morlawe:** You want us to achieve, to study, to pass, and to become something after high school and you wonder why we don't want to achieve. We don't want because we don't know how to do that. We have already been destroyed right from elementary school; we have been given grades and pushed on. Nobody cares. The teachers don't care weather we learn or not and we are used to either getting grades or cheating to pass. You are just about the only one who cares about us learning and that is why everybody is failing your class [voices mutter in the background, "Am not failing," "Am not failing this class," "Only you is failing"]. Morlawe continued, yes am failing and we know you care about us and you want us to learn, but failing us will not help us either, just give us the grade we are already destroyed. You look, look at it this way, the As and Bs we receive from here will not help us, it cannot take us to college because we cannot pass the tests so whether you give us the grade or fail us it is the same, so give us the grade like others. You are not destroying us, we were destroyed before we get to you, look, look here elementary, middle school, even last year that's all they did, give us grade. We know that we are not learning anything. Don't think that we don't know (Fieldnote, Nov. 13, 2013).

Of course, Morlawe is right, in as much as ***giving them grades and pushing them out without educating them would not help them, holding them back and demanding that they learn and be able to apply what they have learned before moving on to the next***

level of schooling or even entering the workforce would not help them either, especially in a system/society where racial supremacy is orchestrated and deployed through differential education. This sedimentation of systemic inequality and it perpetuation through school and schooling becomes a ***constant moral dilemma for ethical and social justice minded teachers and school administrators of predominantly minority and economically disadvantaged inner city schools as they struggle between having a job and disrupting the status quo.***

This struggle resonates throughout the data set from the faculty and staff participants of this study as they shared their experiences from at least two years of teaching in FHS. Thus in responding to the question on teacher effectiveness Kayla states, "I think many of us are highly qualified. I think many teachers here are highly trained because they are qualified because of their training. Many of us have advance degrees, many of us have attended various workshops excetra; however, I don't think we are often encouraged to put those things in place." When asked to explain what she means by that, she responds,

> I think the biggest detriment to that is for some reason the report card. Because of the constant pressure to make sure that all students are here, when a large number of your student aren't there when they walk in the door. They don't desire to be there and it's hard to teach a horse to drink when the horse doesn't want to drink and I think a lot of teachers want to take their students right there, they teach there, but at the end of the day you fight the same constant battle and get the same constant headache at the end of the day. I think a lot of teachers have now joined, have gotten to the place where they have just resigned to their little self and said, I

> am tired, I am done, if this is what you want and I am not saying that's the large, that's not the majority, but that's what has happened to some of us here at FHS, that I think we have thrown in a towel and we don't get a lot of teacher support, you know, I listen to the things you are doing here, and am looking around the room, and am pretty sure you feel the constant struggle of I wana take my students here; however, am I really encouraged to take them there, you know, or am I encouraged to get them to accept defeat. And I think our students have accepted defeat and sometimes it is easy to just throw the towel (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Expressing the same frustration about ***teacher inability to effect change*** in a system that willfully deskills and divests minority and low SES students of equal access and opportunity to equitable education, personal agency, accountability for learning and resilience in pursuing quality education as well as academic success, Jaa, another faculty participant observes,

> I will describe FHS as a school that has failed its students. Ehmm, and I say it failed because we, we have accepted the, or let me not say, we have accepted, we have been forced to accept student mediocrity, and its veiled under the guise of us closing the achievement gap and instead of closing the gap, we are widening the gap, because current theory, current research says okay we will do damage to their psyches by using red ink, we do damage to their psyches by forcing them to actually rise up to the level of expectations, versus giving them a 60 just for showing up. And so as a result, they don't know what it means to actually work hard because they are given everything, you know, they are literally given grades

and keep giving grade; they lose out a lot on the learning process. There is no retention of information, because again, they don't have to do it. And so they don't have to do it, they don't do it and because teachers have no power to force them to do it, but yet to let them see the rationale. They ought not to do it (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Again, Tee and Ron's avowals of how they work for given grade by sitting quietly, not doing any work, not disrupting class or disrespecting the teacher and hoping that this "good" behavior will earn them passing grades at the end of the day, as well as Quan's explanation that students do not do class work and homework because they know that they would still be moved on to the next grade whether they show that they have learned or not, corroborates the teachers observation about students intentionally accepting failure as a means to free grade. Jay, a student participant, describes this ***learned helplessness*** as ***"betting the system***[27]," while Quan describes it as ***"joining the system,***" either way, the students imply a mechanism through which minority and economically disenfranchised inner city students gain free grades by subscribing and/or ascribing to systems' deficit thinking about individuals who are different. This concept would fully develop as participants discuss students' academic behavior and school culture in their respective sections.

When probed to share some similarities and difference between his experiences in his former school and FHS, Quan states, "The curriculum here is easy. It is not tedious at all. I actually don't feel challenged. And actually when I just came here and after a year or two, I just got really like, honestly I got lazy because I just felt like you don't have to

[27] Betting the system—a mechanism through which minority and economically disenfranchised inner city students gain free grades by subscribing and/or ascribing to systems' deficit thinking about individuals who are different.

do a lot of work to get an 'A' and to be honest, I haven't even taken my backpack off my car all year and I still make the honor roll and I don't know how that is happening, but it is working. I feel the school doesn't motivate you to try." Moving the discourse forward, Andy adds,

> I will say just all the rules and all the stuff that they have like really put kids down and they don't wana try. They don't come to school. They make you feel like you are not gona be able, especially it's really kind of like, like I said, if go to look at schools like Joy high, and I guess they need to do all these stuff, but they just kind of like have a nicer setting that when you go look at them, it makes you to feel like why am I trying because you feel like no matter how hard I try, am not gona be up there with them. You know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll. But as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot??? [****][There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60?][All Yeah! Yeah, [**Quan:** minimum grade and a lot of them redo policy especially like, but you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get was a 60. Yeah when I was in class with Jaa, I didn't do anything because I know I was gona get a 60 and I know was gona pass with those 60s and so Am glad they took that off. Still I just feel like Ok. So I felt kinda like, redo policy, if I fail this, I can redo it, slight test, redo it.

In this discourse and others like it throughout the data corpus, participants revealed FHS academic culture that generates students' academic behavior, which in turn explains their understanding of school, schooling, and academic achievement. Beginning with Quan's description of the curriculum as easy and monotonous, to Andy's portrayal of the school as having "settlement for kids not to do their best," participants furthered ***the culture of settlement for mediocrity and low expectation*** that Quan introduced in the discussion on the meaning and purpose of school and schooling when he blamed teachers for accepting students' culture of acting up and disrupting instruction. According to the participants, this ***settlement for mediocrity is deployed through grade and grading policies, program and procedures that disable students from applying themselves in pursuing learning and academic success.*** Such programs and policies include S300 credit recovery program, mandatory two days a week after school tutorial, No zero, minimum grade and redo policies, as well as open door make-up work policy. These programs and policies will be fully discussed in the sections on FHS academic culture and the relationship between FHS policies and procedures and student academic outcome. Appendix L is the list of FHS instructional program, while Appendix M is the grading policies.

From this section on grade and grading actually is, I teased out seven concepts about grades and grading as a measure of academic success namely: (1) The irony of grading, grades and academic achievement. (2) The discrepancy between grade and GPA (3) The disconnect between pedagogy, assessment and student learning. (4) Four types of grades and grading practices (5) Systemic teacher bullying for grades (6) Systemic deskilling and divesting of students through handicapping grading policies, programs,

and procedures (7) Distrust of teachers' professionalism and expertise in planning, implementing, and assessing student learning and academic progress within their content area. Table 8.2 presents these findings.

Chapter Summary

Overall, although FHS students use letter and number grades to explain academic achievement, they also believe that grade, as performed in FHS, is not a true reflection of learning and academic success. Rather, grade in FHS is a cumulative of systemic performances aimed at closing the achievement gap between minority and mainstream students, which invariably yields the counterintuitive result of widening the gap because of the policies and procedures through which it is performed and navigated.

Mirroring the pattern of different categories of students that emerged from the data on students' definition of school and schooling, four types of grades emerged from this section, earned graded, which only learning oriented students seek; easy grade, which grade oriented students gain through enrolling in easy and unchallenging courses, stolen grade through which some grade oriented and the rather be in school students move through the grade levels, and given grades, which all categories of students get through either mandatory grading policies, systemic teacher bullying for grades, or through teacher favoritism. Additionally, the data corpus on this interview question, how would you explain academic achievement?, revealed several concepts that allude to FHS academic culture and students behavior. I will discuss these aspects of the study when I take up the second research question for this study.

Table 8.2: Emergent Concepts from Students' Sensemaking of Academic Achievement.

1. The irony of grading, grades and academic achievement.
2. The discrepancy between grade and GPA.
3. The disconnect between pedagogy, assessment and student learning.
4. Four types of grades and grading practices.
5. Systemic teacher bullying for grades.
6. Systemic deskilling and divesting of students through handicapping grading policies, programs, and procedures.
7. Distrust of teachers' professionalism and expertise in planning, implementing, and assessing student learning and academic progress within their content area.

Chapter IX

Student Participants' Perception of School Policies and Practices

The third interview question I asked participants in my quest into students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling as well as the bidirectional interaction between student and school in students' academic achievement is what they think about the school policies and practices. The assumption behind this question is that in responding to it and its attendant probes, student participants would reveal their academic behavior as it shapes and is being shaped by the school environment. Additionally, this question aims at revealing how the academic culture that students and school construct in-turn shapes students' academic outcome. This assumption derives from Bronfenbrenner (2001; 2005) and Bandura's (1989) belief in individuals as both producers and products of their environment.

What do you think of school policies and practices?

In answering this questions, both students and faculty participants consistently showed ambivalent feelings about school rules and policies as they indict and exonerate the rules, policies and procedures simultaneously for FHS students' academic success as well as their academic failure. Two types of policies emerged from the data, discipline policies and procedures and instructional policies and procedures. For the most part, almost all the participants viewed the discipline policies as necessary for student safety and academic success, but lamented the differential implementation of the policies otherwise, policy procedures.

On the contrary, most students and faculty participants identified the instructional policies, processes and procedures as handicapping students from excelling academically. Because this question also targets my second research question, the bidirectional interactions between person characteristics and context in creating student academic outcome, I include faculty and staff members' responses to this question in this section. Like in the preceding sections, I first, present participants responses to familiarize my readers with excerpts of the data before engaging them in my analysis, findings, and interpretations of the data.

Excerpts of Focus Group and Teacher Responses on What They Think About School Policies and Procedures

M: What do you think of the school policies and practices?

Andy: Here is the thing though. They got too many rules though. Most people, you know how they most people, students drop out probably because they can't, all the trouble they get with all these rules. Let's say, the rules they have all the trouble they get in and they act up in class because of stuff that they, teachers and whatever they, whatever happens to them, whatever, like most of the stuff are unnecessary things [**Tee:** yeah a lot of things are unnecessary]

Jane: Like being in ISS over ID that's cutting into the learning time. [yeah, you sending students out of class]

Quan: and a lot of people have personal stuff going on, like their own problems and like when they come here, they don't wana try?

Tee: Like certain things here, am just saying, at Columbia High, like that camou (Camouflage) rule, there was never a problem with this and so why would you

want to start a problem with it. I feel like, if there was never, nothing going on with camou, just because that happened at another school, that does not it mean it's gona happen here. So with them making that rule, of course people gona get mad because there nothing ever happen with it. It's just that the things that never happen here that people get mad about. It's like why we got to do it when no rule has been broken yet, <you got what am saying?>

Quan: I just feel like they are like labeling us. [**Tee:** yeah] [**Quan:** that's what it is] [**Quan:** because we are African American predominant school]

M: What is it about camou?

Yali: Mhm, they, you know how they got the rule we can't wear camouflage jacket, [yeah, it was yeah] and they claim it was gang related? Yeah, it was like different school that's nowhere near Freedom high and so they made a rule for us, because of something that has absolutely nothing to do with us. Like it's cold outside, I know a girl who wore, the only jacket she had to wear that was gona keep her warm was a camouflage jacket. She got in trouble for that and it's like, if her parents provided that for her to keep her warm, why is it that you gona take something from her that's gona keep her warm in the cold <and write up and have a referral on her record, and she is not like a bad student (when she] you know at the same time she is an 'A' student. It's like that's just, it just doesn't balance out. She is wearing a jacket that kept her warm in third degree weather>. And people was like [**Tee:** (mimicking the admin) oh! your parents should know what you should wear while shopping].

Tee: I know my mama, [yeah, people gona buy what they want with their money], my mama she gona buy what she wants me to have with her money [**Quan:** you know you gona buy what you can afford] **Tee:** yeah, my mama *she's gona buy what she wants me to have with her money* and like when we are shopping and I go not that and she gona say to me oh no and "I want your school to call me", but they never call your parents about your wearing it though, and when your parents come they are like (mimicking) oh, no! It's not all that, you know.[they try to ??]

M: Which other rules do you think do not make sense?

Jane: The IDs

Ron: Polo. You can't wear big polo horses, shirts at school, you know what I mean? [you all know???]

Yali: I thought that was just a rumor [???]

M: The tardy policy, polos, ISS and all that. . .

Ron: Tardy policy you get ISS for being late to class [or you???] they do have???

M: You said something about ISS and cutting into class time. Can somebody talk a little more about that.

Shade: Ok. They say in our school we don't get proper money because of our test score. Like, if a student in ISS all day, they might not be in a proper mind to take a test, so of, course our test score will be low and if everybody gets wrote up and gets sent home for IDs and their dress code and of course they are not gona be in school to get the proper knowledge.

M: Okay, and why are they being written up, because if what am hearing is correct and what I have heard so far [**Shade:** because of school rules not district rules] it's not for class disruption

Shade: School rules not district rules

M: They are not being written up for classroom disruption? [all shaking head] No!

Yali: You rarely see referral for that. The way it is, is so odd. You see more referrals for being tardy and stuff like that versus referrals for people who make loud outburst in class while the teacher is teaching. You never, see that, but oh! Let me not have my ID on and I'll be wrote up for that but I can yell out in class, curse a teacher out and nothing is gona happen. [I think that's backwards]

Jane: I don't feel the IDs is for protection because as I said, I almost fell down on the step yesterday and there is no soap in the bathroom [**Andy:** see they don't worry about all that stuff, they are worried about ehh] that's protection right there. [**Andy:** they are not trying to get us ehh more stuff that we need] [**Jane:** when one wants to use the bathroom and there should be soap, that's protection][**Tie:** that's right] [**Andy:** they are worried about the wrong stuff].

Tee: Then when a student addressed the issue in our senior meeting, oh! They get so upset like she is disrespectful but she asked your opinion and like she asked her opinion and she told her, but oh that was disrespect when she said she feel like dress code is not the appropriate thing, like something to worry about in school. I mean I understand some dress codes, but like, yeah.

M: Okay, **Jane** why did you almost fall down yesterday?

Jane: Oh! Because how, I don't know how to say it. It's the step and this whole little and it was like when is walked and the thing was like coming off, [you slipped] no, I did not slip, I know how to walk, but the thing was like coming off, [wobbling], [p2 no. the rubber part, you know like the edges] that came off when I was trying to walk and I am like . . .

M: So we are looking at lack of maintenance here. You know why I that question is because you have mentioned it several times whenever you talked about things not being done. So I want to be able to know exactly what we are dealing with here. So, am I hearing that we worry about things that are nor really important when the real safety issues are not being handled (overlooked or unattended to) [yeah] like we have lose tiles, lose stair ways, no soap in the bathrooms, the doors are always open, but we want students to wear IDs and even if all students wear their IDs, there are still security issues as far as the outside doors are left open and unattended. [and then the warning, ****, **Tee:** anybody can put on a leather [all ***, ???] anybody can put on an ID and walk around here, anybody can do that so it's not really like {a big issue that exists} because I can bring my work card or something else and (shows a fake ID card) and walk around here, you guys will never know.

Quan: I know the importance of IDs is like for student identification because it will be difficult for teachers and administrators actually know the faces of like you have around 777 kids at the school, but (makes face and hand lift the implies, it doesn't deserve the attention it gets)

M: There is something else I heard during you discussion of the rules that I would like to have more clarification on. Somebody stated that people act up in class, yell and disrupt instruction and classroom activities, but are never written up while majority of the students are written up for not wearing IDs and for tardy. What you think is the reason why students who disrupt classes do not get any repercussion for their actions?

Quan: I think it's the culture of the school. The teachers are just accepting it, ok am not going to do anything about it because it's gona fall right back to me and they still gona be in my class [yeah] maybe am just gona ignore it and act like I don't hear it. So I think of the culture of the teachers' accepting the culture of the student acting up. And because the teachers accept it, the students gona keep doing it.

Shade: Or may be the boss only wants referrals for ID and tardies and not classroom and academic discipline (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

I: Tell me about your experiences with school and schooling.

Zani: Mmh, my experience with school, the students, some of them are disrespectful, more of them are like immature, but most of them, they are like, respectful to one another. With like schooling, I, the rules (breathes heavily) the rules, I feel like they are okay, but I feel like they should treat us more as adults instead of like we are in elementary school, because I feel like the rules are really childish in a way. Because I feel like the cell phones rules, if we are at lunch, I feel like we should be able to use our cell phones. And for the dress code, I feel like the way you dress shouldn't like describe, like, your learning environment. I

really feel like the dress code and the cell phone rules should be change (S. Participant Interview, April 9, 2014).

Keni: I feel like the rules that they have set, like they are not bad rules, the rules that they have set are good rules that will help you, but the way they enforce it, and I feel like to get respect, you got to give respect to get respect and if you are just coming to students with do this, do that, do that, like, you are not gona get through to them, it's like, it's gona take a while, I feel like, they should like, start out, like, if they want something going, like, the rules, they should put that in a child's mind ahead of time, like, they should start that before they get here so that they can understand how, what procedures and what's gona go on, but pretty much, like the rules they have, they are good

I: How do they enforce the rules here?

Keni: It's like they are strict on rules, but they are very lenient sometimes. Like, if you gona be strict on rules then you have to make sure you do that, like be consistent. <They are not consistent at all> and the rules that they are consistent on it don't be like the rules that you need to worry about, like, it don't be like the rules people in high school need to worry about. Like they treat us sometimes like we are babies. Like, I just feel like they have to be more consistent with the rules and if they gona have to enforce one thing, then they gona have to take action, they gona have to do the same thing because you can't try to enforce one thing and you are supposed to be the role model and you're not doing the same thing. So, it's like, (Takes a deep breath) how are you telling me to do the same thing when you are not doing it yourself, like for, how are you telling me not to do

something, when you are doing the same thing you are telling me not to do. (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 31, 2014).

I: Tell me about your experiences with school and schooling.

Mai: I don't know. I didn't have a good high school experience. I had good teachers like you, but I didn't really like high school, I hope I have a better in college.

I: What didn't you like about high school? What are those experiences that you did not like?

Mai: They give out handout too much here.

I: What do you mean by that?

Mai: You know the saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it to drink it"?

I: Yes

Mai: If you don't do your homework, they give you so many chances after chances and that's not how the real world works. They yes up. And that's not gona help us at all for those of us who are going to college (S. Participant Interview, April 6, 2014).

Excerpts of Faculty Participants' Data on School Policies and Practices

Angy: The policies at the school and district level are in place and work if we can get everyone to buy in to that and consistently follow the plan and work with students (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Barry: It's in black and white and all that we have to do is to follow it. If we follow it to the letter, to the 't', cross the 'T's, do the 'I's, and quit trying to go

with friends for these students do what is outlined, and they will always say, you know, we are putting too many black kids out of school, but the thing is there are a lot of black kids don't wana be here. They wana stop someone else from learning, but the handbook is there. If we follow the rules, we will have no problem. Rules change every year. When I first came to this school the rule was great. Now, shaggy paints, short dress and pants, hair do, prayer, they have taken all these out and if you have noticed, it has caused a problem in school. The rules are for them to follow and they will succeed if they will follow the rules, but you get some kids who are so head strong that they think that they are parents instead of their parents being over the kids (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Dean: The policies are fine because they reflect real world life. However, the policies are not effective because they are not enforced from top down (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Jaa: I won't even think the policies enable, I will think it disables students. The number of students who are purely motivated to succeed are such so far few and between. I taught a young man this year and this young man said, "The biggest mistake he ever was that he was in English II-Honors and was scheduled to come to AP Lang the next year," he didn't come because he was afraid of the work. He didn't want to do the work and at the end of his senior year, he realizes, "I should have come, because I leave with nothing." And, he qualifies for the bright future scholarship and all of these other monies, but he realizes, there is nothing, there is nothing there.

Justy: the policies I really do like and I really do follow and make sure that my students to follow them, but the effectiveness of some of them is as a matter of fact, the effectiveness is not high enough and that is because I think they get too many chances to do the same wrong thing. So, some of the policies here are very, very good for the students and there are some of them that are not very effective. the ones I think they are good are tardy, like the tardy policy to a <point> and one of the ones I think is not very effective I wearing the ID because when they do not wear their ID, what happens is that they get a pat, they get a sticker. They get stickers over, and over, and over, so, I don't think it will be effective for helping them to go out to a job and have to wear their IDs. That's not going to be effective in preparing them because they don't have to because they are given an alternative. I like the idea where if the kids are late, they have to go and they have to get a pass after the bell rings, but what I don't like about it is that they have to accumulate a certain amount of tardies before they can get a consequence. And I think, you know, that creates, you know they have a chance to do something four, five, six, or seven times, you see what I mean? And what will happen is that they would wait till the seventh time and they will do something about it, but I feel that we nip it in the bud, then they got know or I got to do this, I got to do that. You know, so (F. Participant Interview, April 8, 2014).

Kelly: We have good policies, but is it carried out, ehmm no! None whatsoever. You tell a parent, I if I take your cell phone the first time, you get it back, the second time, you don't get it back until June, but nowadays you take it and they get it back in the afternoon, take it a second time, they get it back in the afternoon,

the third time, I don't, you know, they don't follow through on those policies. Pants have to be worn appropriate, but people say what has that got to do with education? (F. Participant Interview, April 4, 2014).

Loyld: If everyone were to be on the same page, and if everyone across the board did what they are supposed to, I believe it will be a lot more effective when it comes to discipline, IDs, dress codes, and such things because I believe those things do prepare kids when it comes to life after high school. I have never been one to agree with the grading policy with the 60 minimum or giving students a grade even if the assignment is not complete or even attempted, policies such as that, I think, are setting kids up for unrealistic realty for after high school because it's not gona be like; students once again, not setting high expectation, not holding them accountable thinking it will be okay for them to do the minimum or nothing at all and still move on to the next level (F. Participant Interview, April 2, 2014).

Meg: We have some policies that I think are needed and do help students. (Takes a deep breathe) our dress code and electronic policies, I think are trying to establish a culture of success in the classroom. You are coming here to learn. This is not the park and when you are in different environment you have to dress for that environment. I often tell my kids because they get upset by the dress code when you go to work you dress in uniforms, you don't have problems with that because they are paying you. Okay, you come to school we are not paying but you are earning your credits and there is an environment that you have to be a part of and if your clothing is distractive to another student or sends out a wrong message because that's what it's supposed to be it's saying something about who you are.

Appropriate message and appropriateness, if your mind is set on learning, you have more learning focus. I had a classmate of mine who always dressed up for test because it gave her a boost to her confidence she felt so good about herself and she did well and I think about that all the time I come into my class as a teacher I have to be concerned about my dress as well and so those two policies are helping, are trying to motivate kids to be focused academically. I think our policy of having teachers to be reflective of their lesson plan, the only thing with that, I don't think they're checking to see that teachers are writing reflections. I think it's important for teachers to reflect about, on the lesson, did it work? What will I change? I think a good teacher ?? does it. I think we are getting ready for the next class, I have a 1A class and a 4A class as in night and day, but as am teaching 1A if I see something that didn't work quite go well in 1A, I could have fixed that by 4A. So that I can fix that by 4A, that's reflection, but if you ask teachers to follow the lesson protocol we keep changing our lesson plan and I have no problems with protocols, making sure that the new teachers coming understand why the lesson plan, what's the essential question? What is the outcome? Thinking with the end in mind as both of us did that training. That's no problem, but that just paper work because at the end of the day you can write anything in the lesson plan to make it sound good, there's no one to check, *there's no one coming in to actually into the classroom to see if you are actually implementing the strategies that is ineffective. So, all am saying is having us all have one lesson plan is a great idea so that there will be continuity among the classes, but if you are not going to reinforce that, it's just paper work. It's just*

that. Ehmm, Our SOAR program is making efforts to try to get students to get involved, trying to give them an avenue to be successful, but again, I know that they are having problems with kids coming and behaving in that program and that is a disconnect, so the effort is there and it's impacting some students because we are having mentors come in, but there is no, I think there is no consistent support or information about SOAR. I think SOAR can be done for all grade and I think if you make it to where you can compete to get into the program, I think that will change it, It's not something everybody can just sign up and you are there, but if you compete to get in there, kids are bound to know that hey, I got into this program and they want to stay in it. Make them earn it, provide it, but make them earn it. *<I do not think our E2020 how it's set up, our no zero policy, our 60 as the lowest grade policy, saying that if a kid has a 76 if a failing and that teachers should find ways to improve their grade, I think those policies are hurting our kids* because a kid knows, I got an 80 first nine weeks, I have a 60 this nine week, I should have a 70 because in the end you can't fail me because you have to give me a 60. *I can come to class every day or not come to class every day and get a 60 because the lowest grade you can give me is a 60. If I have done the work do for the first nine weeks, am done and there are several kids who are like that, am good. That's it, there is nothing you can do to affect me now.* And those policies are in place, if they realize, if the minimum 60 policy is not in place or if the final exam actually count as 20% so sure, you have an 80 and you have 60, but here is your final exam, it's 20 % of your grade and it's actually cumulative then you have to come there is no way you can skip that. *If a kid passes final exam, sure*

that shows you have learned something, but if they have you gone throughout the year you have not passes one quiz, one test and the reason why they are passing is because we have x amount of class work or assignment have they really learned and mastered content? So, I think those policies hurt academic rigor and success for students. I don't think they are actually ??pulling out students for HSAP, I think helps to get them extra attention. Those who are enrolled in those course, I think smart-blocking or double-blocking or power-blocking, as they say, certain classes help, but <*I think that when they are doing that, they focus on one content and the other content classes go down, so we need to have a balance and I think they should go to the teachers more*>. {*Leadership is not real leadership. I think it's a top down approach and if that is how you wana have it,*< *fine*>*, but make sure you have a clear expectation of what you want and who you want to execute it and not the same teachers all over again*}. I think it work better if you have a bottom up approach, {you have the outcome that you wana have and then you have teachers work together to achieve the outcome. <*Let them be a part of the process. Let them be collaborative and build a community because when you have all circles involved, then you have more success, then you can check you climate, but if it was here*, you *do what I said and you go*, and *you keep changing* (snaps finger 4 times) it doesn't work>}, so and I cannot name one consistent policy we have had in this school, advisory changes from year to year, enrichment changes from year to year. Ehmm, I really can't say that we have policies that work. You are already telling kids we gona have a power week after school is over for like, you know, those kids who didn't quite measure up. So if you are in the 60 range,

> oh, you go to school for a week and half and all of a sudden you earn your credit. If I was a student and I did have a background and the support of my parents, oh, >*fine*<, school will be my playground and then I will go, take that course and am done (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Analysis, Findings, and Interpretations

In responding to this question, participants provided different understandings and interpretations of the various policies programs and procedures through which student learning and academic outcome is planned, managed, and sustained in the study's setting. Although, in actual fact, discipline and instructional policies and procedures should complement, reinforce and sustain each other (Fullan, 2009), most of the participants saw them as isolated and thus counterintuitive. Following this division, I will first present the participants' thoughts about the discipline policies and procedures followed by the their perception of the instructional policies and programs. Miller (1981) described policy as "a historical or contemporary statement or series of statements which describes, prescribes, and/or proscribes a course of action" (p.1) and posited that policies can be either written or oral, and may or may not imply contractual legal obligations.

Additionally, policies can be generated at central or local organizational levels, and may or may not be binding at levels other than the one from which it originated. Educational policies are not excluded from these distinctions, especially with the adoption of site-based leadership by many school districts and educational entities. Consequently, in this dissertation, school policies refer to explicit and/or implicit, central office or site school, decisions as well as single or group decisions and directives aimed at guiding future decision, initiating or retarding actions, and/or guiding implementation

of previous decisions. Below, I present my findings on participants' perceptions of the study setting's policies and procedures by emergent concepts within each of the two categories of school policies, discipline and instructional policies and procedures. Within each category, I first present my analysis, findings and interpretation of students' perceptions of the policies before presenting faculty participants' perception of the policies. Throughout the presentation, I juxtapose students' and faculty members understanding and interpretation of the policies whenever the need arises.

Students' Perceptions of Discipline Policies and Practices

Predominantly, student participants acknowledge the discipline policies as necessary for school safety as well as student learning and academic success, however they express mixed feeling about the intention, usefulness, and implementation of some of the policies. Specifically, ***they identify the ID, dress code, and tardy polices as important, but described their implementation processes as punitive, malicious and unnecessary***. Hence, in discussing policy situation in FHS, students focused on ***policy intent for safety and well-being of students versus policy for power, vindication and vindictiveness as the excerpts below portray.***

> **Tee:** I mean, personally, I understand the ID and stuff, I understand that, but I feel like they go overboard with that at times. I feel like every school has ID and I understand [**Jane:** but they do go overboard with the ID policy] [???] it's what, mmh, what? Probably like about 3:15 and they are still worried about the ID and we were about to go home and they are worried about the ID, but they have doors open around the school. So if you are worried about ID [**Quan:** if ID is for protection why do we have open doors. It is so obvious to people who don't even

go here, then, they come unauthorized to school][???] **Quan:** last year, last year we had pit bowl in the school you're worried about security and [???] you know in our mindsets as students we were like you are worried about us wearing IDs for security but then you have wild animals and people come into the school like, you know, if they wana come shoot up the school, but God forbid something like that should happen, they will be able to come in through the little side doors and start shooting and nobody could do anything about it.

In this excerpt, Tee and her peers introduce the concept of ***the discrepancy between policy intention and policy implementation***, a concept that suffuses the entire data corpus on school policies and practices. By describing the ID policy as unnecessary, they not only question FHS' safety practices, but also normative organizational practices that target subordinates as scapegoats for major systemic dysfunctions. Consequently, the students could not understand why addressing major safety hazards such as broken, open, and unprotected inlets and outlets to and from the school building, loose tiles, leaking roofs, and sanitary needs should not take precedence over minor issues like ID, tardy, and dress code violations. Also, Tee and her colleagues' questioning prefigures the broader theme of ***equality, access, and equitable educational opportunity for minority and economically disadvantaged students*** that saturates the data corpus. According to Yali, this overbearing focus on trivialities over major school problems "does not balance out." Hence, Jane doubts that the forceful implementation of the ID policy is for protection, Quan "feels like they are for labeling students," while Andy describes it as being "worried about the wrong stuff."

Extending this idea of overbearing focus on minor discipline infractions over instruction and academic success, Glory notes,

> One reason, I feel like if we stop focusing much on some of the things as far as or even like IDs and the dress code. Like, yes, we shouldn't* be allowed to come here naked**, but to send us out of class for being like ISS you are not gona learn nothing in there because honestly, you are not gona have to do anything. You just have to sit there and if you get sent home for being tardy I think it's just gona mess you up for being suspended, for being tardy 6 times or sometimes you can't get here on time and it's putting a big gap on our academics because we are always out of class. If we focus on what we need to do with the books, I think it could be so much higher (S. Participant Interview, May 12, 2014),

while Keni and Kiesha affirm, "I understand the dress code is gona help you like, if you are wearing like uniforms and like jobs and being on time, but it's other little things like they focus on, they try to push that don't really have like no meaning" (Keni, S. Participant interview, Mar. 31, 2014) and "I think when they talk too much about the dress code everybody don't hear them and that's when they don't care so much about their grades. You talking more about dress code, but you don't care about the HSAP, EOC, whatever test you take, you gona kick me out of class and she made me miss a whole lesson and I hate being behind that's one thing I do not like" (Kiesha, S. Participant interview, Dec. 13, 2013).

Here, again, students show obvious concern about missing classes and instructional activities for what seem to them as minor infraction of unnecessary rules. They believe that rules that send them to in-school and out of school suspensions

seriously cut into their learning, thus such rules should not be the focus of a school whose students are failing academically. However, when asked why they refuse to adhere to the dress code, ID, and tardy policies, participants provide the following responses,

> **Keni:** The rules that they have set, like they are not bad rules, the rules that they have set are good rules that will help you, but the way they enforce it.
>
> **Jane:** They said that we have to use the bathroom on our way to class. I remember my freshman year I have JROTC all the down there and I have Ms. M, I was always late every day and I knew my way around the school, but I was always late because that's a very long walk and then when you get to the bathroom there's always this long line. People just sit there and skip in the bathroom. And like sometimes you really have to use the bathroom, and it's there, this four people in there and they don't want to, you know, [M ***no one wants to get out] yeah, four people and like, so how am I supposed to be on time. It's simply messed up (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).
>
> **Tee:** I know my mama, [yeah, people gona buy what they want with their money], my mama she gona buy what she wants me to have with her money [**Quan:** you know you gona buy what you can afford] **Tee:** yeah, my mama *she's gona buy what she wants me to have with her money* and like when we are shopping and I go not that and she gona say to me oh no and "I want your school to call me", but they never call your parents about your wearing it though, and when your parents come they are like (mimicking) oh, no! It's not all that, you know.[they try to ??]

Jay: Because the administration, they are focusing on bigger and other projects rather than the children's academics. Yea, because about their, Like with the dress code, they are more concerned about what the kids are wearing and the dress code then it's taking time from them being in the classroom.

Jerry: Well one here, I know that students get suspended for being tardy whenever they, it doesn't make any sense because they end up missing more school for like having so many tardies, that's not smart.

Tee: Like certain things here, am just saying, at Freedom High, like that camou (Camouflage) rule, there was never a problem with this and so why would you want to start a problem with it. I feel like, if there was never, nothing going on with camou, just because that happened at another school, that does not it mean it's gona happen here. So with them making that rule, of course people gona get mad because there nothing ever happen with it. It's just that the things that never happen here that people get mad about. It's like why we got to do it when no rule has been broken yet, <you got what am saying?>

Quan: I just feel like they are like labeling us. [**Tie:** yeah] [**Quan:** that's what it is] [**Quan:** because we are African American predominant school]

Kiesha: I think when they talk too much about the dress code everybody don't hear them and that's when they don't care so much about their grades. You talking more about dress code, but you don't care about the HSAP, EOC, whatever test you take. I feel like when, you do, you have to go to extreme to make me mad because like<that day she made me so mad, it's like you did for, the reason, what's your cause?> <and it's like, am not a, am a good student.< <I

have never cause any type of trouble she just wanted, I feel like some teachers, I feel like you should get to like, if you are the principal, you should get to know your students. Yea, you should know all of your students. If you are the assistant principal you should know your students, the administration know all your students. If you want to like come up to me, you should at least go look at my background because I don't start trouble. I actually achieve at school. What is purpose of writing people up?< I know you all are trying to control the class, but if you can't control, you have to write them up every single day and there's nothing that will happen" (Kiesha).

Zaine: I really feel like the dress code and the cell phone rules should be changed."

In order to understand these students repeated infractions and belligerence over dress code, ID, and tardy policies, one has to take each student's episode singly before addressing them holistically. First, Keni suggests that the policies are not bad in themselves, but how they are enforced is problematic. Jane's bathroom experience reinforces Keni's assumption as Jane points out that she does not go late to class on purpose; rather her tardies are circumstantial upon her restroom needs and the condition of the bathrooms when she gets there. Implicit in her explanation is the need for more bathrooms, since the available bathrooms are not enough for everybody who would like to use the restroom during class transition. Second, in Tee's declaration that her "mama she gona buy what she wants me to have with her money" because people buy what they want with their money, she suggests that her clothing styles depend on her mother's choices since her mother makes the decision of what to buy with her money. Since Quan

agrees with her, I suppose the situation also applies to him. Accordingly, ***Tee and Quan insinuate that students are not supposed to be scapegoats for adults' behaviors, and by implication, societal decisions that ruffle school effectiveness and efficiency.***

Third, both Jay and Jerry question the rationality of administrative decision that undermines the learning and academic success of their students. By referencing the history of the "no camouflage policy," ***both Tee and Quan accuse school of "labeling and stereotyping predominately African American schools," while contesting the one-size-fits all practice that informs school policy formation and adoption***. Additionally, their accusation foreshadows the students' stories about the acclaimed academic failure of African American high school students as they explain the reason why African American high school youths are failing academically.

Finally, Kiesha ***reveals that students would not listen to anybody who does not care about their learning and academic success***, a revelation that might be shocking considering all the grading policies and practices that has been put in place to help student graduate on time from high school. Additionally, this revelation begs the question of whether these students are willfully revolting against these policies because they have suddenly realized that these policies are "smoking mirrors" meant to distract them from the actual purpose of school for minority and low SES student, sorting, labeling, and conscientizing them to accept their poverty as deserving (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983). According to her, "You are talking to me about dress code, but you don't care about HSAP and EOC, whatever test you take?" The implication of Kiesha accusation will fully manifest as students begin speaking about the instructional policies in the next section. She ends by advising school administrators and

all school disciplinarians to first know their students, "if you are the principal, you should get to know your students. Yea, you should know all of your students. If you are the assistant principal you should know your students, the administration know all your students. If you want to like come up to me, you should at least go look at my background because I don't start trouble," thus introducing ***the importance of genuine relationship between student, teacher, and administration in creating a safe, trusting, and learning centered environment that boosts student and teacher moral, while fostering student learning and academic success.***

Nevertheless, Jalisha reminds us that students understand the usefulness of these policies in creating safe and conducive learning, even though they do not all agree with the policies because of generational gap, "But I could say that schooling itself isn't the same thing that it used to be, which is probably due to the generation so I just would say, schooling itself is I think it's fair." When this statement is read in context with her full explanation of FSH and FHS student, the full meaning of these students actions manifests,

> School has changed. I might not have been in school back then, but I know school has drastically changed just because of the way our generation is set up. We didn't, probably back then they didn't have cell phones. You all didn't have to enforce that rule and like bringing contraband to school. Kids probably, kids were raised differently back then so they knew better or they did better, so because going back home was different. It seems ***kids today do not have the same mindset or don't have the same drive that they did back then***. My current high school, <you come here to learn, but you probably leave here with so much more than

> that> Ehmm, it's not just what the principals and the teachers trying to enforce, but you actually have to look at the students because students have a big effect on other students. So, @@I think this school, @@it, I think this school could listen to the students because if you get a group of students that don't get into trouble that much and they ask for something, I think you should sit down with them and listen to them because after sometime they gona stop asking for thing, then things are gona start getting taken?? Just because you feel as though if you are doing good, you get privileges (S. Participant Interview, Mar. 27, 2014).

Once again, Jalisha in explicating the problem, ends up complicating it by implicating students, school, parents and the society in what, she thinks, is as simple and natural as the getting of a reward for being good and answering the call of nature when the need arises. Even though students assert that ID, tardy, and dress code are the only violation for which they receive immediate and prolonged out of class consequences, the discipline data reviewed for this study shows that students receive more in-school and out school suspensions for refusing to obey/defiant, cutting class, disruption of classes, and Tardy. Table 9.1 is a list of disciplinary infractions that occurred more than two hundred times in FHS in 2013-2014 academic year.

Jay compounds this problem in discussing FHS students' likes and dislikes during the interview. According to him, students in the setting collectively dislike the school administrators. When asked why, he explains,

Table 9.1: List of Disciplinary Infractions that Occurred More Than Two Hundred Times in FHS in 2013-2014 Academic Year.	
Refusal to Obey/Defiant	1072
Cutting Class	778
Disrupting Class	589
Tardy	558
Disrespect	417
Phone violation	393
ID Detention Violation	326
Profanity	222

Because administration they are actually hard on the kids these days. Like last year, the administration they was easy and they were giving kids leeway, but the administration now they are not giving kids no leeway. For example, with the tardy policy, now kids are getting suspended and they don't like that. Usually, they can be late to class, just the after school detention, but now, after the third tardy, they get suspended and they don't like that or such as dress code. They come in and they are mad because they can't wear all the tight or shirts with cleavage showing. They can't wear the gang or nothings, they are kind of mad at the administration for that because the administration are actually peeping game and when I say peeping game they are actually seeing what the kids are doing and they feel like oh, we can't pull the wool over their eyes. Yeah they dislike structure. Because they feel like if they have structure then they would have to learn and they don't want to learn so they have to fight to get rid of structure. Yeah, by the administration we have now, they are forcing kids to learn and they are making it hard for them, like with IDs, like last year, there was nothing like

IDs. Now this year with the IDs they are getting mad and kiss ohha, I better bring this ID. Now kids they have learned this year to actually start bringing their IDs.

When asked what he thinks is the reason why they do not want to learn, he responded:

> I think they feel like it is bad for them to learn because they won't get any time in between the play and all that. I think that is why they do because if they have to learn, they won't have time for playing and all that. That's why they dislike this administration because administration won't mind taking away the fun things, things that we like most. For example, student didn't know how to act around sloshes, administration has slashed down the whole sloshes machine and all that and I think that is why they fear this administration though and that's why they don't wana like learn. Because, ***when they learn, then you will expect them to act right with the knowledge they have, but then they don't want to act right Ms. Sandra,*** so therefore {they don't like learning with this} and that's when they don't like the administration because the administration is making them learn, if you do it this way, then we will let you have this. Therefore, *they will not wana do wana this, but they will do what they did in the first place, and that's when they get mad* (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

Tee's tone in the following statement captures this tension between the school and the students that Jay describes in the above passage.

> **Tie:** Then when a student addressed the issue in our senior meeting, oh! They get so upset like she is disrespectful but she asked your opinion and like she asked her opinion and she told her, but oh that was disrespect when she said she feel like dress code is not the appropriate thing, like something to worry about in school. I

mean I understand some dress codes, but like, yeah (Focus Group Interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

Taken together, the data suggests that students might be willfully revolting against these policies and procedures for four reasons. (1) They see the policies as counterintuitive, and as such, unnecessary. If, truly, the students care about learning and academic success as they have stated above, this becomes a legitimate reason for revolt against any policy that hinders them from participating in learning activities. However as Jalisha and Jay's explanations depict, it could be that the students are revolting against the policies because, (2) they see the policies as school administrators' mechanisms of power and control over them. They could also be revolting because, (3) they feel that the policies target, label and stereotype them. Finally, (4) students might be disobeying the policies because they feel neglected and voiceless. Jalisha alluded to this possibility when she stated, "I think this school could listen to the students because if you get a group of students that don't get into trouble that much and they ask for something, I think you should sit down with them and listen to them because after sometime they gona stop asking for thing then things are gona start getting taken." Similarly, Tee's statement that "they," faculty and staff, get upset and label students as disrespectful when students say their mind about issues occurring in the school corroborates Jalisha's claim to the negligence of students' opinions and requests, a concept I refer to as ***systemic silencing of students' voice through policies.*** Table 9.2 portrays students' perception of school discipline and instructional policies.

Students Perception of Instructional Policies and Procedures

In discussing their perception of instructional policies, programs and practices at FHS, student key informants to this study chose to focus on the major instructional policies, programs, and practices for achieving these policies. The instructional policies that emerged from the data are minimum grade or minimum 60 policy, no zero policy; redo policy, and make-up work policy. The procedures for achieving these policies that emerged from students' data are *S300* credit recovery program and teacher pedagogy and assessment practices, which functions as both policy and procedure for achieving other policies. Below are some excerpts of the data from which I worked out my finding.

Table 9.2 Students' Perception of School Discipline and Instructional Policies	
Discipline Policies	**Instructional Policies**
1. Students see the policies as counterintuitive, and as such, unnecessary.	School rules, policies, and practices that are laced with low expectation and deficit thinking humiliate, demoralize, and incapacitate students from pursuing academic excellence and achievement.
2. Students see the policies as school administrators' mechanisms of power and control over them.	Minimum 60, no zero, and redo grading policies, or "crouches to lean on" are academic achievement handicapping policies that reinforce academic mediocrity and academic failure.
3. Students feel that school policies, especially ID and dress code, target, label, and stereotype them.	Handicapping policies such as minimum 60, no zero, redo, and open-door make-up work policies predispose students toward low aspiration and academic failure.
4. Students might be disobeying the policies because they feel neglected and voiceless.	Interaction between handicapping policies, processes, and procedures generates a confounding feedback that trumps efforts aimed at improving the academic performance of minority and economically disenfranchised students.
5.	Handicapping and settlement instructional policies, practices, and procedures sediment minority and economically disenfranchised students' apathetic behaviors toward school and schooling.
6.	Through handicapping policies, practices, and procedures, inner city schools deskill and divest

	minority and economically disenfranchised students of access to equitable educational opportunities.
7.	Handicapping policies and expectations reifies deficit ideology and racial supremacy.
8.	School becomes a joke because of the forceful enforcement of phony policies, practices and procedures that confounds the purpose of school and schooling.

Excerpts of Data on Students' Perception of School Instructional Policies and Practices

Andy: I will say just all the rules and all the stuff that they have like really put kids down and they don't wana try, they don't come to school. They make you feel like you are not gona be able to like [**Quan:** especially it's really kind of like, like I said, if go to look at schools like Joy High, and I guess they need to do all these stuff, but they just kind of like have a nicer setting that when you go look at them it makes you to feel like why am I trying because you feel like no matter how hard I try, am not gona be up there with them.] [**Andy:** yeap, you know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll.] [but as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me, I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot???.] [****][There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60?][All Yeah! Yeah, [**Quan:** minimum grade and a lot of them redo policy especially like ehm, was this year? When we first started that[last two years[last year] year, but you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get

was a 60. Yeah when I was in class with *Mr. Jaa*, I didn't do anything because I know I was gona get a 60 and I know was gona pass with those 60s and so Am glad they took that off. Still I just feel like Ok. So I felt kinda like, redo policy, if I fail this, I can redo it, slight test, redo it.

Andy: I think like for athletes, like all these athletes, I think that they should raise the required GPA for them to play, from 2.0 to 2.5 because 2.0 makes it like you just come to school and just sit around and wait for whatever they do in the school, but like 2.5 will force them to be like actually try to learn something and like be able to go to a good school (college).

Andy: That's why most people who do have a 2.0 or whatever, but don't have over 2.5, they don't, 2.5 is what you need to go to a real school, not that you got to have 2.5 just to play a sport or whatever. That's why most people can't even go to a real school because they don't have the grades to go.

Tie: Like hold on the D.E.A.R., that thing we have for fifteen minutes, or twenty-five or whatever it is, I feel like that's a waste of time taken out of our class because, the administration knows that these kids are not gona read those books so why do you take time out of their math class, [**Ron:** that's just settling down back to them being stupid, they're giving off fifteen minutes for kids to read, I mean just because they wana read that doesn't mean[**Quan:** I just, yeah, I disagree with you. They should give the time there's a lot of at this school that's reading on a fourth grade reading level and just because you are not reading the book provided, I mean, you can't resort to making noise, you can go to the library [do you read[yeah][he does], [**Janet:** our class can't read] yes that's what am

saying, I am the only person that likes to read, [**Janet:** I swear to God our class be the loudest.[which class] Ms. B's class, that whole football team on the back I swear to God they be on a temp.] [**Quan:** well that's just classroom management, she needs to learn how to manage her class][**Tie:** that goes to a lot of teachers too] [**Tie:** how you ?? that's[she stands there screaming on the top of her voice and they was still talking, oh my God, I fina walk out.[**Tie:** it's like that with a lot of the teachers] There's a couple of times [**Andy:** yeah like, who said something about ehm[**Tie:** teacher settling because they can't control their class. (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Jane: I think some teachers are too lenient and some are too hard. Like one of my teachers we don't do nothing there and suddenly she will jump up and expect us to know everything and another one of my teachers, she gives us a test with literally three essays on it. And am sorry, I just don't feel like I was learning that way by writing three essays. It's not gona make me smart, it's not gona help pay my bill [yeah].

Tie: I agree because it's like, one teacher is like so lenient, the next teacher is like so hard and it's like, so we go to the teacher that is so hard and we are like, why are we doing this here and the teacher is like, they need to get their, whatever, their little program to like where they're like both of them are both hard or [I think I disagree] [**Jane:** something is ridiculous] yes (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Lui: The passing rule (minimum 60, no zero policy; make-up policy) is giving students a handicap on just passing in general. That means they pretty much don't

have to do any work and they will still pass and do *S300*. That is the one rule I don't like. Ehmm, the camouflage, I feel like if it ain't broke don't fix it. We haven't had any problems about that I know of. It's not many gay related problems at this school in the past two years or four years I have been here <probably my freshman year and that was my first year> But for the past two years I have been here there was any ehmm, no that many fights. Ehm, that's probably it, no that's not it, am thinking, let me think. (Thinks aloud) Ehm, some of the rules, Ehm, that's probably it for now, I think.

Yan: *Not at all*. I don't think the redo policy is helping students to achieve academically at all. I think the redo policy was a good idea, but it's not fair in a sense because you have to go back and let somebody to redo a test that they should have studied for, but, you know, sometimes you slip off and you need that redo policy. So, it's good and bad.

Zack: "I remember last year when we were in Ms. Sandra's class and she was telling us about the redo policy, I think it's the privileges that we have been giving them. We have been giving them too many privileges and if that were taken away from them, and they have no choice but to do the work. Then *either they will they push themselves of they will drop out. I think most of them will push themselves, if they got the grit, if they got the motivation; they will push themselves because that's why most of the other districts are doing better than we are because we offer too much privileges to our students.* When teachers like Ms. Sandra has done all they can toward a student, what she need is wash her hands and *leave because*

in the end, he is either gona fail or succeed (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

The subtle undertone of disappointment and shattered hopes that was introduced in students' discussion of the meaning of school, schooling, and academic achievement took center stage in this section of policy analysis as students passionately spoke about the various instructional policies and procedures adopted to improve their learning, academic achievement, and on-time graduation from high school. Unlike the discipline policies, which they described as useful, but disagreed with their implementation, only one of the student key informants identified just one of the major instructional programs and policies as useful, even though she acknowledged that it is unfair and handicaps students.

This analysis opens with Andy's assertion "I will say just all the rules and all the stuff that they have like really put kids down and they don't wana try, they don't come to school. They make you feel like you are not gona be able to like." Thus, Andy identifies ***the school rules and policies as humiliating, demoralizing, and incapacitating***. Although this description could apply to any and all the multiple rules and policies in the school, his succeeding statements speak to the contrary,

> Yeap, you know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll, When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me, I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot. There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60? (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

In this excerpt, specifically in the last statement, Andy reveals that the "automatic 60," students' code for the minimum 60 and no zero grading policies, grants students settlement for not doing their best, a statement I interpreted in two ways, (1) automatic 60 promotes students' settlement for mediocrity and (2) automatic 60 provides settlement for students' mediocrity. Either way, the ***automatic 60 grading makes school a joke since it reinforces mediocrity and academic failure.*** When automatic 60 is added to automatic 70 on a test for attending after school tutorial with the intention to redo a failed major assignment, agentic students use these handicapping policies to get through grade levels without learning anything. I would take up this in the discussions section. For the mean time, the effect of these settlements manifests fully, as well as develops into ***handicapping tools as student after student speaks of procrastinations, complacency and eventual resignation to minimum grade,*** on a grading scale of 70 -100 and 'D – A,' in the interview transcripts, student journals, fieldnotes and teacher interviews.

Hence, Andy speaks of skipping classes knowing there is crutches and so he cannot fail, even though the grade he gets is as good as an 'F', and Quan, refuses to do anything in his AP (Jaa's) class because he knows he "was gona get a 60" and "was gona pass with those 60s" along with the multiple redos. One of the 10th grade honors students captured the ***confounding feedback that arises from the interaction between these handicapping policies and person characteristics*** vividly in her self-assessment, "My academic behavior in the year *2013* was simple: I did enough to get by, not to excel. This would be categorized as lazy, but I see it as not caring. As long as a 70 or higher showed up on my report card, I was fine. This behavior will never change, and I am not looking to change it" (Rosa, Student Journal, Jan. 8, 2014). When this student's journal is

juxtaposed with the field note on grades and other pieces of data on curriculum, instruction, and academic outcome of past and present students of FHS, the full effect of these grading policies on student academic behavior, teacher pedagogy and assessment practices, and leadership behaviors manifests (See appendix N for field note on grades).

Continuing his thought about the "settlement" rules, Andy discloses another rule that disenfranchises students, the earn-to-play rule for athletes,

> I think like for athletes, like all these athletes, I think that they should raise the required GPA for them to play, from 2.0 to 2.5 because 2.0 makes it like you just come to school and just sit around and wait for whatever they do in the school, but like 2.5 will force them to be like actually try to learn something and like be able to go to a good school (college). That's why most people who do have a 2.0 or whatever, but don't have over 2.5, they don't, 2.5 is what you need to go to a real school, not that you got to have 2.5 just to play a sport or whatever. That's why most people can't even go to a real school because they don't have the grades to go.

The revelation in this piece of data becomes disturbing because student athletes are anathemized in most high school literature as jocks and in this study as the rather be in school, or the group that sees school as just something to do. Through this piece, Andy provides insight into the school life of this group of students as he indicts ***handicapping and settlement policies for their apathetic academic behavior***s. Since the athletes are not challenged to extend their intelligence beyond sports and whatever is needed to maintain their athletic interest, these students apply the rest of their energy into disrupting class and the learning environment for others. However, Andy reminds us that at the end, these

students also lose their athletic opportunities because their 2.0 GPA, which they worked to maintain, cannot get them into "real schools." This again speaks to ***the irony of grade, GPA and academic achievement*** as well as ***the evil of low expectation and deficit ideology***.

Furthermore, Andy questions why able-bodied and agentic teenagers should be mandated to "just come to school and just sit around and wait for whatever they do in school" and in such questioning he challenges the ***deskilling of minority and low SES inner city students through unequal access to equitable educational opportunities***. Janet and Tee, frustrated by the disruptive behavior of the football team in their math class called for the termination of the Drop Every Thing and Read (D.E.A.R) program, which according to them is a waste of instructional time. Quan reminds them that D.E.A.R is a necessary program because, "a lot of *students* at this school *are* reading on a fourth grade *level*," and Mai points out that not holding students accountable for own learning through rigorous curriculum is "not the best way to teach somebody to value education."

Within these students' conversation, several concepts about school, schooling and the academic achievement of minority and economically disadvantaged inner city students' emerged. These concepts are (1) School rules, policies, and practices that are laced with low expectation and deficit thinking humiliate, demoralize, and incapacitate students from pursuing academic excellence and achievement. (2) Minimum 60, no zero, and redo grading policies, or "crutches to lean on" are academic achievement handicapping policies that reinforce academic mediocrity and academic failure. (3) Handicapping policies such as minimum 60, no zero, redo, and open-door make-up work

policies predispose students toward low aspiration and academic failure. (4) Interaction between student personality, handicapping policies, processes, and procedures generates a confounding feedback that trumps efforts aimed at improving the academic performance of minority and economically disenfranchised students. (5) Handicapping and settlement instructional policies, practices, and procedures sediment minority and economically disenfranchised students' apathetic behaviors toward school and schooling. (6) Through handicapping policies, practices, and procedures, inner city schools deskill and divest minority and economically disenfranchised students of access to equitable educational opportunities. (7) Handicapping policies and expectations reifies deficit ideology and racial supremacy. (8) School becomes a joke because of the forceful enforcement of phony policies, practices and procedures that confounds the purpose of school and schooling.

Lui wraps up the discussion on grade and grading policies as he observes, "The passing rules (minimum 60, no zero policy; redo and make-up policies) is [sic] giving students a handicap on just passing in general. That means they pretty much don't have to do any work and they will still pass and do *S300*. That is the one rule I don't like." Lui's second to the last sentence moves the discussion away from grading policies to the computer-based *S300* credit recovery program, an instructional program. Drawing from Lui's postulation, "That means they pretty much don't have to do any work and they will still pass and do *S300*," minimum 60, no zero policy and make-up policy prepares students for *S300* credit recovery invariably making *S300* a handicapping program. A student captured this handicapping impact of the *S300* credit recovery in her expression of her feeling about the school in a class meeting in the following excerpt:

> I hate this school, Freedom high, you all do not care about our learning, Ms. Angy and all the administrators don't care, they are passing students off with *S300* where they only copy and paste. Students will be in here and not be doing anything and you all will put them on *S300* . . ." as she was still talking now almost yelling, another student, a boy, said, "no, *S300*," she waved her hand to the boy's direction, "yes, all you all do in *S300* is to copy and paste off of the internet without learning anything, and bring the school score down. All that Ms. Angy and all the administrators and even the teachers focus on is on discipline, you don't have an ID, you have an ID, you don't focus on us passing the standardized test. *S300* will not give us that" (Fieldnotes, Jan. 20, 2014).

The student above not only charges the school with "passing students off with *S300* where they copy and paste," she also indicts the students for choosing to be passed off by not making any effort to earn their grades in their respective courses and for accepting to be shortchanged through handicapping programs that do not really education them, "Students will be in here and not be doing anything and you all will put the on *S300* . . . . yes, all you all do in *S300* is to copy and paste off of the internet without learning anything and bring the school score down." Once more, the student implicates individual students in their own academic outcome through personal choices and use or refusal to use personal agency and self-efficacy to disrupt the situation that disenfranchises them. Expressing the same distrust over *S300*'s ability to replace actual classroom teaching and experiences in educating students, Nick's recounts his observation in the *S300* lab,

> I remember, I sat down there with *S300*, I was helping a teacher, I saw a lot of people just listening to music when the video was on, playing games, and not listening to what the video was saying, so no, I don't think they are learning at all. You can look them up, google them or someone who had done the same things probably gives them the answers and they are passing it and stuff. You shouldn't need it, because you should have done what you needed to do the first time. I understand that they, let me not say that because sometimes you never get that class put on your schedule. In that case, if there is no available spot in that class to put you in, then, I will say for you to do that, but people that need it because they failed that class, they don't need it (S. Participant Interview, Dec. 13, 2013).

Although Nick understands the role of extenuating circumstances and the environment on individual outcome, and was ready to excuse students who have no other alternative, but to use these policies and programs, every once in a while, to leverage their situation, he still believes that students could and should avoid being victims of these programs by applying themselves in class. Again, he alludes to the power of personal agency, self-efficacy beliefs, and will-power in disrupting environmental circumstances. Thus, Nick re-echoes Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (1998) observation that person disposition has the power to either set in motion and sustain the constructive operation of the proximal process through developmentally generative behavioral dispositions such as selective responsiveness, epistemological curiosity, structuring proclivities, and self-efficacy beliefs or person disposition can disrupt, retard, or hinder the constructive operation of the proximal process through developmentally disruptive

behavioral dispositions such as inability to defer gratification, impulsiveness, aggression, violence, apathy, and inattentiveness.

My June 4, 2014 field note on the extended summer program, "Power Week" credit recovery program that allows students to recover year grades by attending a-one week recovery session through *S300* (see appendix o), corroborates these students observation about the program's ineffectiveness in improving student learning, as I questioned the actual purpose of both the one week recovery program for nine months academic skills and the program through which these skills are recovered. The implementation of the *S300* virtual credit recovery program is just another good intention gone wrong through person and environmental effect. *S300* is an excellent program in itself; however, the implementation weaknesses trump the effectiveness of the program. As one of the teachers puts it, the problem with *S300* "is not just about 'them' copying and pasting and googling answers from the internet without reading the stories and the questions, it is the fact that no matter how long they sit on it, they will not pass it, and at the end, administration gives them the grade." ***The problem then, is not that these students do not want to learn or cannot learn; rather it is the lack of belief in minority and low SES students' ability to learn and master rigorous curriculum that leads educators to adopt demoralizing, humiliating, and dehumanizing policies and practices that recycles these students through school without improving their situation***—a deficit thinking that seems to say, why challenge them to aim high, strive for excellence, develop "grit," resilience, self-discipline, and accountability for their learning. The students know this and work for it. This explains why the students' data corpus is suffused with the phrase, "They don't care."

Moving the focus from policies and programs to pedagogy, Jane notes, "I think some teachers are too lenient and some are too hard. Like one of my teachers we don't do nothing there and suddenly she will jump up and expect us to know everything, and another one of my teachers, she gives us a test with literally three essays on it. And am sorry, I just don't feel like I was learning that way by writing three essays. It's not gona make me smart, it's not gona help pay my bill." Tee concurs with Jane, "I agree because it's like, one teacher is like so lenient, the next teacher is like so hard and it's like, so we go to the teacher that is so hard and we are like, why are we doing this here and the teacher is like, they need to get their, whatever, their little program to like where they're like both of them are both hard" (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Through Jane and Tee's observations, students' perspective about curriculum and instruction (teacher pedagogy), the core of every school, emerges and fully develops as learning oriented students question teachers' instructional strategies, grading practices, and the level of rigor, relevance, and relationships imbued in teacher practices, otherwise, teacher behaviors. First, Jane points out the ***differences in teacher expectations and pedagogical practices throughout the school***, "some are too lenient, some are too hard," "some teach before assessment, some do not," "some align assessment with standards, some do not," while "some just give voluminous and irrelevant work just to occupy students." According to Tee, this ***lack of uniform expectations makes it hard for students to rise to the demands of challenging classes***, hence as students "go to the teacher that is so hard, they are like, why are we doing this here and the teacher is like?" This lack of uniform expectations and cohesiveness in learning expectations across the

school has the following implications for students, teachers, and the entire school, especially in this databased accountability era.

(1) Grade oriented students avoid taking rigorous courses as well as taking classes with teachers they perceive as difficulty, even though these courses and teachers are committed to preparing them for college and the workforce. Because these students are used to easy grade, they opt out of challenging course, even when they can do the work. The following journal excerpt captures this academic behavior as students drop out of AP track in pursuit of easy grade and less challenging assignments:

> It's really disappointing and yet surprising what a lack of confidence in one's academic ability can do. I found out today that only two out of the eleven boys I taught in English II-honors continued in the AP track. The AP teacher told me that they must have elected out of the course last week Friday because that was when he saw them last and after that class, their names disappeared from power school. He said, he thought I would like to know because they are my boys and yes they are. He said that the problem was that they didn't do their summer reading assignment and when they got their first progress report, they didn't like their grades so they decided to drop the course, even though he told them that they can still make-up the work. I decided to take it up with the boys because I know that they can do the work, I taught them and I know their academic ability. I found Jimmy, and Don first because they were in the same class. I guess they knew I would look for them when I find out what they have done. I began by asking them what happened to our code of checking-in when they going get tough. They did not stop by my room to debrief about AP, as we agreed, before

dropping the course. Don asked, so he has told you? Since the answer was obvious so, I asked why and Don said, “The course is hard.” Jimmy added, I couldn’t do it. I don’t want to “mess up” my GPA. I told them to reconsider their decision and since I did not want to keep them out of class for a long time, I sent them back to class and requested that we meet after school to discuss what could be done because I would want them back in AP. Next I looked for TJ, and when I couldn’t find him, I asked his guidance counselor to find him for me. TJ is the #2 of his class and a very intelligent young man. He walked into my room smiling, but quickly stopped when he saw my disappointed face. Without asking him any question, he said “No offense ma’am, you prepared us, but this is not English II-Honors, it is AP Language and the teacher is Jaa. That junk is hard. I don’t want to fail it. There is a lot of work and I did not do the summer reading.” I asked how he is doing in English III-CP he said, “so, so,” laughing and shaking his head, as he stated, “But it is easy grade. I don’t have to work to get the grade.” I asked whether he feels challenged in class. He emphatically said, “No, but it is better than failing.” When I asked whether he doesn’t care about learning any more, he stated, “That is important but the AP class is hard. It’s a lot of work and I don’t want to fail.” I am really disappointed by this not only because I thought these boys in English II-H and know how intelligent they are, but also because I am amazed at the lack of self-efficacy, resilience, and academic discipline among inner city high school students even those who are so gifted that only the sky would be their limit if they would only try (Journal excerpt, Aug. 28, 2013).

(2) Teachers who are perceived as "hard," and as such, difficulty to pass because of their high expectation, rigorous and relevant curriculum, as well as their belief in students' ability to rise up to these expectations are anathemized as inefficient and "hounded" by administration to give students grades and move them along to graduation. Mr. Jaa and Ms. Angel portray this teacher bullying for grades in the excerpts below:

> We have created a culture where sure failure is not an option, but not only is it not an option; failure is not even a possibility. And with failure not being a possibility, you know, you find students who are extremely disrespectful because again we have allowed them to believe they deserve to pass because they are poor and they are black and because we don't know what we are doing and we are here and we are ineffective because we won't let them to just slide bye. Ehmm, if we allow them to slide bye, then we are great teachers, but if we ask them to be more, to think deeper, to come up with something else that shows that they *are* here and they are not just here on the roll every day, then we are wrong, we are wrong and because we are wrong, they are right and there is no, can we switch it back and forth, no. If they are right, we are so wrong, and because they are right, they get the benefit of a free pass, they get the benefit of mediocrity, they get the benefit of coming to a one week session because they got a 65 through 69 so by coming for that one week, they can increase their grade to pass (Jaa, F. Participant Interview, Jan. 13, 2014).
>
> This school has no structure. I feel more and more like a baby sitter. Each day, they hound me, but they do not hold the students accountable. I miss my old school. I have never seen a thing like this before. We are killing these students. I

> don't think administration ever thinks about it. You can't even believe, I am a resource teacher, but every day I am being bullied. Every day, I am called to the office, why are the students failing. They won't even ask the students why they are not doing their work. They ask you why they are failing like you are the one failing them. All they want is for us to give them grade, even when the students do not do anything (Ms. Angel; Fieldnotes, Feb. 12, 2014).

(3) The school continues to fail behind or what the participants refer to as "maintaining," declining," "apathetic," or "just a work in progress" that moves one-step forward and two-steps backward because the data from which it makes instructional and leadership decisions regarding student learning and academic progress is truncated. Hence, Tee asks the teachers "to get their, whatever, their little program together to like where they're like both of them are both hard or," while Zack remind the entire school that, "if the too many handicapping privileges are taken away from the students, and they have no choice but to do the work, *in other words to apply themselves into learning*, then either they will push themselves or they will drop out," and he "thinks that most of them will push themselves, if they got the grit, if they got the motivation, they will push themselves because that's why most of the other districts are doing better than we are because we offer too much privileges to our students" (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014, *italicized not in the original*).

Chapter Summary

Overall, FHS students perceive the school rules, policies, and practices as demoralizing, incapacitating, and predisposing students toward academic failure. According to them, the rules are unnecessary, a waste of instructional time, and a

settlement for mediocrity. They believe that the ID policy is a punitive rule meant to get them out or put them in their place; rather than for their safety and learning, if not, major safety hazard such as broken entrance and exit doors, loose tiles, leaking roofs, and sanitary needs could have been prioritized over ID and ID stickers. Similarly, they view the dress code policy as an extension of institutional racism and pathologizing of minority and low SES students through labeling and one-size-fits-all rules. According to them, if it is not broken, why mind it, especially as they believe that they have not had any dress and dressing related violence in the school. Consequently, they question why policies created for schools that have had those issues are extended to FHS. Finally, they describe the policies as implements for silencing their voice, as student body, through castigation and disparagement of their opinions and choices by school authorities.

Linking school policies and practices to student learning and academic achievement, student key informants contend that the school is failing because school authorities place more emphasis on policies and practices that promote academic failure more than they stress policies, processes, and procedures that enhance student learning and academic achievement. They argue that the school culture and climate fosters academic failure through its focus on learning disabling policies and practices, such as minimum 60, no zero policy, redo policy, open door make-up work policy, online credit recovery, low expectations, and false grades. As a result, FHS students do not take serious because school is not serious about what it does. According to them, students cannot value learning and academic achievement in an environment where classroom disruption is an acceptable culture, school authorities follow students' lead instead of modeling acceptable learning behaviors, and intellectual mediocrity and class

clownishness get rewarded through settlement or academic achievement handicapping policies, selective enforcement and differential implementation of policies, while minor infractions such as dress code, tardy, and ID violations send students away from classrooms where learning occurs, to ISS that is devoid of learning.

Similarly, connecting school policies and practices to student understanding and interpretation of the meaning of school and schooling, student key informants posit that students believe school is a joke and a thing to do because of the ridiculous policies, practices, and procedures that confounds the true meaning and purposes of school and schooling. As one of the participants bluntly puts it, "I take FHS as a joke because one day you all say something then the next day you all don't enforce it and you all expect us to take you all serious? It's like you all do one thing for like a week straight and the next week, oh! And nobody can careless about it. I don't take you all serious at FHS. Even though as a school FHS faculty and staff try to meet their students where they are, sometimes they get so bogged down with trivialities within the policies that they forget about the actual reason why the adopted the policies in the first place, student learning and academic success. It is this incongruence, these inconsistencies, and these mixed bags of expectations and teams that make students to believe that school is a joke, a thing to do.

Chapter X

Faculty and Staff Participants' Perception of School Policies and Practices

Like students, faculty and staff of FHS recognize the relevance of the discipline policies and the problems inherent in the policies' implementation. However, unlike students, faculty and staff are at the forefront of the implementation of these policies, hence they approached the question on their perception of the school policies and practices from an evaluative standpoint. Following this perspective, all faculty members involved directly and indirectly in the study described the discipline policies, especially dress code, tardy, ID, and electronic devices policies as relevant policies for school safety and effectiveness, but expressed concern in the ineffectiveness of the policies in achieving its goals due to improper implementation. On the contrary, they characterized the instructional policies as irrelevant and handicapping to academic mediocrity and failure. I will first present my analysis, findings, and interpretations of this group of participants' perceptive on the discipline policies followed by their perceptions of the instructional policies.

Faculty and Staff Participants' Perception of Discipline Policies and Practices

Close examination of faculty and staff data, interviews and field notes, on this question reveal several factors that hinder the effective implementation of these policies. Following my style of immersing my finding in excerpts of the data from which they emerged, I first present pieces of data from which I worked beginning with Angy, Dean, and Barry.

Angy: The policies at the school and district level are in place and work if we can get everyone to buy in to that and consistently follow the plan and work with students (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Dean: The policies are fine because they reflect real world life. However, the policies are not effective because they are not enforced from top down (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Barry: It's in black and white and all that we have to do is to follow it. If we follow it to the letter, to the 't', cross the 'T's, do the 'I's, and quit trying to go with friends for these students do what is outlined, and they will always say, you know, we are putting too many black kids out of school, but the thing is there are a lot of black kids don't wana be here. They wana stop someone else from learning, but the handbook is there. If we follow the rules, we will have no problem. Rules change every year. When I first came to this school the rule was great. Now, shaggy paints, short dress and pants, hair do, prayer, they have taken all these out and if you have noticed, it has caused a problem in school. The rules are for them to follow and they will succeed if they will follow the rules, but you get some kids who are so head strong that they think that they are parents instead of their parents being over the kids (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

As is evident in the entire data corpus on the question, what do you think of the school policies and practices? Angy, Dean and Barry think the policies as relevant and could be effective if (1) "everyone buy in to them and consistently follow the plan and work with students," (2) "they are enforced from top down," and (3) "If we follow it to the letter, crossing the 'T's, dotting the 'I's, and quit

trying to go with friends for these students, do what is outlined." Implicit upon these responses is the fact that the policies have not been effective but for different reasons, lack of buy-in, selective enforcement[28] and differential implementation.[29] These three reasons could apply to both students and faculty, however, Barry clears this ambiguity in the following sentence, "and they will always say, you know, we are putting too many black kids out of school, but the thing is there are a lot of black kids don't wana be here. They wana stop someone else from learning, but the handbook is there."

Implicitly, then, it is the adults in the school who are not consistent in the implementation of the rules and policies. A natural question this insight evokes is, why? But, Angy defuses this by stating earlier on that there is a lack of total buy-in on the policies. Although true, to some extent, the data suggests other complex explanations. Nevertheless, a more complex question that arises from this adults' selective enforcement and/or differential implementation of school rules and policies, as it relates to this study is, how do these adult behaviors affect students' understanding, interpretation, and adherence to the rules? Consequently, the backdrop for the analysis in this section becomes the question of the why and how of adult selective enforcement and/or differential implementation of school rules and policies, along with its implication for students' understanding, interpretation, and acceptance of the policies.

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[28] In this document, Selective enforcement of policies refers to various processes through which faculty members and school staff calibrates, modifies, and decides which policy or component of policy should be emphasized or overlooked.

[29] Differential implementation encompasses selective enforcement of policies laced with favoritism, power, prejudice and/or external threat.

Continuing his explanation of why strict implementation of the rules and policies is important, Barry acknowledges the popular culture's indictment of school authorities for "putting too many black kids out of school," but counters that accusation with "but the thing is there are a lot of black kids don't wana be here. They wana stop someone else from learning, but the handbook is there. If we follow the rules, we will have no problem." Barry's explanation connects as well as explicates Jane's previous statement that the disruption of the learning environment for learning oriented student's by the rather be and forced to be at school students occurs because the school allows it, "I don't even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it's the school itself. We can't do anything at all and am not saying that the school should send people away, but at the end of the day some of the things that go on here is ridiculous" (Focus Group Interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

Concluding his thoughts about the rules and policies, Barry states, "The rules are for them to follow and they will succeed if they will follow the rules, but you get some kids who are so headstrong that they think that they are parents instead of their parents being over the kids" (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014). Barry, again, portrays societal overbearing belief in a linear relationship between policy implementation and individual outcome, thus eliding the interactional effect of process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The fact that "some of the students remain headstrong in defying the system validates the interactional effect that emanates from the reciprocity between person, process, context, and time. Could it be that these students remain

headstrong against the rules and policies because the adults who enforce these policies are partial and inconsistent in implementing them, or because they don't see there relevance due to generational gap or because they are point blank obstinate, or a combination of the three factors? Additionally, Barry notes that the "rules change every year," what role does this constant change play in the resistance and/or selective enforcement of these policies? How does this constant change affect students understanding, interpretation, and acceptance of the policies as well as their overall perception and sensemaking of school?

Nonetheless, Justy, Kayla, Kelly, Loyld, and Tasha's discussions of their perceptions of the school policies and practices proffer some insight into the selective versus differential implementation of the school rules and policies as the following excerpts depict:

> **Justy:** the policies I really do like and I really do follow and make sure that my students to follow them, but the effectiveness of some of them is as a matter of fact, the effectiveness is not high enough and that is because I think they get too many chances to do the same wrong thing. So, some of the policies here are very, very good for the students and there are some of them that are not very effective. The ones I think they are good are tardy, like the tardy policy to a <point> and one of the ones I think is not very effective, I, wearing the ID because when they do not wear their ID, what happens is that they get a pat, they get a sticker. They get stickers over, and over, and over, so, I don't think it will be effective for helping them to go out to a job and have to wear their IDs. That's not going to be effective

in preparing them because they don't have to because they are given an alternative. I like the idea where if the kids are late, they have to go and they have to get a pass after the bell rings, but what I don't like about it is that they have to accumulate a certain amount of tardies before they can get a consequence. And I think, you know, that creates, you know they have a chance to do something four, five, six, or seven times, you see what I mean? And what will happen is that they would wait till the seventh time and they will do something about it, but I feel that we nip it in the bud, then they got know or I got to do this, I got to do that. You know, so (F. Participant Interview, April 8, 2014).

Kayla: Ehhm, in all honesty, FHS has really declined over the last couple of years. A major part of that is a reflection of the expectation set and the expectations for those expectations to be met. That falls on, ehhmm, /us/; /however, when I examine things like Freedom Pride, a lot of those, Freedom Pride and some of the other initiative that we try to put in place, they are all expectations. We just don't mandate that the expectations be met and we don't follow up the way we should as a school/. Many teachers try to make sure those happen, but it should start well at the top. Here, we don't work as cohesively as we should. We have a mixed bag of expectations. We have a mixed bag of teams and the teams do not communicate, you know, with each other, you know, I just don't think that we work very cohesively and I don't think that the set of principles, the set of expectations that we have don't really foster into the mission statement.

We are trying to get there, but we are not there quiet yet. I think we need to go back and revamp some things. And again, consequences for student's actions are not followed true in this school because, Ehmm, lack of consistency. We don't do what we said we gona do. No, if we say after 8 unexcused absences you will repeat the course, student attendance will increase. But if we don't do what we said we will do, they students, they feel out our weaknesses and they use it against us. So, when society says you need a good report card because it will make you to look good, then we start loosening up our expectations. So, I think if we stick to doing what we said we gona do, then we won't have any of these problems (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Kelly: We have good policies, but is it carried out, ehmm no! None whatsoever. You tell a parent, I if I take your cell phone the first time, you get it back, the second time, you don't get it back until June, but nowadays you take it and they get it back in the afternoon, take it a second time, they get it back in the afternoon, the third time, I don't, you know, they don't follow through on those policies. Pants have to be worn appropriate, but people say what has that got to do with education? (F. Participant Interview, April 4, 2014).

Loyld: If everyone were to be on the same page, and if everyone across the board did what they are supposed to, I believe it will be a lot more effective when it comes to discipline, IDs, dress codes, and such things because I believe those things do prepare kids when it comes to life after

high school. I have never been one to agree with the grading policy with the 60 minimum or giving students a grade even if the assignment is not complete or even attempted, policies such as that, I think, are setting kids up for unrealistic realty for after high school because it's not gona be like; students once again, not setting high expectation, not holding them accountable thinking it will be okay for them to do the minimum or nothing at all and still move on to the next level (F. Participant Interview, April 2, 2014).

Tasha: Hmmm, let me think of this for a second*** I think we are trying to meet students where they are and to bring them up to where they are supposed to be, but I think and myself included, sometimes we get so bogged down in the little things that we can't see the big picture and I think the students resent those things like, we, and am not saying that it is not necessary because it is, but I feel like sometimes we put so much energy into if they have the cell-phones** or not and those kind of things that we worry more about that, than we do the academic part. And I know that is not only in our school because I know that it's coming from the district level and trying to enforce the policies. So, I think sometimes we get so caught up in the details that we lose sight of the big picture and that make sense (F. participant Interview, May).

First, Justy begins her discussion on the school policies and practices asserting, "The policies I really do like, and I really do follow and make sure that my students, too, follow them, but the effectiveness of some of them is as a matter of fact, the effectiveness

is not high enough and that is because I think they get too many chances to do the same wrong thing. So, some of the policies here are very, very good for the students and there are some of them that are not very effective." Upfront, Justy establishes her belief in the relevance of the policies in preparing students for life outside high school, but she also states that some of them are not very effective. However, it is not clear whether she "follows" and encourages her students to "follow" only the policies she likes or the policies that she thinks are effective. Nevertheless, either way, her statement hints at selective enforcement and/or differential implementation of the policies, which is a major characteristic of the study's setting, as the above excerpts and others like them in the data indicate.

Second, she explains that some of the policies, even though they are "very, very good" remain ineffective for three reasons (1) lack of immediate consequence for action or delayed response to policy violation, (2) minimal consequences for infractions, and (3) multiple numbers of grace period between action and consequences for action. These three reasons feature prominently in the data set as each of the participants directly and/or indirectly attribute the ineffectiveness of the discipline policies to the inconsistency between policy intention and processes of policy implementation. Justy captures the confounding feedback that arises from this disconnect between policy intent and implementation in the following statement,

> I think they are good, like the tardy policy to a <point> and one of the ones I think is not very effective and wearing the ID, but when they do not wear their ID, what happens is that they get a pat, they get a sticker. They get stickers over, and over, and over, so, I don't think it will be effective for helping them to go out to a job

> and have to wear their IDs. That's not going to be effective in preparing them because they don't have to because they are given an alternative. I like the idea where if the kids are late, they have to go and they have to get a pass after the bell rings, but what I don't like about it is that they have to accumulate a certain amount of tardies before they can get a consequence. And I think, you know, that creates, you know they have a chance to do something four, five, six, or seven times, you see what I mean? And what will happen is that they would wait till the seventh time and they will do something about it, but I feel that we nip it in the bud, then they got know or I got to do this, I got to do that.

Kayla complicates this issue of adults' inconsistency in implementing expectations and its effect on the entire school stating,

> In all honesty, FHS has really declined over the last couple of years. A major part of that is a reflection of the expectation set and the expectations for those expectations to be met. That falls on, ehhmm, /us/; /however, when I examine things like Freedom Pride, a lot of those, Freedom Pride and some of the other initiative that we try to put in place, they are all expectations. We just don't mandate that the expectations be met and we don't follow up the way we should as a school/. Many teachers try to make sure those happen, but it should start well at the top."

When asked to explain what she means by "a reflection of the expectation set and the expectations for those expectations to be met," she expounds,

> Here, we don't work as cohesively as we should. We have a mixed bag of expectations. We have a mixed bag of teams and the teams do not communicate,

> you know, with each other, you know, I just don't think that we work very cohesively and I don't think that the set of principles, the set of expectations that we have do really foster into the mission statement. We are trying to get there, but we are not there quiet yet. I think we need to go back and revamp some things. And again, consequences for student's ***actions are not followed through in this school*** because, Ehmm, ***lack of consistency***. We don't do what we said we gona do. No, if we say after 8 unexcused absences you will repeat the course, student attendance will increase. But if we don't do what we said we will do, ***they students, they feel out our weaknesses and they use it against us***. So, when society says you need a good report card because it will make you to look good, then we start loosening up our expectations. So, I think if we stick to doing what we said we gona do, then we won't have any of these problems (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Once again, Kayla not only re-echoes the students' indictment of the school for their academic behaviors and academic outcome, but she, also, implicates the students, the school, and the society in the educational outcome of the students. Yet, she suggests that a school is as good as its leadership hence, "Many teachers try to make sure those happen, but it should start well at the top," a concept that pervades the data corpus. Notwithstanding, through the above excerpt, Kayla provides six more insights into the phenomena of faculty and staff members' selective enforcement and/or differential implementation of school rules and policies namely: (4) mixed bag of expectations (5) mixed bag of teams (6) lack of communication between and among teams (7) disconnect between expectations and school vision and mission statements (8) catering to the report

card and societal expectations, and (9) a lack of follow-through on actions, a phrase that reinforces the motif of constant change that distinguishes schools from other public enterprises. She concludes positing, "But if we don't do what we said we will do, ***they, students, they feel out our weaknesses and they use it against us***," thus linking student academic behaviors to school characteristic, while pointing to students' agency—a developmentally disruptive person characteristic that retards the activation of constructive proximal process—in taking advantage of situations or what the students, themselves described as betting and/or joining the system. Although I choose to write through Angy, Dean, Barry, Justy and Kayla's individual data, the entire data corpus on faculty and staff perception of school policies and practices is imbued with these reasons and allude to students either betting and/or joining the system, depending on available opportunity, through personal agency. Figure 10.1 showcases reasons for faculty and staff selective enforcement and/or differential implementation of school disciplinary and instructional policies.

Figure 10.1 Reason for the Ineffectiveness of Disciplinary and Instructional Policies in FHS

1. Lack of immediate consequence for action or delayed response to policy violation.
2. Minimal consequences for infractions.
3. Multiple numbers of grace period between action and consequences for action.
4. Mixed bag of expectations.
5. Mixed bag of teams.
6. Lack of communication between and among teams.
7. Disconnect between expectations and school vision and mission statements.

Faculty and Staff Participants' Perception of Instructional Policies and Practices

Like in their analysis of the school's discipline policies, FHS faculty and staff participants focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional policies, programs and practices. Their responses centered around four instructional policies namely, minimum 60, no zero, redo, and make-up work policies; two instructional programs, *S300* and SOAR after school tutorial, and two instructional practices, lesson plan protocol and mandatory two days after school tutorials. Overall, participants perceive the policies as deficit, handicapping, contradictory and fluid as most of them are just good paper work aimed at promoting the illusion of work, instead of student learning and academic achievement. Below, I work to present my findings, analysis and interpretations through some excerpt of the data corpus on this aspect of the study.

Excerpts of Data on Faculty and Staff Perception of School Instructional Policies and Practices

> **Meg:** I think our policy of having teachers to be reflective of their lesson plan, the only thing with that, I don't think they're checking to see that teachers are writing reflections. I think it's important for teachers to reflect about, and on the lesson, did it work? What will I change? I think a good teacher?? does it. That's no problem, but that's just paper work because at the end of the day you can write anything in the lesson plan to make it sound good, there's no one to check, *there's no one coming actually into the classroom to see if you are actually implementing the strategies that are ineffective. So, all am saying is having us all have one lesson plan is a great idea so that there will be continuity among the classes, but if you are not going to reinforce that, it's just paper work. It's just that*. Ehmm,

Our SOAR program is making efforts to try to get students to get involved, trying to give them an avenue to be successful, but again, I know that they are having problems with kids coming and behaving in that program and that is a disconnect, so the effort is there and it's impacting some students because we are having mentors come in, but there is no, I think there is no consistent support or information about SOAR. I think SOAR can be done for all grade and I think if you make it to where you can compete to get into the program, I think that will change it, It's not something everybody can just sign up and you are there, but if you compete to get in there, kids are bound to know that hey, I got into this program and they want to stay in it. Make them earn it, provide it, but make them earn it. *<I do not think our S300 how it's set up, our no zero policy, our 60 as the lowest grade policy, saying that if a kid has a 76 it is a failing and that teachers should find ways to improve their grade, I think those policies are hurting our kids* because a kid knows, I got an 80 first nine weeks, I have a 60 this nine week, I should have a 70 because in the end you can't fail me because you have to give me a 60. *I can come to class every day or not come to class every day and get a 60 because the lowest grade you can give me is a 60. If I have done the work do for the first nine weeks, am done and there are several kids who are like that, am good. That's it, there is nothing you can do to affect me now.* And those policies are in place, if they realize, if the minimum 60 policy is not in place or if the final exam actually count as 20% so sure, you have an 80 and you have 60, but here is your final exam, it's 20 % of your grade and it's actually cumulative then you have to come there is no way you can skip that. *If a kid passes final exam, sure*

that shows you have learned something, but if they have you gone throughout the year you have not passes one quiz, one test and the reason why they are passing is because we have x amount of class work or assignment have they really learned and mastered content? So, I think those policies hurt academic rigor and success for students. I don't think they are actually ?? pulling out students for HSAP, I think helps to get them extra attention. Those who are enrolled in those course, I think smart-blocking or double-blocking or power-blocking, as they say, certain classes help, but <*I think that when they are doing that, they focus on one content and the other content classes go down, so we need to have a balance and I think they should go to the teachers more*>. {*Leadership is not real leadership. I think it's a top down approach and if that is how you wana have it,*< *fine*>*, but make sure you have a clear expectation of what you want and who you want to execute it and not the same teachers all over again*}. I think it work better if you have a bottom up approach, {you have the outcome that you wana have and then you have teachers work together to achieve the outcome. <*Let them be a part of the process. Let them be collaborative and build a community because when you have all circles involved, then you have more success, then you can check you climate, but if it was here*, you *do what I said and you go*, and *you keep changing* (snaps finger 4 times) it doesn't work>}, so and I cannot name one consistent policy we have had in this school, advisory changes from year to year, enrichment changes from year to year. Ehmm, I really can't say that we have policies that work. You are already telling kids we gona have a power week after school is over for like, you know, those kids who didn't quite measure up. So if you are in the 60 range,

oh, you go to school for a week and half and all of a sudden you earn your credit. If I was a student and I did have a background and the support of my parents, oh, >*fine*<, school will be my playground and then I will go, take that course and am done (F. Participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Kayla: You have a large population of teachers, who, they work with that in mind. However, many of our teachers like I have said before have not made it a mandate to continue to educating their students based on their data, their training and excetra. And so, unfortunately, many of us have not really used a lot of the school policies, nor have really read the school policies, or don't enforce the school policies to make sure that students are getting educated. However, some of the policies should be abandoned. Like redo policies because a student meeting the expectation set by the school, by the teacher, then you won't need policies like that redo policies or send them to *S300* remakes and retakes in order for students to pass. Students will do the work initially because they understand that, that is the expectation set forth by the educator her/herself.

Kayla: Well, first of all, I think we enroll kids in the honors program just to say that we have the number. As long as we can keep the numbers at state's expectations, then we are fine, even though we are enrolling students into AP and honors courses who are not really capable of doing the work at that moment for the sake of the report card. Second, we have gotten to a place, even in our special education classes, because it looks good on paper, we put a lot of pressure on teachers to pass these students even though the students aren't really learning, which is why we have so many students, for example, this year that have to retake

certain portions of the HSAP or had to take one or both parts of the HSAP over again and that's why, because our kids are not working for the mastery of the material. So, I think that we just gotten comfortable with just doing the status quo because it looks good in the eyes of the public, we think, but we are not moving, we are not the students at all (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Lyold: I have never been one to agree with the grading policy with the 60 minimum or giving students a grade even if the assignment is not complete or even attempted, policies such as that, I think, are setting kids up for unrealistic realty for after high school because it's not gona be like; students once again, not setting high expectation, not holding them accountable, will be thinking it will be okay for them to do the minimum or nothing at all and still move on to the next level (F. Participant Interview, April 2, 2014).

Jaa: Mhm, I think *S300* is one of the biggest deterrents because in theory, it all sounds great lets learn ?? ehm, but yet so many of them don't complete the courses. And because they don't complete the courses, they are right back where they are when they leave the classroom or else, they are put back on *S300*, which means, they are right back in the boat they started in and if they didn't go anywhere in the first time, why put them back in the same boat. But they put them back in the same boat every year (F. Participant Interview, Dec. 19, 2013).

The excerpt on Meg's response to the question on what she thinks of the school policies and practices begins with her perception of the reflection component of the uniform lesson plan protocol and extends to the lesson plan policy, which she describes as "important" practices as they promote teacher reflection on each lesson as well as

continuity among classes. However, she doubts that these important practices are being enforced as "there's no one actually coming into the classroom to see if *teachers* are actually implementing the strategies that are ineffective." She clarifies hers statement saying, "So, all am saying is having us all have one lesson plan is a great idea so that there will be continuity among the classes, but if you are not going to reinforce that, it's just paper work." Meg's observation reinforces students' remarks on the differential expectations and pedagogical practices that fill their everyday curricular experiences as they transition from class to class, and teacher to teacher.

Unequivocally, Meg introduces the idea of ***the illusion of teacher work versus teacher inventive work***[30] that pervades the faculty and staff data corpus generated by this study. She challenges the notion of rigorous lesson plan protocol as important pedagogical practice that becomes just another paper work for teachers to do, if no one gets into the classroom on a regular bases to ensure effective implementation of the lesson plans. According to her, this instructional leaders' regular presence in the classrooms is important because "at the end of the day *any teacher* can write anything in the lesson plan to make it look and sound good" (*italicized* words are not in the original document). Implicit in Meg's critique of the ***prioritization of lesson plans and lesson plan submission over classroom supervision*** is the idea that teaching is an art, a performance, a choreography that happens in the moment; not a formula (Kelehear, 2008).

[30] The illusion of teacher work versus teacher inventive work: I use this phrase to describe the heightened belief that copious paper work, teacher accountability, incessant instructional policies and teacher professional development would automatically improve student learning and academic achievement without equal belief in student accountability for their own learning and academic achievement.

Extending this idea of good paper work and its implication on curriculum, pedagogy and student learning, Kayla reports, that teachers, knowing that good paper work is more important, in this space, than student learning and academic achievement, "have not made it a mandate to continue educating their students based on their data, their training and excetra. And so, unfortunately, many of us have not really used a lot of the school policies, nor have really read the school policies, or don't enforce the school policies to make sure that students are getting educated." She also provides reasons why most teachers have stopped using their data and expertise in educating students noting,

> I think that the pressure that has come down from the top to the bottom has actually put teachers in a very bad place so many of them have not gotten up to the place where they are able to stand for themselves to say this is something that I want to do and I think that they have decided to just do what is necessary to get through the year. I think a lot of teachers have now joined, have gotten to the place where they have just resigned to their little self and said, I am tired, I am done, if this is what you want and I am not saying that's the large, that's not the majority, but that's what has happened to some of us here at FHS, that I think we have thrown in a towel and we don't get a lot of teacher support and sometimes it is easy to just throw the towel (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

As human beings prone to self-protection and survival, teachers, like students and administrators can also take advantage of situations, a point Kayla suggests as she explains how ***the system demoralizes and forces teacher to "thrown in a towel"*** instead of "fighting the same constant battle and getting the same constant headache at the end of the day." Hence, Jaa intimates "I think many teachers come with the best intention. I

think many teachers come wanting to give the best that they have, but I think the culture and the climate creates teachers who feel beaten down by the system," a system that places so much emphasis on increasing the percentage of the students who *actually* pass, but forgets about increasing the percentage of students who have *actually* mastered the skills necessary to *actually* move on to the next grade level.

So, teachers give up on both the system and the students, thus, just like school, the teaching profession becomes no longer a vocation, but a joke; a thing to do, and for Kayla, this has not changed regardless of multifarious school reform initiatives, increased professional development and prescribed curriculum, as well as heightened teacher accountability through voluminous paper work and meetings that leave no time for them to actually facilitate students' learning and educational outcome through inventive planning, implementation, assessment, and modification of curriculum to target students academic needs. Thus, even though Kayla chastises teachers for not using the school policies and programs to ensure that students get educated, she agrees that school policies, such as the redo policy and *S300* should be abandoned" because they promote the status quo. According to her, if teachers and school administrators focus on challenging students to meet "the expectations set by the school, and by the teacher, there would not be any need for policies like redo policies, open-door make-up work policy, two days mandatory after school tutorial, nor would there be any need to send students to *S300* remakes and retakes in order for students to pass. Students would do the work when it is given because they understand that, that is the expectation set forth by the educator."

Through these avowals, Kayla echoes the minds of most faculty and staff at FHS who refuse to use these policies and programs in educating their students because they

believe that these policies handicap students as well as create a ripple effect of learned helplessness, deficit thinking, and low academic self-efficacy. Hence, Loyld states, "I have never been one to agree with the grading policy; with the 60 minimum or giving students a grade even if the assignment is not complete or even attempted, policies such as that, I think, are setting kids up for unrealistic reality for after high school because it's not gona be like that; students once again, not setting high expectation, not holding them accountable, will be thinking it will be okay for them to do the minimum or nothing at all and still move on to the next level," while Meg asserts, "I do not think our *S300* how it's set up, our no zero policy, our 60 as the lowest grade policy, saying that if a kid has a 76, it is a failing and that teachers should find ways to improve their grade, I think those policies are hurting our kids."

Explaining the ***confounding feedback that arises from improper use of virtual credit accrual and recovery programs*** Jaa states,

> I think *S300* is one of the biggest deterrents because in theory, it all sounds great let's learn, but yet so many of *the students* don't complete the courses. And because they don't complete the courses, they are right back where they are when they leave the classroom or else, they are put back on *S300*, which means, they are right back in the boat they started in and if they didn't go anywhere in the first time, why put them back in the same boat. But they put them back in the same boat every year (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 13, 2014).

Continuing this concept of ***subtle deskilling and divesting of minority and low SES inner city high students of developmentally generative disposition such as constructive***

personal agency, self-efficacy, and socio-economic mobility through inequitable access to quality education Kayla observes,

> we have gotten to a place, even in our special education classes, because it looks good on paper, we put a lot of pressure on teachers to pass these students even though the students aren't really learning, which is why we have so many students, for example, this year that have to retake certain portions of the HSAP or had to take one or both parts of the HSAP over again and that's why, because our kids are not working for the mastery of the material. So, I think that we have just gotten comfortable with just doing the status quo because it looks good in the eyes of the public, we think, but we are not moving, we are not moving the students at all (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Once again, Kayla returns to ***the irony between theory and practice, expectations and outcomes, grade and learning, along with quality teaching and good paper work*** in the faculty and staff members' discussion of the discipline policies. These ironies continue to develop and intensify as each of the educational stakeholders in this space, student, teachers, administrators, and parents directly or indirectly assert, acclaim, and/or reclaim their personhood through selective enforcement, differential implementation, and/or outright revolt against school policies and practices they perceive as dehumanizing, demoralizing, and/or counterintuitive to the promise of compulsory free and appropriate public education.

Hence, Meg describes the SOAR after school program as a good program that is "making efforts to get kids involved," but is hampered by problems of "kids coming and behaving in that program," a disconnect she believes to be caused by inconsistent support

or information about SOAR. The SOAR program director explains this disconnect in the following words, "SOAR is the way it is not because I don't know what to do, but because the school authorities support neither my vision nor my plans for achieving the goals of SOAR; rather they want me to "cater to the students. They see after school tutorial as a reward and reinforcement of students' mediocrity and not a place for learning; however, they force me to make it so strict and stringent to the point that students have to act like they are in regular school hour's classroom" (Fieldnote, SOAR Feb. 21, 2014). Meg vividly captured these inconsistencies that morph programs, policies, and procedures adopted to improve the learning and academic achievement of students' in this space in the following statement,

> I cannot name one consistent policy we have had in this school; advisory changes from year to year, enrichment changes from year to year. Ehmm, I really can't say that we have policies that work. You are already telling kids we gona have a power week after school is over for like, you know, those kids who didn't quite measure up. So if you are in the 60 range, oh, you go to school for a week and half and all of a sudden you earn your credit. If I was a student and I didn't have a background and the support of my parents, oh, >*fine*<, school will be my play ground and then I will go, take that course and am done.

Chapter Summary

Summarily, in responding to the question on their perception of the policies, programs and practices at FHS, faculty and staff informants to this study took an evaluative stance as they pointed to the strengths and weaknesses of the disciplinary and instructional policies, programs and procedures. Whereas they view the disciplinary

polices as essential for maintaining a safe and conducive leaning environment, but whose effectiveness is marred by lack of total buy-in, selective enforcement, and differential implementation by school authorities, they perceive the instructional policies as deficit, handicapping, contradictory and fluid as most of them just are good only on paper.

Based on their analysis, the disciplinary policies are ineffective because of faculty and staff's (1) lack of consistencies in the implementation of the policies (2) lack of immediate consequence or delayed response to policy violation, (3) minimal consequences for infractions, and (4) multiple numbers of grace period between action and consequences for action, (5) mixed bag of expectations, (6) mixed bag of teams, (7) lack of communication between and among teams, (8) disconnect between expectations and school vision and mission statements, (9) catering to the report card and societal expectations, and (10) a lack of follow-through on actions. According to them, the defect in school authorities' implementation of the discipline policies enables students to pitch teachers and administrators against each other, while manipulating the policies to their immediate advantage and/or long-term disservice as their self-conceited efforts rewards them with false grade that loses its worth immediately they leave FHS.

Likewise, they criticize the instructional policies as espoused by the illusion of teacher work whereby school administrators believe that multifarious instead of inventive teacher work will automatically generate student achievement and academic success. They assert that the system demoralizes and forces teachers to deskill and divest minority and economically disadvantaged students of opportunities and access to equitable education by bullying teacher into accepting and enforcing learning and academic achievement disabling policies.

Section Summary

In this section, I shared the findings related to my first research question: How do minority and low SES high school students perceive and make sense of school and schooling? How are bioecological systems, habitus and sociocognitive theories of human development and achievement reflected in their sensemaking of school and schooling? In chapter six, I described how students' understanding of the meaning of school and schooling is linked more to their lived experiences within school than their prior knowledge about school and schooling. In chapter seven, I discussed students' understanding and explanation of academic achievement through grade and grading, the disconnect between their belief in what grade and grading should be as a true reflection of learning and academic success and what it actually is, based on their experiences with school and schooling, along with the attendant implications of this discrepancy on students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling. In chapter nine, I reported students' and faculty and staff members' perception of the school policies and practices. I related students' understanding and interpretation of school policies and practices, first, to their learning and academic outcome and then to their understanding and interpretation of the meaning and purpose of school and schooling. Finally, in chapter ten, I presented my interpretation of students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling, as derived from the data corpus, and factors that influence their understanding and interpretation of school and schooling situated in the on school, schooling, and educational outcome of minority and economically disadvantaged students in the United States. In the next section, I present the findings related my second research question.

Chapter XI

Students' Perception and Sensemaking of School and Schooling: Mechanisms that Undergird Their Sensemaking of School and Schooling

Thomas, Clark, and Gioia describe sensemaking as "the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription, and action" (p. 240). It is a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain surprises as well as a recurring cycle that comprises of sequence of events occurring over time (Louise, 1980). As a process, the cycle of sensemaking begins with individuals forming unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions for the future (Weick, 1995). Hence, as active agents construct sensible, sensable events, they structure the unknown and in that structuring, they experience events that may be discrepant from their predictions. This discrepancy or surprises between predictions and/or expectations trigger a need for explanation or retrodiction, as well as a need for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed (Louise, 1980; Weick, 1995).

Consequently, interpretation or meaning derives from "surprises as an output of the sense-making process, rather than arising concurrently with the perception or detection of differences" (Louise, 1980, p. 251). Through sensemaking, individuals and groups place phenomena into some kind of framework, a frame of reference that enables them to "comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51). As Louise (1980) suggests, "sensemaking is partially under the control of expectations. Whenever an expectation is disconfirmed, some kind of ongoing

activity is interrupted" (p. 241). Hence, to understand sensemaking is also to understand how people cope with interruptions, which involves environmental scanning, interpretation, and associated responses (Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993; Weick, 1995).

Whereas Sackman (1991) discusses sensemaking mechanisms that organizational members use to attribute meaning to events as processes and procedures that "include the standard and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting that are used in a given cultural setting (p. 33), Feldman (1989) explains sensemaking as an interpretive process that is necessary for members of an organization to understand and share understandings about features of the organization, such as "what it is about, what it does well and poorly, what problems it faces and how it should resolve them" (p. 19). Although both Thomas and colleague (1993) and Sackman (1991) include action in sensemaking, Feldman (1989) insists that sensemaking often, "does not result in action. It may result in an understanding that action should not be taken or that a better understanding of the event or situation is needed. It may simply result in members of the organization having more and different information about ambiguous issues" (p. 20).

Drawing from Thomas et al, Sackman, and Feldman, I define sensemaking as a thinking, as well as an interpretive process through which individuals and groups comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, predict, and share understandings about the meaning, purpose, and problems of events and/or organizations and posit that sensemaking includes actions, inactions, and new meanings that arise from the process of tinkering with discrepancies between predictions, expectations, and reality. In what follows, I present my interpretation of FHS students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling. Having detailedly presented my analysis, findings, and localized

interpretations situated within the data, I now invite the reader into my own sensemaking of these cultural groups' understanding, interpretation and performance of school, schooling, and academic achievement along with the mechanisms that influence their sensemaking.

Summary of Findings and Interpretations

Although simplistic, the students' musings about school and schooling encompass philosophical, social, cultural and historical issues that confront education in the 21st century. It questions the essence of school and schooling, especially as it is organized and performed in the U.S in the 21st century as well as the meaning of education, academic achievement, and a successful or achieved life. The contradiction inherent in these participants' definition of school as an "enforced institution" and at the same time "a place for education, interaction, and relaxation" reflect societal confusion about the meaning and purpose of school and schooling (Sadovnik et al., 2013), while pointing to a new direction for schools of the future. Considering the discrepancies between their expectations of school as a fulcrum of aspirations—social and economic mobility and a leverage out of poverty, otherwise the promise of the U. S public education (Sadovnik et al., 2013), as well as the illusion of the American dream for marginalized individuals (MacLeod, 2007) as is evident in the lives of individuals, families, and communities of minority and economically disadvantaged individuals—it becomes imperative for minority and economically disadvantages students to construct their own meaning of school and schooling in order to cope with the challenges of the compulsory twelve years of public education.

School Is An Enforced Institution that Everyone Must Partake

The iterative analysis of study participants' definition and/or description of the meaning of school and schooling, their understanding of academic achievement, along with their perception of school policies, practices and procedures, as well my observational fieldnotes, research journals, and documents from the sites, suggest that FHS students perceive and view school as an enforced institution that every one must partake.

Implicit within the concept of sensemaking is the belief that the sense maker has a prior belief or assumption about a phenomenon that has been disrupted or unsettled. Hence, sensemaking begins with an interruption in meaning, a disruption of ones taken-for-granted beliefs, values, and assumptions, that leads to new meaning, and awareness, a realization that unsettles the sense maker's previous suppositions, while pointing her/him to new directions. Drawing from this rationalization, it becomes necessary that a person seeking an understanding of a cultural group's sensemaking of an event evaluate the held suppositions along with the new meaning, and the sources of the discrepancies that ignited the process of sensemaking. Consequently, in order to better understand the new meaning of school and schooling that emerged from FHS students' sensemaking of school and schooling, I also examined their held beliefs, assumptions, and value of school and schooling as well as the incompatibilities in these beliefs that might have provoked the students' search for new meaning and understanding about school and schooling.

As the data from this study revealed, before encountering high school, student participants held some expectations of what their high school should be and should do for them. Based on their supposed meaning and purpose of school and schooling these

beliefs include (1) school as a place for education, interaction, and relaxation, (2) school as a preparation for life and for adulthood, (3) school as a place of learning that broadens ones horizons, that is, ones mental perceptions, experiences, and interests, and (5) schooling generates social and economic mobility as well as self-development. The disconfirmation of these expectations as they entered FHS unsettled their original belief in school as leverage in poverty and necessitated the need for them to construct an alternative meaning of school to explain the incongruence between their expectation of school and the reality of their inner city high school.

Hence, notwithstanding their original beliefs about school and schooling expressed in their supposed meaning and purposes of school and schooling, majority of the student participants described school as an enforced institution that everybody must partake. According to them, this particular nature of school warps its effort to deliver its promises. They attribute the ineffectiveness of school in educating majority of its pupils to the fact that teenagers or young adults have no choice, but to go to school or face legal charges. Permeating this definition of school as an enforced institution is the idea of school as a joke, a thing to do, and/or a place to hang out. Hence, majority of FHS students believe that irrespective of the supposed meaning and purpose, school, as they have lived and are still living it, is actually (1) a past time activity (2) something to do (3) a place to hang out, and (4) a joke because of the discrepancy between its supposed meaning and purposes and its phony policies, processes, and procedures, which confound its meaning and purpose.

As an enforced institution, school houses three categories of students, (a) students who actually come to school because they want to learn and achieve academically or

learning oriented students, (b) students who do not want to be in school, but come because they have nothing else to do or ***The rather be at school***, and (c) students who do not want to be in school, but are forced to be here by the law or ***The forced to be at school***. Additionally, school deals in deceitful academic currency through dishonest grades and grading practices, differential and handicapping policies and procedures that reifies societal inequality. Under the concept of school as a joke, participants indict their high school for implementing ridiculous policies, practices, and procedures that shortchanges students, while confounding the true meaning and purposes of school and schooling. Both students and faculty participants allude to this ridiculousness in the following excerpts:

> **Tee:** I take FHS as a joke because one day you all say something then the next day you all don't enforce it and you all expect us to take you all serious? It's like you all do one thing for like a week straight and the next week, oh! And nobody can careless about it. I don't take you all serious at FHS.
>
> **Ron:** I don't say they take school as a joke, I probably will just say this school because there isn't much going on except like unnecessary drama, unnecessary rules and everything and so it is what it is" (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).
>
> **Jerry:** It's very boring. It is like, sometimes you just do things repeatedly and you are like why am I doing this over and over and it just really starts to get boring. It's not enjoyable. By boring I mean "Like you get tired of doing something and the only reason you do it is because you have to, so it's boring. It's like, it's not really exciting some of the stuff, like the way it's taught, how you need to learn it" (S. Participant Interview, April).

Jane: I think it's just the way the whole school is set up, like the way it's built, the way it's framed.

Tee: they gona graduate whether you do something or not. Because they get lazy and just don't want to do the work, that's what I think, they don't wana do work because they wana laugh and joke around and think it's cool and try to fit in with people that's how. **Jane:** I don't even think it's that. Sometimes the class work, ehm, I don't want to say any teacher's but sometimes you just don't have to sit there and do the work, if you give about 10 to 15 minutes, they will go ahead and put the answers on the board and they copy it. So who is to sit there and burst their behind doing work when the answers will be given to you (Focus Group, Feb. 2014).

Quan: I think a lot of people don't do their homework because they know if you don't do the homework you can still pass and some students don't the class work not because they are lazy but because they know if they don't the class work, I can just copy it off another person and pass. A lot of people that have As in the class are the best cheaters you know.

Kelly: Report card is one issue. They don't want students to be out of school and when they come back, graduation rate will go down and dropout rate will sky rocket and too many students are failing excetra and so administration take on the role of parents instead of being an administrator. We have administrators who will just slap the student on their wrist and say okay have a good day and the kids know how far to go. They know, they know they can pull out their iphone or cell phone and talk excetra, but the consequences are also lax because of

administrators being afraid of the parents because as soon as the parent says am going to the district office, the administrator starts shaking and sometimes they would have to pull up their strong pants and say this is how am gona run my school (F. Participant Interview, April 9, 2014).

Jaa: we have accepted the, or let me not say, we have accepted, we have been forced to accept student mediocrity, ehmm and its veiled under the guise of us closing the achievement gap and instead of closing the gap, we are widening the gap, ehmm, because current theory, current research says okay we will do damage to their psyches by using red ink, ehmm, we do damage to their psyches by forcing them to actually rise up to the level of expectations, ehaam, versus giving them a 60 just for showing up. And so as a result, they don't know what it means to actually work hard because they are given everything, you know, they are literally given grades and keep giving grade; they lose out a lot on the learning process. There is no retention of information, ehmm, because again, they don't have to do it. And so they don't have to do it, they don't do it and because ehmm, teachers have no power, and not to force them to do it, but yet to < to, to, to> let them see the rationale. They ought not do it (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Jason: it is hard to separate the school policies from the district policies and the emerging national policies. I confess my bias that my educational background comes from where it is a much stricter environment and students in my background and my heritage has less latitude and I believe sometimes, our

students are allowed too many choices that do not necessarily contribute to their educational goals and development (F. participant Interview, April 24, 2014).

Tasha: I think we are trying to meet students where they are and to bring them up to where they are supposed to be, but I think and myself included, sometimes we get so bogged down in the little things that we can't see the big picture and I think the students resent those things like, we, and am not saying that it is not necessary because it is, but I feel like sometimes we put so much energy into if they have the cell phones** or not and those kind of things that we worry more about that than we do the academic part. And I know that is not only in our school because I know that it's coming from the district level and trying to enforce the policies. So, I think sometimes we get so caught up in the details that we lose sight of the big picture and that make sense (F. Participant Interview, May).

Similarly, by describing school as something to do, participants implicate the society in the academic failure of minority and economically disenfranchised student through the ambiguous educational policies that uses school as a panacea for societal ills. The following excerpt vividly depict the danger broader societal, state and national educational policies and expectations of school poses to students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling, as the student participants perceive it:

Jay: Most of these students think school is the place for them to come and have fun, for them to come and see their friends, for them to come and meet, for them to come and eat, sleep. To me, {*you can't make someone learn if they don't want to. You can't force knowledge upon a person*}. Especially if we have all these handouts for these kids and you think about

all these new kids in *<this generation we're getting smarter>, but we are getting smarter on ways to get over, we are not getting smarter on ways we can actually help. We are getting smarter on ways to get over on us, how to bit the system not how we can improve the society*.

Jalisha: because they system has gotten a lot easier to pass. They have a lot of ways for you to get out of high school of high school nowadays. They just think they are gona pass you along. They gona help you. They think your teacher wana see you graduate, which they do, but they think something is gona be given to them just because they might have fallen too far behind or might not be on the same level as their peers (S. participant Interview, Mar. 27, 2014).

Lui: I think it's the, maybe it's the system being scared of what's gona happen, pretty much if you change everything about the system you really will have the statistics in showing that shows that the state or the school itself is really bad. I feel like if we change everything and show them that there are consequences or that something will happen as effect of something else, and they probably will change their mindset for them not to do *S300*, for them not fail. They will probably, like reverse psychology, they will probably have a different thinking and they will feel like, oh! My gosh, this is actually gona happen to me, am not gona pass. Like, I think that probably why because I think they are scared.

Zack: I think it has to do with again seeing themselves as, as ehmm, because if they think lowly of themselves, they don't like any other person

> to think highly of them. So, when we receive high expectations from our teachers it's like we are under pressure like, if we don't reach the bar, if we don't meet your expectations am disappointing you and we don't wana disappoint anybody. We want to, we just want to be free of all that society, all these expectations and live in the moment because tomorrow is not promised (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

Accordingly, the institution called school sort and select students through differential access to equitable education deployed and navigated through grades and handicapping policies, processes, and procedures that recycle students through the crystallized system of inequality between minority and mainstream; haves and have-nots of the society. Hence, grade and grading, which should reflect student learning and mastery of academic and career-based skills as well as self-development and improvement become a process of passing student along the pipeline through four types of grades: (1) *Earned grade*, (2) *Easy grade*, (3) *Stolen Grade,* and (4) *Given Grade*, which equips them with worthless academic credentials with little or no purchasing power, thus reifying the status quo.

Nevertheless, sensemaking does not occur in a vacuum. It is a reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription, and action or inaction by agentic individuals through environmental scanning, evaluation and interpretations of rules, policies, practices, and standards for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting obtainable in a cultural setting (Thomas et al., 1993; Sackman, 1991; Feldman, 1989). Consequently, it is not enough to know the meanings a cultural group attaches to its environment, an event or organization without knowing how they construct the meanings.

Hence, I now turn to the mechanism through which FHS students construct their meaning of school as a joke and something to do.

Mechanisms for Students Sensemaking and Construction of the Meaning of School and Schooling

As Weick (1995) posits, the process of sensemaking begins with an imbalance, a discrepancy between expectation and realty, which precipitates the need for an explanation or post-diction of the incongruence through the examination of the standards and rules. Six major areas of discrepancy that disrupt students' assumptions about school and schooling emerged from the data set. These discrepancies are: (1) The irony of grades, grading, and academic achievement, (2) the discrepancy between learning and grades, (3) handicapping policies and programs, (4) a culture of settlement for mediocrity, (5) Discrepancy between policy intention and policy implementation, and (6) systemic silencing of students' voice. I take up each of these factors in the discussion that follows.

The Irony of grades, grading, and Academic Achievement

Yali, Yan, and Jose introduced the discrepancy between grades and mastery of skills and concepts that grades should reflect as they questioned why they receive Advanced mastery grade (A) in courses they learned little or nothing and below mastery grades (C and/or B) in courses they know that they learned something, even though they must not have mastered the skills and concepts taught. This questioning led them to the realization of two things about grades, grading, and academic achievement namely: (1) schools use grades to push students out of the system, as Jose posited,

"Academic achievement means achieving, having good grades and being an honor roll student and making really good scores on the test. The grades show that, I learned what I needed to learn and I, Yeah in Health, it's like, I don't know, ehmm, I do the work, but I have not really learned anything yet, because I don't think he checks our work. He just checks to see if we did it not really to see if we understand it and so I feel like I haven't learned anything yet. It makes me feel like he really doesn't care. He just wants us to pass. Like, it mostly seniors in there so *he just wants to pass them on*.

(2) Grade is not a true measure of learning and mastery of skills and concepts taught, "They say, I mean, that is how it is supposed to be, if you get a good grade in class, it should reflect all the things you have learned. But actually I realized, if you are actually come to school to learn, then in a lot of ways, grades don't really matter because the class I learn the most thing, you look at my report card, that's the class I have the lowest grade in and it's strange."

This is quite ironic as one expects that students' best grades should come from classes in which they learned and mastered the concepts taught. Stretching this thought further, Yali introduced the idea of ***discrepancy between grade and GPA*** as well as ***the disconnect between pedagogy, assessment and student learning*** (Skalski & Romero, 2011) as she asserted, "But you know, I don't know, but it took some time, because for a long period of time I just thought that academic achievement would be recognized by the highest test scores and the highest GPA, ***but a lot of times some of your smartest students have some of the lower GPAs because they are actually learning and they are doing the work to learn not just to get a good grade***. I don't, you can't really reflect it

off of like, say the top five percent in a graduating class because no lie, the top five in *our graduating* class are not some of the brightest. You'll be appalled by it, but it's the truth, so."

Affirming, Yali's assertion, Ron revealed how this top five percent, possibly came to be the top students of their class, "They can be top, but are people that just didn't even learn nothing, they just cheat and pass, they cheat and copy and they got the easy classes." Concurring, Janet added, "I don't think academic success is measured by grade because anybody can copy and cheat and get good grades," while Quan explained, "Lots of teachers, like I don't want to say, they show favoritism," and Tee clarifies, "When students, they be nice to a teacher, it's like if you're nice to a teacher, she is not gona fail you or like she is not gona make you a low grade in her class, and I see that happen most of the times. Because I can go to a teacher's class and not do anything in there and somehow end up with an 'A' or a 'B' and am like okay am gone be real quiet." Ron confirms Tee's experience noting, "yeah, I really don't, you show them respect. Like my grade is straight average and I don't really be doing nothing and like, if I try my grade would probably be 'As', I don't try, but my grade is just straight."

In the above episode, participants in discussing why grade is not a true measure of student learning and academic success revealed four types of grades obtainable in the study's setting namely: (1) ***Earned grade***, whereby learning oriented students work for learning by choosing challenging tasks and courses that enable them to broaden their horizons. This group of students accepts their grade not as a symbol of academic success, but more of a feedback on their efforts and progress toward learning and mastery of given concepts and/or skills. Hence they use grade and grading to monitor and adjust their

efforts in achieving their academic goals. Consequently, Yali, Gloria, Jalisha, Yan, and Yani explained academic achievement as "not just getting good grades, but actually putting in your best efforts and turning in your work, not half done, and to just go ahead and get your grade, but to say am proud of my work and I actually did the work." Implicit in their explanation is the understanding that learning is more important than grade and students who are learning and mastering skills have a higher likelihood to earn high grades than those who are not learning and/or mastering skills because learning is recursive and transfers to multiple contexts.

(2) ***Easy grade***: Here, grade oriented students choose easy classes and tasks over challenging courses and tasks so as to get easy As and Bs. Hence, Advance Placement (AP) students withdraw from the AP track, because the "AP classes are more work than the CP classes, while the CP classes are easy; a way to get an easy 'A' is to be in CP classes (Janny, Participant Interview, 2014) and students generally avoid challenging classes "Because usually challenging classes are like the ones with strict teachers and they think they gona be yelled at because they are not gona do their work." Yet, students attest to learning in these challenging classes because the teachers challenge them to earn their grades; instead of giving them grades and passing them on, "Like most people don't wana take Jaa, Meg, and Sandra, but they are good classes. We learn a lot in those classes. I don't know why anybody would not like to take them. They are hard teachers though."

(3) ***Stolen Grade:*** Again, grade oriented students get good grades by either cheating or copying from their peers who actually do the work. Jalisha introduced this concept of stolen grades in the previous section when she advises students who believe in

grades as evidence of learning and academic success to ensure that they understand the material and not just doing the work or getting the work from their peers. In this section, the issue of stolen grade takes center stage as participants indict top ranking students who cannot defend their grades through any other means than class work, homework and class assessments, with cheating and copying their way to the top. Ron described this group of students' as people that just didn't event learn anything, but earn good grades by cheating and copying without being caught.

(4) ***Given Grade:*** Teacher gives students grade just to pass them on, a practice that both Jose and Yan decried as they wondered why they get 'As' from teachers who taught them nothing. However, although Quan and Tee blamed teacher favoritism and manipulation of students behavior for given grades, the most disturbing source of given grades manifested as students share, explicate, and implicate the school for persistent academic failure of its students outside this space. Table 6.4 depicts the four types of grade and their sources p. 190.

In an effort to explain what he means by teachers showing favoritism, Quan continued,

> but, I mean a lot of teachers around here are okay, let's say you got an F and you are failing the class, you can go talk to Ms. Angy and shed a couple of tears and the next thing you know, you don't got do nothing, you only have to show up in that class and if your parents come here and act like a fool because you are failing a class. The teachers will be like submit to that and say I have to do something about the failure because I will not only have their parents on my back, but also administration is on me and so, then again people are accepting the culture, and I

> think it is part of the whole the Freedom high culture because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that [things changed?].

Once more, Tee, Ron, and Quan's discussion of the various types of grades and grading practices obtainable in the research setting elucidate the question of why teachers, who by profession, are supposed to be committed to educating student, would rather pass students on without educating them, a question that arose from Jose, Yan, and Yali's musings on how and why they and their peers receive mastery grades, "As and Bs," when they have neither learned nor mastered anything in those courses.

Not only does Quan's statement above indict students, parents, and school administrators for deskilling and divesting FHS students of ***quality and equitable education,*** he also introduces the concept of ***teacher bullying***[31] and ***distrust in teacher professionalism***, as well as raises the question of who, among the educational stakeholders has the professional expertise and credibility to plan, teach, evaluate, and provide accurate (useful) feedback on student learning and academic progress. Hence to avoid student, parent, and administrators' bullying, ***teachers "submit" to diluted curriculum, low expectations, checking student work for completion not for mastery, giving students grade for showing up in class and remaining quiet; not for participating in learning meaningful activities and mastering the learning goals, and allowing students to cheat and copy on exams and tests.*** Undoubtedly, these practices moot the promise of public education to minority and economically disenfranchised students, as it reduces the value of their educational certificates, the academic currency,

[31] Teacher bullying in this document refers to all covert and overt harassment, embarrassment, threats as well as verbal and emotional abuses that teachers receive from school administrators, parents and students who push teachers into the unethical conduct of giving students grades and moving them on, even when it is evident that such students have not learned and cannot perform the given concepts and skills.

which in turn, transforms to reduced economic capital credentials, thereby reproducing the status quo (Giroux, 1983).

Students in the study's setting seem to fully understand this social reproductive role of school, but willingly join the system in the reproduction of societal inequality by aiding their own recycling through the system (Bourdieu, 1977; Bandura, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Hence, even when they know the ramifications of given grades on their academic life and future, they work for it. A tenth grade student portrayed this awareness of the social reproductive role of the educational system and students' willful participation in it as he addresses his teacher in a class meeting:

> Morlawe: you want us to achieve, to study, to pass, and to become something after high school and you wonder why we don't want to achieve. We don't want because we don't know how to do that. We have already been destroyed right from elementary school; we have been given grades and pushed on. Nobody cares. The teachers don't care whether we learn or not and we are used to either getting grades or cheating to pass. You are just about the only one who cares about us learning and that is why everybody is failing your class [voices mutter in the background, "Am not failing," "Am not failing this class," "Only you is failing"]. Morlawe continued, yes am failing and we know you care about us and you want us to learn, but failing us will not help us either, just give us the grade we are already destroyed. You look, look at it this way, the As and Bs we receive from here will not help us, it cannot take us to college because we cannot pass the tests so whether you give us the grade or fail us it is the same, so give us the grade like others. You are not destroying us, we were destroyed before we get to you,

> look, look here elementary, middle school, even last year that's all they did, give us grade. We know that we are not learning anything. Don't think that we don't know (Fieldnotes, Nov. 13, 2013).

Of course, Morlawe is right, in as much as ***giving them grades and pushing them out without educating them would not help them, holding them back and demanding that they learn and be able to apply what they have learned before moving on to the next level of schooling or even entering the workforce would not help them either, especially in a system/society where racial supremacy is orchestrated and deployed through differential education***. This sedimentation of systemic inequality and it perpetuation through school and schooling becomes a ***constant moral dilemma for ethical and social justice minded teachers and school administrators of predominantly minority and economically disadvantaged inner city schools as they struggle between having a job and disrupting the status quo.***

This struggle resonates throughout the data set from the faculty and staff participants of this study as they shared their experiences from at least two years of teaching in FHS. Thus, in responding to the question on teacher effectiveness Kayla states, "I think many of us are highly qualified. I think many teachers here are highly trained because they are qualified because of their training. Many of us have advance degrees, many of us have attended various workshops excetra; however, I don't think we are often encouraged to put those things in place." When asked to explain what she meant by that, she responded,

> I think the biggest detriment to that is for some reason the report card. Because of the constant pressure to make sure that all students are here, when a large number

> of your student aren't there when they walk in the door. They don't desire to be there and it's hard to teach a horse to drink when the horse doesn't want to drink and I think a lot of teachers want to take their students right there, they teach there, but at the end of the day you fight the same constant battle and get the same constant headache at the end of the day. I think a lot of teachers have now joined, have gotten to the place where they have just resigned to their little self and said, I am tired, I am done, if this is what you want and I am not saying that's the large, that's not the majority, but that's what has happened to some of us here at FHS, that I think we have thrown in a towel and we don't get a lot of teacher support, you know, I listen to the things you are doing here, and am looking around the room, and am pretty sure you feel the constant struggle of I wana take my students here; however, am I really encouraged to take them there, you know, or am I encouraged to get them to accept defeat. And I think our students have accepted defeat and sometimes it is easy to just throw the towel (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Expressing the same frustration about ***teacher inability to effect change*** in a system that willfully deskills and divests minority and low SES students of equal access and opportunity to equitable education, personal agency, accountability for learning and resilience in pursuing quality education as well as academic success, Jaa, another faculty participant observed,

> I will describe FHS as a school that has failed its students. Ehmm, and I say it failed because we, we have accepted the, or let me not say, we have accepted, we have been forced to accept student mediocrity, and its veiled under the guise of us

closing the achievement gap and instead of closing the gap, we are widening the gap, because current theory, current research says okay we will do damage to their psyches by using red ink, we do damage to their psyches by forcing them to actually rise up to the level of expectations, versus giving them a 60 just for showing up. And so as a result, they don't know what it means to actually work hard because they are given everything, you know, they are literally given grades and keep giving grade; they lose out a lot on the learning process. There is no retention of information, because again, they don't have to do it. And so they don't have to do it, they don't do it and because teachers have no power to force them to do it, but yet to let them see the rationale. They ought not to do it (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Again, Tee and Ron's avowals of how they work for given grade by sitting quietly, not doing any work, not disrupting class or disrespecting the teacher and hoping that this "good" behavior will earn them passing grades at the end of the day, as well as Quan's explanation that students do not do class work and homework because they know that they would still be moved on to the next grade whether they show that they have learned or not, corroborates the teachers observation about students intentionally accepting failure as a means to free grade. Jay, a student participant, described this ***learned helplessness*** as ***"betting the system***[32]," while Quan described it as ***"joining the system,"*** either way, the students imply ***a mechanism through which minority and economically disenfranchised inner city students gain free grades by subscribing and/or ascribing to systems' deficit thinking about individuals who are different.*** This

[32] Betting the system—a mechanism through which minority and economically disenfranchised inner city students gain free grades by subscribing and/or ascribing to systems' deficit thinking about individuals who are different.

concept fully develops as participants discussed students' academic behavior and school culture in their respective sections.

When probed to share some similarities and difference between his experiences in his former school and FHS, Quan stated, "The curriculum here is easy. It is not tedious at all. I actually don't feel challenged. And actually when I just came here and after a year or two, I just got really like, honestly I got lazy because I just felt like you don't have to do a lot of work to get an 'A' and to be honest, I haven't even taken my backpack off my car all year and I still make the honor roll and I don't know how that is happening, but it is working. I feel the school doesn't motivate you to try." Moving the discourse forward, Andy added,

> I will say just all the rules and all the stuff that they have like really put kids down and they don't wana try. They don't come to school. They make you feel like you are not gona be able, especially it's really kind of like, like I said, if go to look at schools like Joy high, and I guess they need to do all these stuff, but they just kind of like have a nicer setting that when you go look at them, it makes you to feel like why am I trying because you feel like no matter how hard I try, am not gona be up there with them. You know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll. But as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot??? [****][There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60?][All Yeah! Yeah,

[**Quan:** minimum grade and a lot of them redo policy especially like, but you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get was a 60. Yeah when I was in class with Jaa, I didn't do anything because I know I was gona get a 60 and I know was gona pass with those 60s and so Am glad they took that off. Still I just feel like Ok. So I felt kinda like, redo policy, if I fail this, I can redo it, slight test, redo it.

In this discourse and others like it throughout the data corpus, participants revealed FHS academic culture that works simultaneously with students' personality to create and sustain students' academic behavior and academic, which in turn explains their understanding of school, schooling, and academic achievement. Beginning from Quan's description of the curriculum as easy and monotonous, to Andy's portrayal of the school as having "settlement for kids not to do their best," participants furthered ***the culture of settlement for mediocrity and low expectation*** that Quan introduced in the discussion on the meaning and purpose of school and schooling when he blamed teachers for accepting students' culture of acting up and disrupting instruction. According to the participants, this ***settlement for mediocrity is deployed through grade and grading policies, program and procedures that disable students from applying themselves in pursuing learning and academic success.*** Such programs and policies include S300 credit recovery program, mandatory two days a week after school tutorial, No zero, minimum grade and redo policies, as well as open door make-up work policy. These become handicapping policies and programs that subtly deskill and divest minority and los SES students of personal agency, self-efficacy, resilience, and personal accountability for their choice to

engage or not to engage in their own learning and academic achievement, while preparing them to assume their place in the society as wage laborers.

A Culture of Settlement for Mediocrity

Through their explanation of academic achievement and the reason for the persistent academic failure of FHS students, study participants provide insight into FHS' academic culture and climate. In disagreeing with the supposed meaning of grade and grading as a reflection of what a student knows and is able to do, as well as in revealing that her highest grades come from classes in which she does not do anything, Yali opens up a conversation around the quality of education students receive in FHS, a conversation that spiraled into the discussion of student academic behavior, curriculum and school culture. Following Yali's assertion "I don't, you can't really reflect it off of like, say the top five percent in a graduating class because no lie, the top five in the class of *our graduating class* are not some of the brightest. You'll be appalled by it, but it's the truth, yeah! They got the easy classes and they got [sic] straight through." Stretching Yali's comments, Ron intimates that the top five percent of FHS' graduating class "are people that they just didn't even learn nothing, they just cheat and pass," and Tee concurs, adding "anybody can get a piece of paper and the answer, they cheat and copy." This brief conversation on the academic behavior of the top five, the echelon of FHS students beg the question of how and why these students became the top of their graduating class, while implicating the academic culture of the school.

Quan provides an explanation of how and why these students might have become the top five students of the year through his explanation of why high GPA is not true measures of academic success in FHS,

> Lot of teachers, like I don't want to say, they show favoritism, but, I mean a lot of teachers around here are okay, let's say you got an F and you are failing the class, you can go talk to Ms. *Angy* and shed a couple of tears and the next thing you know, you don't got do nothing, you only have to show up in that class and if your parents come here and act like a fool because you are failing a class, the teachers will be like submit to that and say I have to do something about the failure because I will not only have their parents on my back, but also administration is on me and so, (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Through this explanation, Quan suggests that teachers and school administrators submit to mediocrity, a behavior Kelly, in speaking about the school culture, described as "sucking up to parents and students." Quan later concludes his explanation noting, "Then again, people are accepting the culture, and I think it is part of the whole culture of Freedom High because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that [things changed?]," thus blaming teachers' and administrators' acceptance of mediocrity on the school culture, a culture Andy vividly described in the following excerpt:

> You know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll. But as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me, I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot??? [****][There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60?][All Yeah! Yeah, [**Quan:** minimum grade and a lot

> of them redo policy especially like ehm, was it this year? When we first started that[last two years[last year] year, but you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get was a 60 (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Kayla refers to this culture of settlement, settling students into accepting defeat, as she described the incongruence between NCBL demands of on-time graduation, the preparation of all students for college and career readiness and the constant pressure that arises from these contradictory demands. According to her, "a lot of teachers have now joined, have gotten to the where they have just resigned to their little self and said, I am tired, I am done, if this is what you want, we have thrown a towel." Jaa captured this culture of settlement for mediocrity on teacher effectiveness as well as its confounding feedback on the academic achievement of minority and low SES student in the following excerpt:

> I will describe FHS as a school that has failed its students. Ehmm, and I say it failed because we, we have accepted the, or let me not say, we have accepted, we have been forced to accept student mediocrity, and its veiled under the guise of us closing the achievement gap and instead of closing the gap, we are widening the gap, because current theory, current research says okay we will do damage to their psyches by using red ink, we do damage to their psyches by forcing them to actually rise up to the level of expectations, versus giving them a 60 just for showing up. And so as a result, they don't know what it means to actually work hard because they are given everything, you know, they are literally given grades and keep giving grade; they lose out a lot on the learning process. There is no retention of information, because again, they don't have to do it. And so they

don't have to do it, they don't do it and because teachers have no power to force them to do it, but yet to let them see the rationale. They ought not to do it (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Responding to the probe on what they think could be the reason why students who disrupt classes do not get any repercussion for their actions, Quan explains, "I think it's the culture of the school. The teachers are just accepting it, ok am not going to do anything about it because it's gona fall right back to me and they still gona be in my class [yeah] maybe am just gona ignore it and act like I don't hear it. So I think of the culture of the teachers' accepting the culture of the student acting up. And because the teachers accept it, the students' gona keep doing it." Through this response, Quan introduces another aspect of FHS culture, a culture that reinforces student mediocrity (acting-up in class) either by ignoring it or by "providing crutches for students to lean on." Hence, teachers allow students to disrupt class without any consequences because if they discipline the disrupters, it will "fall right back on them," because those students would still be in their classes. Again, Quan alludes to the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics (teacher/student interaction) in creating and sustaining both the school's culture of mediocrity and student academic behavior (disruption of learning).

Although Quan's reason why teachers allow disruptive students to remain in class is neither clear nor convincing, juxtaposing his response with two other documents, Jane's response to the probe on what the government should do to help students who "mess-up" the learning of others because they feel forced to come to school and my field note from one of the faculty meetings where the principal subtly threatened teachers to promote all students allow this culture of reinforcement of mediocrity to fully manifest.

"I don't even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it is the school itself. We can't do anything at all and am not saying the school should send people away, at the end of the day, some of the things that go on here is ridiculous" (Jane, Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014), and:

> You as a teacher must prove to me that you have done everything in your power or required of you to make sure that the student did not fail. You must prove that all your grades correspond to everything that is required of the grading policy, from number of homework to number class work, to number of tests and quizzes and how you graded them to the T. If you fail any student, be ready to teach that student next year. If you don't want to see the student again next year, then, let it go" (Fieldnotes, May 12, 2014: Faculty Meeting 3: 30PM),

Quan concludes, "And because the teachers accept it, the students' gona keep doing it," invariably implicating students in taking advantage of a culture that allows them to settle for mediocrity.

Lamenting the handicapping effect of this culture of mediocrity on students' overall outcome Shay noted,

> Well, we do have good policies set up, but unfortunately, sometimes, I just feel like we, in some occasions, not all, some students here in this school, are not gona know how to act and how to conduct themselves and how to be productive citizens when they leave the school, because, I feel like, unfortunately, we, for some students not all, but for some students, we have really handicapped them and have given them an easy way out and by doing that, we have really crippled

> them and have set them up for failure because I don't think that they are gona be ready and prepared to be successful in the real world (F. Participant Interview,).

Moving the discussion forward, Jaa explains how the school promotes mediocrity, while "handicapping" students from making effort to learn in classes because they know that there is an easier alternative,

> I think *S300* is one of the biggest deterrents because in theory, it all sounds great let's learn, but yet so many of them don't complete the courses. And because they don't complete the courses, they are right back where they are when they leave the classroom or else, they are put back on *S300*, which means, they are right back in the boat they started in and if they didn't go anywhere in the first time, why put them back in the same boat. But they put them in the same boat every year (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 13, 2014).

The irony of *S300* credit recovery as it is used in FHS takes center stage as a mechanism for recycling minority and low SES students without educating them as study participants pointed to its inability to yield the expected result of remediating the skills credit recovery students did not master in class. Hence, conscientious teachers like Jaa, Meg, Kayla and Kelly kept asking, "why put student in computer-based credit recovery program repeatedly when it is evident that they pass the course without mastering the skill?" The following personal conversation with Ms. H, provides an answer to why students who recovered course credits through the *S300* program pass the course without learning any of the skills and concepts that prepares them for the next level, as well as why "they put them back in the same boat every year, "Ms. S, It is not just about them copying and pasting and googling answers from the internet without reading the stories

and the questions, it is the fact that no matter how long they sit on it, they will not pass it, and at the end, administration gives them the grade" (Fieldnotes, Jan. 22, 2014). Again, this revelation evokes the question, why should educators resort to shortchanging a group of students who need quality education more than any other group.

However, Kayla, and Jaa in explaining why they described FHS students' academic progress as "maintaining" and "stagnant" provide insight in why and how the school endorses mediocrity as their respective excerpts below portray,

> **Kayla:** One thing at the grand skim of things.< If we push these kids to do better or to do more, that means we have to do more. That means parents have to do more that means the organizations will have to contribute more. So I think that sometimes, you know, you mentioned being stagnant, I think sometimes, you know, keeping things where they are means that we don't have to change anything about ourselves and so when parents don't have to push themselves to be better parents, to monitor more, then they are comfortable with that. The school doesn't encourage it, the district, the state itself, the government, if nobody is pushing them to do better, then they are comfortable. So, I think it's just a complete system of utter disregard for I need to change. They say we want change, we don't mean it because that means I will have to change, everybody has to change (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).
>
> **Jaa:** You know, it is funny because they talk about high expectations and the students know the truth of the situation that as teachers, we can talk all we can about high expectations, but as for the school all they are concerned about is graduation, it is that they graduate and they veil it, or they don't even veil it with

> we want you to be successful after you leave; rather it is we want to you graduate. And it is rooted in that idea of you got to graduate, you got to graduate, you got to graduate, without graduate and be successful, no we just want you to graduate. And I think nobody has expectations for success, why, why come, if the teachers don't expect me to be successful, then am wasting my time (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 13, 2014).

Interestingly both participants see this culture of settlement and reinforcement of mediocrity as systemic. Their data speak to the complacence and self-protection inherent in a system that seeks to preserve itself. Suggestively, both participants implicate all stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, site and central administration and the entire society in creating and sustaining this culture of mediocrity that recycles minority and economically disadvantaged students, making them more susceptible to poverty and the dangers of poverty. Hence, when asked what generates this poor expectation, Kayla responds, "Parents, students, teachers, administration, even all the way up. You know, and it does, it starts all the way up, it goes all the way to the superintendent. If you understand that a school is struggling with something you put certain supports in place so that, that school can't fail, that school can meet its mission. You know, I mean, a mission is, ehmm, our mission statement is nothing more than what is on paper" (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Finally, in the excerpt below, Jaa paints a vivid picture of the handicapping nature of the school's culture and climate as it subtly deprives students of ambition, critical thinking, and achievable vision, while clothing them with the unattainable dream of failure as not an option without giving them the protective skills needed to combat failure

into success; skills such as industry, resilience, perseverance, self-discipline, self-regulation, personal accountability, and deferment of gratification, skills that individuals develop and sustain through personal agency and self-efficacy belief (Bandura, 2005).

> Nobody really ever ask kids to, to get real with?? Athletes. It's funny how they are willing to bend over backwards for athletes who might be failing and coming to talk to teachers and reminding teachers of their professional responsibilities, when as teachers we are doing our professional responsibilities. If the kids have not done what they are supposed to do, they are supposed to fail; but to be asked to give a kid extra works so that the kid can achieve the minimum GPA so that they can play. Our focus totally or let me say the focus of the kid totally shifts from I need to learn, to I need to play. So their main goal doesn't become to learn, it all becomes to play and then when it's time to graduate, they can't do it. And so are they losers, ehm, yea because they bought into a dream that is so unobtainable that everything else falls into pieces when that dream does not happen}. Ehm, can they read or write? Probably not, because again it comes back to are parents at home reading with them? Do we as teachers allow them to make adult decision not to learn? The answer is yes. Do we follow them up when they skip? No. Because again, they don't understand what is at stake, and because again the culture they leave in, the culture we work in, is such that I don't have to know how to read. I don't have to know how to be academically inclined or academically disciplined to succeed because; it's all given to me. There's a redo waiting from me, if I just show-up for the tutorial session the zero I received on the test will be replaced with a 70% automatically and so there are so many pieces

in place that I don't need to learn how to do anything because the system is set so that I will succeed regardless of my intellectual inclination or intent (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Handouts and Handicapping Policies

In discussing why minority and Low SES students do not invest into academic achievement, Zani notes, "They know that by end of the day, they are just going to graduate and get their credits so with the NCBL rule, they feel like they can just do anything." When asked to explain what she understands as the meaning of the NCBL rule, she expounds, "I feel like with the NCBL rule, since they know that no child can be left behind, they just feel like they don't have to work as hard as they should, like they will pass regardless. That's how I feel about it." Probed further on how she thinks these students who want to graduate, but would not work for it get the required credits for graduation, she asserts, "It's just handed out to them. Some kids, well some teachers can give the students the grade to pass, but if I were principal, I will have my students not to just have the teachers "give" them a passing grade, but I want them to earn it by themselves. Instead of just studying and taking test, I want them to have the knowledge of it." Here, Zani pointed to another characteristic of FHS, the culture of handouts and it subsequent effect on students' academic behavior, a "sense of entitlement to passing grades," which suffuses the data set as participants deliberated on the causes of the persistent academic failure of FHS students. However, in as much as Zani indicted the school for accepting this culture of handouts and entitlement, she blamed NCBL, the national education policy for the inception and sustenance of a system of handouts within school and the subsequent sense of entitlement to a passing grade.

Supporting Zani's view of the handouts, entitlement, and subsequent push-out of minority and low SES students without educating them as a systemic issue, Jalisha explains, "Because the they system has gotten a lot easier to pass. They have a lot of ways for you to get out of high school nowadays. They just think they are gona pass you along. They gona help you. They think your teacher wana see you graduate, which they do, but they think something is gona be given to them just because they might have fallen too far behind or might not be on the same level as their peers." Mai localized this culture of handouts and sense of entitlement to FHS adding, "They give out handout too much here. If you don't do your homework, they give you so many chances after chances and that's not how the real world works. They yes up. And that's not gona help us at all for those of us who are going to college." Explaining how the school "yeses up" to student mediocrity Jaa stated, "The climate here is different, there is a ehm, ehm, what's the word am looking for, you owe me something, it is not that let me have something, [entitlement], "Entitlement." Yes, they believe they are entitled to a passing grade if they write their name on a paper they are entitled to a passing grade, where, and it doesn't matter how many are right or wrong. I wrote my name on it, I did some of them, and so I deserve a passing grade and it doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong, it is I turned it in."

Jay captured the full effect of this culture of handouts and entitlement on student motivation and academic performance in the following excerpt:

> Like letting them get bye? Just like they getting on with the bare minimum? It's just what they are used to because it's what happened in the past, handouts." Yes I think so. I think, I think school nowadays by them just wanting to help, I think

schools nowadays wana help so much that they are just making it easy, they are just giving it to them. I feel like if we take out things such as *S300*. If we take out things such as you have to come back and make-up and the redo policy, if we cut all that out, the kids will be forced to do work. Because with the redo policy, it feels like hey, if I fail this, all I have to is to come back and spend one day with Ms. Sandra, spend one day with Ms. Kayla, then come back and retake the test to get my grade or with the ehmm, late homework I can do the home or I turn it in late I get the half credit and I can do the homework like that and get some credit. I feel we actually have a lot of stuff to aid them, but if we take *the stuff* away, they gona be actually forced to learn. Because they'll get tired of seeing the zeroes in the grade book and they'll get tired of not being helped. They'll get tired of that. And thinking about it, I think because we caught out summer school, more kids are passing now. Because then, Ms. Sandra, when we had summer school, a lot of kids will go to summer school, but now that we cut out[they still do the *S300*] yeah, but summer school is now, it actually is at some place that kids are now like woo! I have to do something in order to pass that class. If they don't learn, if they pretend that they can't do, it will be given to them. You really did talk about the minimum 60, the no zero policy, yea, you talked about them, and the make-up policy and how it is destroying our kids yea, you see, how it seem to maybe helping them, but really it's hindering them, let's look at it this other way, that's what am thinking right now, do you think that somebody out there who came up with these things must have seen that if we keep them and they won't pass, they will remain in school so the best thing is to give them that and push them out[yeah

because they are tired of them, they don't know what to do with them. [waoo, you are intelligent] well, because am able to think like them too, though. I think so, well, if I don't do nothing, I will have basically a 60, if I just walk in here for attendance. So, all I have to is just do a couple of assignments and am passing. To me, {*you can't make someone learn if they don't want to. You can't force knowledge upon a person*}. Especially if we have all these handouts for these kids and you think about all these new kids in <*this generation we're getting smarter>, but we are getting smarter on ways to get over, we are not getting smarter on ways we can actually help. We are getting smarter on ways to get over on us, how to bit the system not how we can improve the society. You all can't do everything for these kids*. There's nothing you can do to make them work (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

Describing the culture of handouts and sense of entitlement to unearned grade that pervades FHS, Jaa contends,

We have created a culture where, sure, failure is not an option, but not only is it not an option, failure is not even a possibility. And with failure not being a possibility, you know, you find students who are extremely disrespectful because again we have allowed them to believe they deserve to pass because they are poor and they are black and because we don't know what we are doing and we are here and we are ineffective because we won't let them to just slide bye. Ehmm, if we allow them to slide bye, then we are great teachers, but if we ask them to be more, to think deeper, to come up with something else that shows that they're here and they are not just here on the roll every day, then we are wrong, we are wrong and

> because we are wrong, they are right and there is no, can we switch it back and forth, no. If they are right, we are so wrong, and because they are right, they get the benefit of a free pass, they get the benefit of mediocrity, they get the benefit of coming to a one week session because they got a 65 through 69 so by coming for that one week, they can increase their grade to pass (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Finally, Zack concludes his process of sensemaking about the persistent lack of academic improvement among and between FHS students and their peers, irrespective of the numerous "student centered" programs, policies, and practices the school has adopted to enhance the learning and academic success of its pupils, stating,

> I think it's the privileges that we have been giving them. We have been giving them too many privileges and if that were taken away from them, and they have no choice but to do the work. Then *either they will they push themselves of they will drop out. I think most of them will push themselves, if they got the grit, if they got the motivation, they will push themselves because that's why most of the other districts are doing better than we are because we offer too much privileges to our students.* When teachers like you have done all they can toward a student, what you need is wash your hands and *leave because in the end, he is either gona fail or succeed* (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

Ironically, what students describe as handouts and prize as right to graduation is a system of social reproduction, a system that permanentizes the situation of minority and low SES students as wage laborers. Thus, these students by asking and working for free grades and/or easy grades exonerate the system from shortchanging them, while indicting

themselves for their own handicapping. Through a culture of handout, settlement for mediocrity and handicapping policies, students are rid of all accountability for their learning. The fact that they get promoted whether they show that they have learned or not reinforces their belief in school as a joke, because if it is not so, why are they being passed along? Why are they receiving diplomas that people burn midnight oil to get without sweating? Even though they do not realize that the diploma they receive have no purchasing power, but they have received it and nothing in the environment alerts them to this deceit until it is too late.

Finally, Jaa elaborates on these disparities pointing out nuanced instances of how the ironies inherent in the incessant talk about high expectations, student centered teaching, rigor, relevance, and relationship forces students to see school as a joke, a thing to do or, in an extreme case, a place not to be. The following excerpt speaks clearly to this demoralizing effect of FHS' mixed bag of expectation on its students' motivation and academic success.

> You know, it is funny because they talk about high expectations and the students know the truth of the situation that as teachers, we can talk all we can about high expectations, but as for the school all they are concerned about is graduation, it is that they graduate and they veil it, or they don't even veil it with we want you to be successful after you leave; rather it is we want to you graduate. And it is rooted in that idea of you got to graduate, you got to graduate, you got to graduate, without graduate and be successful, no we just want you to graduate. And I think nobody has expectations for success, why, why come, if the teachers don't expect me to be successful, then am wasting my time.

It is these discrepancies; these ironies between minority and low SES students' expectations of school and schooling and their experiences with school processes, policies, and procedures that led them to conclude that school is a joke, something to, a conclusion that drives their performance of school. Hence, in consort their school environment, their family, neighborhoods, and the society, this group of students invest into betting the system that marginalizes them and by so doing; become accomplices in their own disenfranchisement. Thus, Jay concludes his discussion on students' academic behavior stating, "No! You can't make someone learn if they don't want to. You can't force knowledge upon a person, especially if we have all these handouts for these kids and you think all about these new kids in this <this generation, we're getting smarter>, but we are getting smarter on ways to get over, we are not getting smarter on ways we can actually help. We are getting smarter on ways to get over on us, how to bit the system not how we can improve the society" (S. participant Interview, April 2, 2014).

Section Two

Bidirectional Interaction Between Person Characteristics and School Processes and Procedures and Their Impact on Student Academic Behavior, School Climate and Culture, and Student Academic Outcome

This section focuses on the findings related to my second research question: How does the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures impact student academic behavior, school culture, and student academic outcome? Throughout this section, I focus on participants' words, actions, and inactions that allude and/or reveal students' academic behaviors and the school culture. Further, as I consider how covert and overt institutionalized practices, policies, and processes are enacted and lived through school and schooling, I work to complicate the understanding of minority and low SES students' academic behaviors and educational outcomes, emphasizing the reciprocal interaction between process, person, context, and time.

I draw upon my analysis of the one hundred and seventeen students' semi-structured and unstructured interviews, twenty faculty and staff interviews, focus group discussions, observational/field notes, student journals, and my research journal and diary entries. Each chapter encompasses my analysis, findings, and interpretations situated in students' as well as faculty and staff's discourse on the meaning of school, schooling, academic achievement, relationship between school policies, processes, and procedures and students' academic outcome, along with what the participants think are the reason for the persistent lack of academic achievement among minority and low SES students.

Section Overview

Like in section one; each chapter begins with background information that relates the concept under examination to broad bodies of literature followed by excerpts of data corpus from which I extracted my findings. Then, I consider explicitly how the participants perceive, make sense of, and agentically manage and perform school, focusing on the goal of each interview question. Finally, I move to more clearly illustrate the ways in which FHS students perform school, while working to account for the role of the reciprocal interaction between process, person, context, time, and its influence on student academic behaviors and school culture. Because of the sensitivity of the findings presented in this study, I choose to report my findings on students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling and the factors that influence their sensemaking using narrative or storytelling style of writing. Hence, I allow the reader to meet the participants first, through excerpts from the data corpus, before encountering my deliberations and dialogue with the data.

Chapter XII

School Climate and Culture

In order to better understand the impact of the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures student academic behavior, school culture and student academic outcome, I analyzed the data generated from the study searching for patterns and concepts that speak to the culture of Freedom High School. In this chapter, I present the culture of FHS as it emerged from the data corpus. First, I present the various ways in which the meanings of culture are produced and situated in a broader context of cultural studies, pointing specifically to school culture and how it shapes and is shaped by student characteristics. Second, I present the emergent school culture followed by excerpts of data that allude to the culture. Third, I present my analysis and interpretation of the culture focusing on the processes and procedures that generated the culture. Fourth, I explore how this culture shapes and is shaped by student characteristic and/or academic behaviors. Finally, I explain the relationship between the identified culture and student learning and academic outcome. Appendix K is the transcription Key.

Introduction

Various cultural scholars define culture as shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, basic assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values that characterize an organization (Engle et al, 2008; Maslowski, 2006; Lunenburg and Allan, 2004; Schein, 2004; Stolp & Smith, 1995). However, Cunningham and Gresso (1993)

offered a more thought provoking description of culture as "an informal understanding of the way we do things around here" (pg. 20). According to them, "Culture is a powerful yet ill-defined conceptual thinking within the organization that expresses organizational values, ideals, attitudes, and beliefs." It is "a strategic body of learned behaviors that gives both meaning and reality to its participants" (pg. 20).

In his 2004 classic, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein classified culture into three interdependent levels of artifacts (visible organizational structures and processes, which are hard to decipher), espoused beliefs and values (strategies, goals, and philosophies, which are the espoused justification of culture), and basic underlying assumptions—the unconscious, taken-for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feeling of the members of the organization and the ultimate mate source of values and actions. Similarly, quoting Geertz (1973), Stolp and Smith (1995) contend that culture represents a "historically transmitted pattern of meaning embedded in symbols." According to them, those symbols are both explicit and implicit messages encoded in the language of the organization and transmitted through the organization's vision and mission statements. In the case of schools, these include the goals explicitly stated in the vision and mission statements that focus on student achievement, and the implicit value the school places or does not place on academic success. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) assert "successful educators spend considerable time developing an effective school culture, since nothing can be accomplished if the culture works against the needed reform" (pg. 19).

Recognizing the importance of school climate and culture in student motivation, learning, academic behavior, and academic achievement, I sought an understanding of

FHS culture within the data set generated from the three broad interview questions and their attendant probes. In this chapter, I present my analysis, findings, and the interpretation I drew from emergent concepts within the data set. First, I invite the reader to familiarize and dialogue with the excerpts of the data from which I extracted my findings.

Analysis, Findings, and Interpretations

In responding to the questions on their understanding of the meaning of school and schooling; academic achievement, and perception of FHS' policies and practices, students and faculty participants in this study provided useful insights through which I extrapolated the school climate and culture. Eight characteristics that speak to the culture of Freedom High School emerged from the entire data corpus, namely: (1) Low expectation and settlement for mediocrity.[33] (2) Reinforcement of mediocrity.[34] (3) Handouts and entitlement to a passing grade. (4) Inconsistency and mixed bag of expectations. (5) Quick fix, instant gratification and visionlessness. (6) Low morale and apathy. (7) Teacher bullying and deskilling of teachers and students (8) Misplacement of priorities and the irony between expectation and practice. Below, I offer detailed analysis of each of these cultural elements presenting illustrative excerpts as well as my interpretations. The analytic process constitutes of generating a corpus of examples for each element that speak to the varied meanings and performances of school and schooling as it pertain to student learning and academic outcome.

[33] I use Low Expectation and Settlement for Mediocrity to differentiate school policies and practices such as minimum grade, no zero and given grades as well as any procedure that disposes teachers and administrators to accepts mediocre behaviors and works from students either because they do not need fight to fight or because they are forced to accept mediocrity.

[34] I use Reinforcement of Mediocrity to describe practices, policies, and procedures aimed at allowing students who failed a course by choosing not to apply themselves in earning passing grades to recover credits for the course through computer-based credit recovery programs, extra-credits, redoes, and open-door make-up work.

Low Expectation and Reinforcement of Mediocrity

Through their explanation of academic achievement and the reason for the persistent academic failure of FHS student, study participants provide insight into FHS' academic culture and climate. In disagreeing with the supposed meaning of grade and grading as a reflection of what a student knows and is able to do, as well as in revealing that her highest grades come from classes in which she does not do anything, Yali opens up a conversation around the quality of education students receive in FHS, a conversation that spiraled into the discussion of student academic behavior, curriculum and school culture. Following Yali's assertion "I don't, you can't really reflect it off of like, say the top five percent in a graduating class because no lie, the top five in our graduating class are not some of the brightest. You'll be appalled by it, but it's the truth, yeah! They got the easy classes and they got [sic] straight through." Stretching Yali's comments, Ron intimates that the top five percent of FHS' graduating class "are people that they just didn't even learn nothing, they just cheat and pass," and Tee concurs, adding "anybody can get a piece of paper and the answer, they cheat and copy." This brief conversation on the academic behavior of the top five, the echelons of FHS students beg the question of how and why these students became the top of their graduating class, while implicating the academic culture of the school.

Quan provides an explanation of how and why these students might have become the top five students of the year through his explanation of why high GPA is not true measures of academic success in FHS stating,

> Lot of teachers, like I don't want to say, they show favoritism, but, I mean a lot of teachers around here are okay, let's say you got an F and you are failing the class,

> you can go talk to Ms. *Angy* and shed a couple of tears and the next thing you know, you don't got do nothing, you only have to show up in that class and if your parents come here and act like a fool because you are failing a class, the teachers will be like submit to that and say I have to do something about the failure because I will not only have their parents on my back, but also administration is on me and so, (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Through this explanation, Quan suggests that teachers and school administrators submit to mediocrity, a behavior Kelly, in speaking about the school culture, describes as "sucking up to parents and students." Quan later concludes his explanation noting, "Then again, people are accepting the culture, and I think it is part of the whole culture of Freedom high because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that [things changed?]," thus blaming teachers' and administrators' acceptance of mediocrity on the school culture, a culture Andy vividly describes in the following excerpt:

> You know, it just like Peace High, the school where hmm, I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll. But as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me, I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot??? [****][There's settlement for kids to not do their best. What's that thing that if you're, your grade is like 40 they automatically give you a 60?][All Yeah! Yeah, [**Quan:** minimum grade and a lot of them redo policy especially like ehm, was it this year? When we first started

> that[last two years[last year] year, but you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get was a 60 (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Kayla refers to this culture of settlement, settling students into accepting defeat as she describes the incongruence between NCBL demands of on-time graduation, the preparation of all students for college and career readiness and the constant pressure that arises from these contradictory demands. According to her, "a lot of teachers have now joined, have gotten to the where they have just resigned to their little self and said, I am tired, I am done, if this is what you want, we have thrown a towel." Jaa captures this culture of settlement for mediocrity on teacher effectiveness as well as its confounding feedback on the academic achievement of minority and low SES student in the following excerpt:

> I will describe FHS as a school that has failed its students. Ehmm, and I say it failed because we, we have accepted the, or let me not say, we have accepted, we have been forced to accept student mediocrity, and its veiled under the guise of us closing the achievement gap and instead of closing the gap, we are widening the gap, because current theory, current research says okay we will do damage to their psyches by using red ink, we do damage to their psyches by forcing them to actually rise up to the level of expectations, versus giving them a 60 just for showing up. And so as a result, they don't know what it means to actually work hard because they are given everything, you know, they are literally given grades and keep giving grade; they lose out a lot on the learning process. There is no retention of information, because again, they don't have to do it. And so they don't have to do it, they don't do it and because teachers have no power to force

them to do it, but yet to let them see the rationale. They ought not to do it (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Reinforcement of Mediocrity

Responding to the probe on what they think could be the reason why students who disrupt classes do not get any repercussion for their actions, Quan explains, "I think it's the culture of the school. The teachers are just accepting it, ok am not going to do anything about it because it's gona fall right back to me and they still gona be in my class [yeah] maybe am just gona ignore it and act like I don't hear it. So I think of the culture of the teachers' accepting the culture of the student acting up. And because the teachers accept it, the students' gona keep doing it." Through this response, Quan introduces another aspect of FHS culture, a culture that reinforces student mediocrity (acting-up in class) either by ignoring it or by "providing crutches for students to lean on." Hence, teachers allow students to disrupt class without any consequences because if they discipline the disrupters, it will "fall right back on them," because those students would still be in their classes.

Although Quan's reason why teachers allow disruptive students to remain in class is neither clear nor convincing, juxtaposing his response with two other documents, Jane's response to the probe on what the government should do to help students who "mess-up" the learning of others because they feel forced to come to school, "I don't even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it is the school itself. We can't do anything at all and am not saying the school should send people away, at the end of the day, some of the things that go on here is ridiculous" and my field note from one of the faculty meetings where the principal subtly threatened teachers to promote all students,

> You as a teacher must prove to me that you have done everything in your power or required of you to make sure that the student did not fail. You must prove that all your grades correspond to everything that is required of the grading policy, from number of homework to number class work, to number of tests and quizzes and how you graded them to the T. If you fail any student, be ready to teach that student next year. If you don't want to see the student again next year, then, let it go" (Fieldnotes, May 12, 2014: Faculty Meeting 3: 30PM),

allow this culture of reinforcement of mediocrity to fully manifest. Quan concludes, "And because the teachers accept it, the students' gona keep doing it," invariably implicating students in taking advantage of a culture that allows them to settle for mediocrity.

Lamenting the handicapping effect of this culture of mediocrity on students' overall outcome Shay notes,

> Well, we do have good policies set up, but unfortunately, sometimes, I just feel like we, in some occasions, not all, some students here in this school, are not gona know how to act and how to conduct themselves and how to be productive citizens when they leave the school, because, I feel like, unfortunately, we, for some students not all, but for some students, we have really handicapped them and have given them an easy way out and by doing that, we have really crippled them and have set them up for failure because I don't think that they are gona be ready and prepared to be successful in the real world (F. Participant Interview,).

Moving the discussion forward, Jaa explains how the school promotes mediocrity, while "handicapping" students from making effort to learn in classes because they know that there is an easier alternative,

> I think *S300* is one of the biggest deterrents because in theory, it all sounds great let's learn, but yet so many of them don't complete the courses. And because they don't complete the courses, they are right back where they are when they leave the classroom or else, they are put back on *S300*, which means, they are right back in the boat they started in and if they didn't go anywhere in the first time, why put them back in the same boat. But they put them in the same boat every year (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 13, 2014).

The irony of *S300* credit recovery as it is used in FHS takes center stage as a mechanism for recycling minority and low SES students without educating them as study participants point to its inability to yield the expected result of remediating the skills credit recovery students did not master in class. Hence, conscientious teachers like Jaa, Meg, Kayla and Kelly keep asking, "why put student in computer-based credit recovery program repeatedly when it is evident that they pass the course without mastering the skill?" The following personal conversation with Ms. H, provides an answer to why students who recovered course credits through the *S300* program pass the course without learning any of the skills and concepts that prepares them for the next level, as well as why "they put them back in the same boat every year, "Ms. S, It is not just about them copying and pasting and googling answers from the internet without reading the stories and the questions, it is the fact that no matter how long they sit on it, they will not pass it, and at the end, administration gives them the grade" (Fieldnotes, Jan. 22, 2014). Again, this revelation evokes the question, why should educators resort to shortchanging a group of students who need quality education more than any other group.

However, Kayla, and Jaa in explaining why they describe FHS students' academic progress as "maintaining" and "stagnant" provide insight in why and how the school endorses mediocrity as their respective excerpts below portray,

> **Kayla:** One thing at the grand skim of things.< If we push these kids to do better or to do more, that means we have to do more. That means parents have to do more, that means the organizations will have to contribute more. So I think that sometimes, you know, you mentioned being stagnant, I think sometimes, you know, keeping things where they are means that we don't have to change anything about ourselves and so when parents don't have to push themselves to be better parents, to monitor more, then they are comfortable with that. The school doesn't encourage it, the district, the state itself, the government, if nobody is pushing them to do better, then they are comfortable. So, I think it's just a complete system of utter disregard for I need to change. They say we want change, we don't mean it because that means I will have to change, everybody has to change (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).
>
> **Jaa:** You know, it is funny because they talk about high expectations and the students know the truth of the situation that as teachers, we can talk all we can about high expectations, but as for the school all they are concerned about is graduation, it is that they graduate and they veil it, or they don't even veil it with we want you to be successful after you leave; rather it is we want to you graduate. And it is rooted in that idea of you got to graduate, you got to graduate, you got to graduate, without graduate and be successful, no we just want you to graduate. And I think nobody has expectations for success, why, why come, if the teachers

don't expect me to be successful, then am wasting my time (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 13, 2014).

Interestingly both participants see this culture of settlement and reinforcement of mediocrity as systemic. Their data speak to the complacence and self-protection inherent in a system that seeks to preserve itself. Suggestively, both participants implicate all stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, site and central administration and the entire society in creating and sustaining this culture of mediocrity that recycles minority and economically disadvantaged students, making them more susceptible to poverty and the dangers of poverty. Hence, when asked what generates this poor expectation, Kayla responds, "Parents, students, teachers, administration, even all the way up. You know, and it does, it starts all the way up, it goes all the way to the superintendent. If you understand that a school is struggling with something you put certain supports in place so that, that school can't fail, that school can meet its mission. You know, I mean, a mission is, ehmm, our mission statement is nothing more than what is on paper" (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Finally, in the excerpt below, Jaa paints a vivid picture of the handicapping nature of the school culture as it subtly divests its students of ambition, critical thinking, and achievable vision, while clothing them with the unattainable dream of failure as not an option without giving them the protective skills needed to combat failure into success; skills such as industry, resilience, perseverance, self-discipline, self-regulation, personal accountability, and deferment of gratification.

Nobody really ever ask kids to, to get real with?? athletes. It's funny how they are willing to bend over backwards for athletes who might be failing and coming to

talk to teachers and reminding teachers of their professional responsibilities, when as teachers we are doing our professional responsibilities. If the kids have not done what they are supposed to do, they are supposed to fail; but to be asked to give a kid extra works so that the kid can achieve the minimum GPA so that they can play. Our focus totally or let me say the focus of the kid totally shifts from I need to learn, to I need to play. So their main goal doesn't become to learn, it all becomes to play and then when it's time to graduate, they can't do it. And so are they losers, ehm, yea because they bought into a dream that is so unobtainable that everything else falls into pieces when that dream does not happen}. Ehm, can they read or write? Probably not, because again it comes back to are parents at home reading with them? Do we as teachers allow them to make adult decision not to learn? The answer is yes. Do we follow them up when they skip? No. Because again, they don't understand what is at stake, and because again the culture they leave in, the culture we work in, is such that I don't have to know how to read. I don't have to know how to be academically inclined or academically disciplined to succeed because; it's all given to me. There's a redo waiting from me, if I just show-up for the tutorial session the zero I received on the test will be replaced with a 70% automatically and so there are so many pieces in place that I don't need to learn how to do anything because the system is set so that I will succeed regardless of my intellectual inclination or intent (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Handouts and A Sense of Entitlement to A Passing Grade

In discussing why minority and Low SES students do not invest into academic achievement, Zani notes, "They know that by end of the day, they are just going to graduate and get their credits so with the NCBL rule, they feel like they can just do anything." When asked to explain what she understands as the meaning of the NCBL rule, she expounds, "I feel like with the NCBL rule, since they know that no child can be left behind, they just feel like they don't have to work as hard as they should, like they will pass regardless. That's how I feel about it." Probed further on how she thinks these students who want to graduate, but would not work for it get the required credits for graduation, she asserts, "It's just handed out to them. Some kids, well some teachers can give the students the grade to pass, but if I were principal, I will have my students not to just have the teachers "give" them a passing grade, but I want them to earn it by themselves. Instead of just studying and taking test, I want them to have the knowledge of it." Here, Zani points to another characteristic of FHS, the culture of handouts and it subsequent effect on students' academic behavior, a "sense of entitlement to passing grades," which suffuses the data set as participants deliberate on the cause of the persistent academic failure of FHS students. However, in as much as Zani indicts the school for accepting this culture of handouts and entitlement, she blames NCBL, the national education policy for the inception and sustenance of a system of handouts within school and the subsequent sense of entitlement to a passing grade.

Supporting Zani's view of the handouts, entitlement, and subsequent push-out of minority and low SES students without educating them as a systemic issue, Jalisha explains, "Because the they system has gotten a lot easier to pass. They have a lot of

ways for you to get out of high school nowadays. They just think they are gona pass you along. They gona help you. They think your teacher wana see you graduate, which they do, but they think something is gona be given to them just because they might have fallen too far behind or might not be on the same level as their peers." Mai localizes this culture of handouts and sense of entitlement to FHS adding, "They give out handout too much here. If you don't do your homework, they give you so many chances after chances and that's not how the real world works. They yes up. And that's not gona help us at all for those of us who are going to college." Explaining how the school "yeses up" to student mediocrity Jaa states, "The climate here is different, there is a ehm, ehm, what's the word am looking for, you owe me something, it is not that let me have something, [entitlement], "Entitlement." Yes, they believe they are entitled to a passing grade if they write their name on a paper they are entitled to a passing grade, where, and it doesn't matter how many are right or wrong. I wrote my name on it, I did some of them, and so I deserve a passing grade and it doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong, it is I turned it in."

Jay captures the full effect of this culture of handouts and entitlement on student motivation and academic performance in the following excerpt:

> Like letting them get bye? Just like they getting on with the bare minimum? It's just what they are used to because it's what happened in the past, handouts." Yes I think so. I think, I think school nowadays by them just wanting to help, I think schools nowadays wana help so much that they are just making it easy, they are just giving it to them. I feel like if we take out things such as *S300*. If we take out things such as you have to come back and make-up and the redo policy, if we

caught all that out, the kids will be forced to do work. Because with the redo policy, it feels like hey, if I fail this, all I have to is to come back and spend one day with Ms. Sandra, spend one day with Ms. Kayla, then come back and retake the test to get my grade or with the ehmm, late homework I can do the home or I turn it in late I get the half credit and I can do the homework like that and get some credit. I feel we actually have a lot of stuff to aid them, but if we take *the stuff* away, they gona be actually forced to learn. Because they'll get tired of seeing the zeroes in the grade book and they'll get tired of not being helped. They'll get tired of that. And thinking about it, I think because we caught out summer school, more kids are passing now. Because then, Ms. Sandra, when we had summer school, a lot of kids will go to summer school, but now that we cut out[they still do the *S300*] yeah, but summer school is now, it actually is at some place that kids are now like woo! I have to do something in order to pass that class. If they don't learn, if they pretend that they can't do, it will be given to them. You really did talk about the minimum 60, the no zero policy, yea, you talked about them, and the make-up policy and how it is destroying our kids yea, you see, how it seem to maybe helping them, but really it's hindering them, let's look at it this other way, that's what am thinking right now, do you think that somebody out there who came up with these things must have seen that if we keep them and they won't pass, they will remain in school so the best thing is to give them that and push them out[yeah because they are tired of them, they don't know what to do with them. [waoo, you are intelligent] well, because am able to think like them too, though. I think so, well, if I don't do nothing, I will have

basically a 60, if I just walk in here for attendance. So, all I have to is just do a couple of assignments and am passing. To me, {*you can't make someone learn if they don't want to. You can't force knowledge upon a person*}. Especially if we have all these handouts for these kids and you think about all these new kids in *<this generation we're getting smarter>, but we are getting smarter on ways to get over, we are not getting smarter on ways we can actually help. We are getting smarter on ways to get over on us, how to bit the system not how we can improve the society. You all can't do everything for these kids*. There's nothing you can do to make them work (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

Describing the culture of handouts and sense of entitlement to unearned grade that pervades FHS, Jaa contends,

We have created a culture where, sure, failure is not an option, but not only is it not an option, failure is not even a possibility. And with failure not being a possibility, you know, you find students who are extremely disrespectful because again we have allowed them to believe deserve to pass because they are poor and they are black and because we don't know what we are doing and we are here and we are ineffective because we won't let them to just slide bye. Ehmm, if we allow them to slide bye, then we are great teachers, but if we ask them to be more, to think deeper, to come up with something else that shows that they here and they are not just here on the roll every day, then we are wrong, we are wrong and because we are wrong, they are right and there is no, can we switch it back and forth, no. If they are right, we are so wrong, and because they are right, they get the benefit of a free pass, they get the benefit of mediocrity, they get the benefit of

> coming to a one week session because they got a 65 through 69 so by coming for that one week, they can increase their grade to pass (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Finally, Zack concludes his process of sensemaking about the persistent lack of academic improvement among and between FHS students and their peers, irrespective of the numerous "student centered" programs, policies, and practices the school has adopted to enhance the learning and academic success of its pupils, stating,

> I think it's the privileges that we have been giving them. We have been giving them too many privileges and if that were taken away from them, and they have no choice but to do the work. Then *either they will they push themselves of they will drop out. I think most of them will push themselves, if they got the grit, if they got the motivation, they will push themselves because that's why most of the other districts are doing better than we are because we offer too much privileges to our students.* When teachers like you have done all they can toward a student, what you need is wash your hands and *leave because in the end, he is either gona fail or succeed* (S. Participant Interview, April 27, 2014).

Culture of Inconsistency and Mixed Bag of Expectation

Although the culture of inconsistency and mixed bag of expectation pervades the entire data corpus, it fully develops as participants share their perception of the school policies, practices, and procedures. Beginning with the focus group participants' indictment of the school's policies and practices for their lack of academic success, "Here is the thing though. They got too many rules though. Most people, you know how they most people, students drop out probably because they can't, all the trouble they get

with all these rules. Let's say, the rules they have all the trouble they get in and they act up in class because of stuff that they, teachers and whatever they, whatever happens to them, whatever, like most of the stuff are unnecessary things [**Tee:** yeah a lot of things are unnecessary]" (Andy, Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014), almost all the participants spoke to the incongruence between expectation, theory, and practice that characterize FHS.

Even though all the participants discussed these disparities from a policy standpoint, each of them focused on a specific area of policy and expectation. Hence, whereas Kelly notes the differential understanding of the importance of the cell phone and dress code policies that trump their effective implementation, as the following excerpt portrays,

> We have good policies, but is it carried out, ehmm no! None whatsoever. You tell a parent, I if I take your cell phone the first time, you get it back, the second time, you don't get it back until June, but nowadays you take it and they get it back in the afternoon, take it a second time, they get it back in the afternoon, the third time, I don't, you know, they don't follow through on those policies. Pants have to be worn appropriate, but people say what has that got to do with education? It doesn't have anything to do with education, but I don't wana sit down and see what is under someone's pants, that's taking away from me and I want my young men and my young ladies in my class to dress properly. So that when they graduate and go out into the real world, they know how they should look. They call a parent up and say hoo, you child's phone is all the way up here and when the parent come to school and she will have unheard things. You know, sometimes the children have only this to help them and sometimes we don't put

> the burden on them to be accountable for how they dress and how they look excetra and it's about education. You, if you go for an interview, you cannot go in there with ring in noses, dress up to your navel, and cleavages out, and that's the (F. Participant Interview, April 4, 2014).

Loyld focuses on the mixed expectations that confound the effectiveness of disciplinary policies such as IDs, tardy, and dress code as he contends,

> If everyone were to be on the same page, and if everyone across the board did what they are supposed to, I believe it will be a lot more effective when it comes to discipline, IDs, Tardy, dress codes, and such things because I believe those things do prepare kids when it comes to life after high school. I have never been one to agree with the grading policy with the 60 minimum or giving students a grade even if the assignment is not complete or even attempted, policies such as that, I think, are setting kids up for unrealistic realty for after high school because it's not gona be like; students once again, not setting high expectation, not holding them accountable thinking it will be okay for them to do the minimum or nothing at all and still move on to the next level (F. Participant Interview, April 2, 2014).

Conversely, Kayla focuses on the lack of clarity and mixed messages that surrounds the dissemination of expectation as she blames the entire faculty and staff for the inconsistencies stating,

> **Kayla:** Ehhm, in all honesty, FHS has really declined over the last couple of years. A major part of that is a reflection of the expectation set and the expectations for those expectations to be met. That falls on, ehhmm, /us/; /however, when I examine things like Freedom Pride, a lot of those, Freedom

> Pride and some of the other initiative that we try to put in place, they are all expectations. We just don't mandate that the expectations be met and we don't follow up the way we should as a school/. Many teachers try to make sure those happen, but it should start well at the top. Here, we don't work as cohesively as we should. We have a mixed bag of expectations. We have a mixed bag of teams and the teams do not communicate, you know, with each other, you know, I just don't think that we work very cohesively and I don't think that the set of principles, the set of expectations that we have don't really foster into the mission statement. We are trying to get there, but we are not there quiet yet. I think we need to go back and revamp some things. And again, consequences for student's actions are not followed true in this school because, Ehmm, lack of consistency. We don't do what we said we gona do. No, if we say after 8 unexcused absences you will repeat the course, student attendance will increase. But if we don't do what we said we will do, they students, they feel out our weaknesses and they use it against us. So, when society says you need a good report card because it will make you to look good, then we start loosening up our expectations. So, I think if we stick to doing what we said we gona do, then we won't have any of these problems (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Finally, Jaa elaborates on these disparities pointing out nuanced instances of how the ironies inherent in the incessant talk about high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationship forces students to see school as a joke, a thing to do or, in an extreme case, a place not to be. The following excerpt speaks clearly to this demoralizing effect of FHS' mixed bag of expectation on its students' motivation and academic success.

You know, it is funny because they talk about high expectations and the students know the truth of the situation that as teachers, we can talk all we can about high expectations, but as for the school all they are concerned about is graduation, it is that they graduate and they veil it, or they don't even veil it with we want you to be successful after you leave; rather it is we want to you graduate. And it is rooted in that idea of you got to graduate, you got to graduate, you got to graduate, without graduate and be successful, no we just want you to graduate. And I think nobody has expectations for success, why, why come, if the teachers don't expect me to be successful, then am wasting my time.

I: What am hearing is that students already know that the school does not expect them to be successful after the leave here. Does this imply that the school is not future oriented; rather it is present oriented in graduating or pushing students out, so, because students know that they would rather stay out of school or prefer not to go to school at all?

Jaa: Yes.

Culture of Quick Fix, Instant Gratification and Visionlessness

In discussing why most student do not do the class work, homework or study for test and quizzes most of the participants pointed to a culture of quick fix, instant gratification and visionlessness that permeates the climate and culture of FHS. While Tee believes that students do not do school work "Because they get lazy and just don't want to do the work, they don't wana do work because they wana laugh and joke around and think it's cool and try to fit in with people, I want my grades, so I wana do the work," Jane disagrees with her positing, "sometime you just don't have to sit there and do the

work, if you give about 10 to 15 minutes, the *teacher* will go ahead and put the answers on the board and they copy it. So, who is to sit there and burst their behind doing work when the answers will be given to you," and Matt postulates, I guess, nobody wants to do the long term. Nobody wants to set goals long term. Everything, everybody wants it now and quick, a lot of quick fix."

However, in the excerpts below, Mai presents an in-depth account of why FHS students do not invest in academic work and in her presentation, she implicates the reciprocal interaction between person characteristic, lack of love for education, and school characteristics (context), visionlessness for students' apathy toward school work:

> Well like I said, kids here don't really value their education. And, if someone don't already value their education and you send them to a school that is not trying to help them value their education it can be harder and that's what leads to the discipline problems that we have here because everyone, it's all bunch of negative mindsets, so do you think something positive can come from a negative mindset? No! So negative things happen because nobody wants to be here. It's kind of hard to say you go to school for 12 years and you get your diploma to a child that's like, it's not too easy to say because you need little incentives working your way to the high school diploma. It's like, it's important, but then it's not important because it takes so long to get a diploma, you know that's what everybody go to school for, but you still need little motivators to help you go to school every day. It can be depressing sometimes.

When probed to explain what she meant by negative mindset, she expounds,

> Well, at our school, the streets are impounding their minds more than the teachers are, so when you get all these negative thoughts in your mind, school is not gona be one of them. Because like I said, the high school, the big prize is your diploma. It takes 12 years of school to get your diploma. Then after you are done, you have to take another whole 4 years to get a degree so you can get a good paying job. When you are in the street, you can just sell weed, crack, whatever you wana sell and you will have almost a $1000 a day, its fast money vs. long term and yeah. And when they don't sell and make that money as they thought, the society feeds them with the money of those who went to college, got a degree and work hard. So a lot of my peers take to the street and don't work hard in school because they believe that school will not give them fast money and when they fail to make that money, they know that the government is there to pick them up (S. Participant Interview, April 6, 2014).

In what she refers to as "fast money vs. long term, Mai blames societal and cultural changes in time for students' lack of interest in traditional education stating, "Our generation has their priorities mixed up and back then, your parents really have a say so, not now. They have a say so, but kids don't listen anymore. It's not like how it used to be. At least, that's what my grandma says."

Moving forward, Jaa, stresses this shift in the traditional meaning of education as well as teacher and student roles as he speaks of the misplaced priorities and sequestered vision that leaves student in mid-air at the end of their high school career.

> **Jaa:** Nobody really ever ask kids to, to get real with?? Athletes. Its funny how they are willing to bend over backwards for athletes who might be failing and

coming to talk to teachers and reminding teachers of their professional responsibilities when as teachers we are doing our professional responsibilities, if the kids have not done what they are supposed to do, they are supposed to fail; but to be asked to give a kid extra works so that the kid can achieve the minimum GPA so that they can play. Our focus totally or let me say the focus of the kid totally shifts from I need to learn, to I need to play. So their main goal doesn't become to learn, it all becomes to play and then when it's time to graduate, they can't do it. And so are they losers? ehm, yea because they bought into a dream that is so unobtainable that everything else falls into pieces when that dream does not happen}. Ehm, can they read or write? Probably not, because again it comes back to are parents at home reading with them? Do we as teachers allow them to make adult decision not to learn? The answer is yes. Do we follow them up when they skip? No. Because again, they don't understand what is at stake, and because again the culture they leave in, the culture we work in is such that I don't have to know how to read. I don't have to know how to be academically inclined or academically disciplined to succeed because; it's all given to me. There's a redo waiting from me, if I just show-up for the tutorial session the zero I received on the test will be replaced with a 70% automatically and so there are so many pieces in place that I don't need to learn how to do anything because the system is set so that I will succeed regardless of my intellectual inclination or intent.

Culture of Low Morale and Apathy

Responding to why FHS students choose to avoid challenging school activities Jaa points to the low morale and apathy that has become the hallmark of FHS climate and

culture for an explanation. According to him, "students choose to avoid challenging activities because our climate or the climate that has been established in our school doesn't encourage students to step outside the box or to step-up and be somebody. They just don't because nobody does, no, call it reverse peer pressure. It is not that because everybody is doing it, here it is because nobody is doing it, so am not doing it vs. in some other school where everybody is doing it, so I want to it." Subsequently, instead of the conventional peer pressure syndrome replete in broader literature on student motivation and academic achievement whereby teenagers join popular trends because everybody is doing it, as Jaa points out, what is obtainable in FHS is a reversed peer pressure, an apathy for learning and academic success that seem engrained into the name Freedom High School. This apathy sucks-in everyone who steps into the building no matter how hard s/he struggles against being sucked-in.

In their attempt to portray this low morale and apathy that exudes from the school to them, several students described the school as either lacking motivation, spirit, or just simply boring. Hence, while Quan feels the school "lacks motivation," Ron feels "the school doesn't motivate you to try," and Jerry feels student drop out of school because of "how boring school can be." In Jerry's words, "sometimes it's very boring, yes, it's not fun," especially as "you just do things repeatedly and you are like why am I doing this over and over, it just really starts to get boring, it's not enjoyable." Finally, speaking about how he feels waking up every morning to go to school Matt states, "Some morning, it's just like, school again? Because there is not like a lot of motivation at school, but I wana go because I wana get a good job and career and be able to provide for my family."

When asked what the school could do to motivate students, he responds, “I don’t know. It’s just that (breather out) there’s no incentives, like for the people that wana go be doctors and wana get something out of school, that’s their incentives, but for others they are not worried about it because no one is like oh! Good job or you can ace this, like the test is easy if you try harder. Nobody is getting pushed, like in the good direction. And there is no, like the incentive that some people need.” Here again, Matt returns to the promise of public education, the landing of good job; economic and social mobility as the internal drivers and motivators for academic achievement, thus evoking the question, what happens when students already know that their schools have failed in providing them with equitable educational opportunities as to compete fairly for available jobs? What then would be their motivator?

Turning the discourse to teachers, Kayla alludes to this apathy and defeatist mentality in discussing teacher quality in FHS,

> I think the biggest detriment to that is for some reason the report card. Because of the constant pressure to make sure that all students are here, when a large number of your student aren’t there when they walk in the door. They don’t desire to be there and it’s hard to teach a horse to drink when the horse doesn’t want to drink and I think a lot of teachers want to take their students right there, they teach there, but at the end of the day you fight the same constant battle and get the same constant headache at the end of the day. I think a lot of teachers have now joined, have gotten to the place where they have just resigned to their little self and said, I am tired, I am done, if this is what you want and I am not saying that’s the large, that’s not the majority, but that’s what has happened to some of us here at FHS,

> that I think we have thrown in a towel and we don't get a lot of teacher support, you know, I listen to the things you are doing here, and am looking around the room, and am pretty sure you feel the constant struggle of I wana take my students here; however, am I really encourage to take them there, you know, or am I encouraged to get them to accept defeat. And I think our students have accepted defeat and sometimes it is easy to throw the towel (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Similarly, Jaa explains:

> Going to the idea of teacher quality, here is what interesting of all, ehmm, I think many teachers come with the best intention. I think many teachers come wanting to give the best that they have, but I think the culture and climate creates teachers who feel beaten down by the system. You know, closing the achievement gap means that, if a student fails the first nine weeks, you put them in a computer program so that they can reach just above, you know, be able to cross the line to a 'D' and there is no real remediation. The remediation is computer-based, the remediation can be done in given time, so you are really not aware of what the students are grasping and so this happens the first nine weeks. At the end of the first semester it happens through the second and if a student has failed by the end of the year, depending on their level of failure it happens. If they received a 65-69, they can go to an extended program for two weeks and pass the class. And so, I think, we have done more to disable them and the student actually say, I will just do it on *S300* and they opt out of participating in class because there is no reason to and so again, it goes back to culture, <the, the culture doesn't say work hard,

> the culture says, be mediocre and if mediocre doesn't work, then we still have something for you to be less than mediocre (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Drawing from Kayla and Jaa's data, one cannot help but deduce the systemic deskilling, divesting, and handicapping of both teachers and students, a thought that leaves one wondering whether this is also happening in other school or is this just unique with FHS?

Jaa's comparison of FHS to his previous schools proffers some answer to the above question as he specifically reveals his surprises in FHS and how he is making sense of them,

> Ehmm, I think one of the major differences between schools where I have worked and FHS is, it is just that here, if we don't lead the students, they don't go. Very few students actually ask for help. Very few students stay after school for help. We are required to have mandatory tutoring days and yet we teach six classes with let's say at least twenty people in a class and yet there are plenty of weeks that go bye when nobody comes in for tutoring. And so the self-efficacy just is not there until right around the time the report cards come out and then, all of a sudden it becomes relevant to them to pass a class, but even then, they don't want to pass for knowledge sake, and they don't want to achieve. They just want to get a seventy. They want to stay one point above a 'D' nobody pushes themselves to get an 'A', and as an AP teacher, you encounter that same thing where everybody, if I can just get a seventy, I will be satisfied and even the group where, you know, this is supposed to be the high achievers, there is still seventy percent at most who

> are satisfied with a 'D' and who will gladly take a 'D' versus pushing themselves to move right above that. Also, some of, I think that is the big difference.

Extending his thought on the impact the climate of apathy and low morale on student motivation to participate in extra-curricular activities Jaa explains,

> Across the board, there is general apathy here where they don't want to do anything. They don't want to be involved in any type of student activities, no clubs, they don't wana play sports, they don't wana be in bands. When you talk about 10% of our students, let me not say that, more than 10%, because you find the same people in the same clubs. They are in student council, they are in the band, they are in national honors society, they are in bata club, and it is the same group of 40 or 50 students and they play sports. And most of the bulk majority of our students is just so apathetic to any type of school activity. We have a fantastic chorus, but only 20 people are in chorus.

And again,

> The system just {<creates this, this, this lack of caring in you> because you realize that all your hopes really means nothing in a system where hard work is not valued. In a system where no matter what, you are always the bad guy. Ahmm, and, and where, if you haven't done the, the appropriate amount of paper work, that your value as a teacher means nothing and so you lose hope, you lose faith, you lose and then you do become just add feel? isolated? into the system. And then you come back and you have that hope. And it just becomes this vicious cycle every year of coming back believing things are gona be different and yet you just realize they are not. And it doesn't matter how you shuffle things around

> or how you shuffle people around, the bigger system doesn't care and since the bigger system doesn't care, the students don't care because they know the bigger system doesn't care. And you just kina get through osmosis sucked into the same apathy and nobody cares and because they know they gona be passed, and you as a teacher know they gona be passed, and you have two options, it's either you just go ahead and give them the extra point as a 70 or because again, it's, you gona have to explain the 69 and everything else and you end up on trial for kids lack of performance, where, "oh! I can't justify you giving a kid a 69." Breathes out, shuu, you give a kid a 70 because it is easier to justify your own action than justifying the kid's lack of performance. And so you do, you just have to stop caring because it is easier for you to pass them yourself, than for them to pay a $100 dollars to sit in a computer lab for <a day> (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Culture of Teacher Bullying and Deskilling of Students and Teachers

Early in the data collection stage of the research process, Jaa pointed to the impact of FHS policies and practices on teacher quality by opening our first debriefing on his first interview transcript with the following statement:

> As I was reading this, I just thought, what has happened to me as a teacher? Where did high level thinking go? Where did all of the push to motivate students go? And I was really, it was kind of unnerving reading this though, really, because as I really sat here and I was going over looking like wao!! [exhales] I think through this I realized how much more frustrated I was as a teacher than I kind of had just said at the point in time. As I talk about my different experiences,

> I really came to the conclusion that I just kind of, as a teacher, have been dumbed-down. So this was eye opening, eye opening. All right, am sorry.

Jaa's feeling about the handicapping effect of FHS climate and culture is mutual among teachers and students, especially those teachers and students who joined this cultural group from other school districts. As each participant narrates his or her experiences with school and schooling either as a teacher or a student, evidences of systemic handicapping and divesting of skills and generative personal agency came afloat. Hence, Quan attests "Well I came from California at the end of my ninth grade. When just comparing the two, the curriculum here is easy. It's not tedious at all. I just got really like, honestly I got lazy because I just felt like you don't have to do a lot of work to get an 'A' and to be honest, I haven't even taken my backpack off my car all year and I still make the honor roll and {I don't know how that is happening, but it is working.}" And, "a lot of them redo policy, you didn't have to do anything and the minimum you get was a 60. Yeah, when I was with Jaa, I didn't do anything because I know I was gona get a 60 and I know I was gona pass with those 60s and so Am glad they took that off. Still I just feel like Ok. So I felt kinda like, redo policy, if I fail this, I can redo it, slight test, redo it."

Similarly, comparing his experiences in his former school with his experiences in FHS Andy laments, "Yeap, you know, it just like Peace, the school where I went there, I swear, when I went there, I was in B honor roll. But as time goes by, look at their school system and look at ours though. When I came here my grade dropped because I had to worry about all the other rules they have here. It made me, I didn't want to go to class, I be skipping, I skipped a lot. There's settlement for kids to not do their best." Kiesha presents it this way, "Academically, we could do better than what we are doing now. I

mean, I see the test score, I will just be like, is that what we at? You see kids who want to learn, who want to go to college, but then you have one side that wants to learn and you the other side that don't care and this side is overruling this side, which is making the test score go low. The people who just don't care about what people put their lives on the line, they don't care because they think that we are made."

Glory fears the after effect of this dumbing-down on her future as she goes to college stating, "That's something we have to work on as a whole to keep our grades up. Yeah, I think to keep so much people from failing, I think a lot of teachers slow down the pace, too slow to where I can graduate top of my class, but when I get to college I can kind of still be too far, just because in this environment we are used to going so slow and at the speed of everybody else that it takes people longer to get it so then you focus more on them and you get more of it and in college it goes by so fast that it slips you." Referring to this dumb-down curriculum Kelly notes, "Right now they just care about report card, graduation rate, but are they really preparing the kids for post education, post high school life? And to me, we are not doing that? Yeah, when I say we, there are some teachers who are doing what they are supposed to do, but other teachers are not doing it because they are afraid to be called into the principal's office or the assistant principal's office because of what the grades look like and some of the grades are not true grades."

From the teachers' standpoint, Kayla acknowledges the knowledgeability of the teachers in their various content areas, but doubts that they are encouraged to use their diverse knowledge to influence student learning and academic outcome,

> I think many of us are highly qualified. I think many teachers here are highly trained because they are qualified because of their training. Many of us have

> advance degrees, many of us have attended various workshops excetra; however, I don't think we are often encouraged to put those things in place. Ehm, we see what is happening in secondary schools across the country, but we don't use the best of them, we don't use their experiences, their practices that they use at FHS. I don't know if it is encouraged. I don't know if we don't feel as if we could, many of us do though. However, well, I won't say many, some of us do and it should be across the board.

Kelly approaches the issue of teacher quality from a different perspective focusing on the quality of relationship between teachers and administrators. However, her excerpt presented below reveals the subtle deskilling and divesting of teachers through the constant struggle between them and administration,

> In some instances, I have seen the decline of teacher and administration togetherness. Teachers do not feel as if the administration has their back and if a parent complains, the teacher is in trouble. There isn't no well I know the teacher, I know what this teacher is all about, or whatever, it is always in favor of the parent and not the teacher. *Until the administration starts thinking about what's best for the students and not what's best for the parents, then we gona always have an issue and then I think the quality of education is gona be what it was in the past. We gona be graduating kids who do not know how to add, subtract, divide, put sentences together and things of that nature. We are going backward instead of forward.* {When you get students who wana cheat on the SAT. When you get students who wana cheat in class, when you get students who gave you the minimum of what is required, who is gona hire them to put a bridge together?

The say, you gona have to come to my office and explain why over 30% of your students fail? Well are gona call the students in and ask them why they failed? No. Why are you calling the teachers in? You see my point? So what's happening? Most teachers are just going on and passing the kids. Why? Because they don't wana go in the office}(F. Participant Interview, April 9, 2014).

Jaa captures the damaging impact of this struggle between teachers and administrators on teacher professionalism and self-efficacy in the following monologue:

You know it so funny, because as adults, we understand that life will throw us lemons and we have to make them lemonades. We understand there're obstacles to overcome. We understand there're sometimes we will fail, but that failure is not the end of the world and we have to pick ourselves up and keep moving forward. Ehmm, we have created a culture where sure failure is not an option, ahmm, but not only is it not an option, failure is not even a possibility. And with failure not being a possibility, you know, you find students who are extremely disrespectful because again we have allowed them to believe deserve to pass because they are poor and they are black and because we don't know what we are doing and we are here and we are ineffective because we won't let them to just slide bye. Ehmm, if we allow them to slide bye, then we are great teachers, but if we ask them to be more, to think deeper, to come up with something else that shows that they here and they are not just here on the roll every day, then we are wrong, we are wrong and because we are wrong, they are right and there is no, can we switch it back and forth, no. If they are right, we are so wrong, and because they are right, they get the benefit of a free pass, they get the benefit of

mediocrity, they get the benefit of coming to a one week session because they got a 65 through 69 so by coming for that one week, they can increase their grade to pass. And it is funny because as a teacher who does care and working with other teachers who do care, I think every year, you just get beat down, <and, and, and>, all the hope you started the year out with, you said this year is gona be different, but then you find out that you encounter the same type of kid you encountered last year. The kid who would rather complain than do the work because complaining is their way to avoid doing work. Ahmm, the kid who complains because you put too many red marks on their paper. Here are all of these reasons, for all the reasons you have to care, the system just {<creates this, this, this lack of caring in you> because you realize that all your hopes really means nothing in a system where hard work is not valued. In a system where no matter what, you are always the bad guy. Ahmm, and, and where, if you haven't done the, the appropriate amount of paper work, that you value as a teacher means to nothing and so you lose hope, you lose faith, you lose and then you do become just add feel? isolated? into the system. And then you come back and you have that hope. And it just becomes this vicious cycle every year of coming back believing things are gona be different and yet you just realize they are not. And it doesn't matter how you shuffle things around or how you shuffle people around, the bigger system doesn't care and since the bigger system doesn't care, the students don't care because they know the bigger system doesn't care. And you just kina get through osmosis sucked into the same apathy and nobody cares and because they know they gona be passed, and you as a teacher know they gona be passed, and you

> have two options, it's either you just go ahead and give them the extra point as a 70 or because again, it's, you gona have to explain the 69 and everything else and you end up on trial for kids lack of performance, where, "oh! I can't justify you giving a kid a 69." Breathes out, shuu, you give a kid a 70 because it is easier to justify your own action than justifying the kid's lack of performance. And so you do, you just have to stop caring because it is easier for you to pass them yourself, than for them to pay a $100 dollars to sit in a computer lab for a day (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Taken together, through dumbed down curriculum, handicapping policies and teacher bullying, FHS deskills and divests its students and teachers of access to equitable educational opportunities, generative personal agency, and self-efficacy as well as teacher professional authority in the classroom. The constant struggle to prove their expertise and professionalism, as well as to reclaim some authority in the classroom generates a highly stressful climate, a kind of we vs. they feeling between teachers, who feel that administrators are out to get them and administrators, who feel the need to assert their power as well as to keep teachers in their place through grade hounding and multifarious paper work. This cold war creates a culture of low morale, apathy, and high teacher attrition, a revolving door that some of the participants blame, in part, for students' apathy toward school and schooling and its resultant lack of academic achievement.

Culture of Misplaced Priorities and Irony Between Theory and Practice

Finally, resonate within the data set is the irony between theory and practice, a misplacement of priorities that both students and faculty participants point to as the source of students apathy toward school and schooling. Tee speaks of the role of this

discrepancy between theory and practice; expectation and outcome in students' understanding, interpretation and performance of school in the following statement, "I take Freedom High as a joke because one day you all say something then the next day you all don't enforce it. Like you all do one thing for like a week straight the next week oh! And nobody can careless about it. I don't take you all serious at Freedom High" (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014). Agreeing with Tee, Jane describes the school processes as ridiculous, "I don't even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it is the school itself. We can't do anything at all and am not saying the school should send people away at the end of the day, some of the things that go on here are ridiculous!" According to her, the school should,

> Stop being strict and quit worrying about things that don't need to be worried about. <I almost fell down the steps yesterday> because the thing lifted up and was trying to walk even though I had a classmate, her whole book is like thorn in-half, then I mean like they expect for us to wake every day and come to this. [year, they supposed] It's like, you know, like, they are worried about what we wear but at the end of the day we go to class and do not a dawn gone thing (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

Implicating this climate and culture of incongruence between expectation and outcome; theory and practice in students' academic outcome, different participants presented various scenarios that spoke to the imbalance between FHS' vision, mission, policies, procedures and actual practices through which these important aspects of school life is achieved. Beginning with the discrepancy between the supposed and actual meaning of school and schooling, followed by the irony of grades, grading, and academic

achievement and the contradiction between policy intent and implementation to other contradictions, participants linked students' social and academic behavior and overall academic outcome to various forms of mixed messages they receive from teachers and/or administrators. Consequently, from the inconsistency between their supposed meaning and purpose of school as a place of learning that prepares individuals for social and economic mobility as well as for self-development and meaningful living in the society; and their observed meaning of school as an enforced institution that recycles, labels and pushes them out without educating them, students concluded that school is a joke, a thing to do or just a place to hang out with friends and peer.

Similarly from the dealing with the disparity between grades, grading, and actual student learning and academic achievement, students realized that excellent grades and high GPAs do not reflect what a student knows and can actually do as well as the fact that their straight 'A' and 'B' transcripts from FHS does not carry the same purchasing power as those from other schools where students earned their grade through academic rigor, relevance, and excellence instead of dumbed down curriculum and handicapping grading policies and practices. Thus, realizing that the difference between a 'D' and an 'A' letter grade stops in FHS, students settle for a 'D,' the least they can get without exerting themselves, but still maintain their status because they know that high GPA or not, they would still take remedial classes after they graduate from FHS, if they want to go to college and be successful in college.

Finally, connecting school policies and practices to student understanding and interpretation of the meaning of school and schooling, student key informants posit that students believe school is a joke and a thing to do because of the ridiculous policies,

practices, and procedures that confound the true meaning and purposes of school and schooling. As Tasha points out, "Even though as a school FHS faculty and staff try to meet students where they are, sometimes they get so bogged down with trivialities within the policies" that they forget about the actual reason why the adopted the policies in the first place, student learning and academic success. It is this incongruence, these inconsistencies, and these mixed bags of expectations and teams that make students to believe that school is a joke, and academic achievement is not worth the investment of their time.

As a conclusion to this chapter on school climate and culture, I choose to close with this section of Lui, the site student body president and national and statewide student council president and P.R.O's, transcript that speaks to the climate and culture of Freedom High School.

> **I: Tell me about your experiences with school and schooling.**
>
> **Lui:** @ Ehmm, my whole entire, with me being in high school for 4 years, it's been kind of up and down. Ehmm, personal life, school life, but overall, I will say it's been an okay year. I won't say it's been a great year, great years, it's just okay, I wish there are certain thing I could have changed, but it's been all our jurisdiction, but overall, my success and my school years has been okay, not too bad and not too great@.
>
> **I: Every child has a dream about what she/he will become when she/he grows up. Tell me about your dream career when you were in elementary, middle and now that you are in high school.**
>
> **Lui:** Ever since I was little I have been thinking about the military and it has been kind of drilled into me since I was little and I guess as you get older you start to

realize, hey I got you own mind and that you can pretty much choose or decide what you wana be. So, I guess, this will be, this year has been, is the ultimate goal of what I want to do with my life and it seems like every day am changing my answer and every day am changing to something new with that answer. Ehm, I will say, I have been \chan—ged\. I have been changed. I have changed my answer, like, when I started off as saying, hey, I want to be in the military and here I am now talking about going to military college and then one day am talking about not even going to school and another minute am talking about going to public school. It's just, every day it's a choice and it's a matter of how you can make the right choices.

I: Okay, so right now, what are you set on doing? What do you think is the one you are leaning toward right now?

Lui: Well, ***like I said, I have been changing, like I don't know how many times, but what I have been solely set on is going to Citadel in Charleston and be there for two years and transfer to Winthrop where I will be getting my degree in dance performance or minor in dance performance and I do wana major or minor in communication. Eh, but my ultimate goal is to be a high school dance teacher.

I: What extra efforts are you making to achieve those goals?

Lui: Well, good thing we have the senior projects. ***eh with the senior project you pretty much get in depth with your career or what you want to do in life. So, the project was to look for whatever you want to do, do research on whatever you want to do and come up with a final decision. And with this project, it has taught me so much about my career as far as my financial life, and my happiness of how I would define my achievement once I get my career. Ehm, it's been a truly an

honor just to figure out what I want to do and look up into what am doing. Because, normally, it be hey, I don't want to do this, but this project has made me to really research and figure out why I want to do this in the first place.

I: What do you think of your high school when you think of your academic ability?

Lui: Ehm, poor. I think my academic side of my high school ability has been very, very poor. And what I mean by that is the taking the time to actually teach. Since this is an interview am gona get really very personal. When I took you class and when I failed your class, and that actually was the very first time I failed something, academic-wise and I was like oh! My gosh this class must be really, really hard. I look back on it and I really didn't take your class into consideration or I really didn't appreciate your teaching, but when I went to S300 that summer, the same exact thing that you were teaching were the same exact thing that was on S300 and it was just a matter of me paying attention and doing what I needed to do. Ehm, so, I would say, that was what had the most impact on academic my career.

I: How did that experience make you feel?

Lui: Ehm, it made me feel disappointed within myself. That really made me think about truly what my success in academic is. Ehm, that made me wana strive harder. I don't like losing and for me that was a prime example of losing when you get to fail on something as simple as paying attention and doing your work and studying. I really felt defeated. And, I wish I could go back in time and do that over, but hey, we all don't have that power. I think your class was the only challenging class out of my whole entire four years. That was the only class that I

really had to do my work and actually think. Pretty much my other classes, I would get the assignment, I would do the research myself, I would do the assignment myself, a prime example, this year, am not gona say any name but I take a particular, a specific class and pretty much we get a book and a handout and put those two together you got your grade. The teacher are not, some teachers are not engaging themselves with the students and that is partly why or another reason, we are kind of defeating on ourselves because we don't really have the motivation or the drive behind us. Ehm, some teachers nowadays will just give us the work and walk away and expect us to learn or to strive, or to motivate ourselves off of that. Some people are not, everybody is not like each other, and everybody is not the same. So one person may have motivation and the rest may not. It is all about that balance so.

I: Which aspect of the school gives you the most support in achieving your goals?

Lui: I will say my extra-curricular activities. I put so much work into them, because I really take my school and the pride of it very seriously. I think the pride is what makes me and wake up and motivate myself to come to school every day. Ehm, just to have that feeling that am doing part of my school and myself. So, I will say the pride. I really can't see how you will get anywhere personally, I really can't see how you can get anywhere without pride. I think that is the diabolic?? of any type of school like, you can't really do good for something if you don't have faith in it and that's pretty much what pride is in any school. It's faith, like, why should I have faith in my school if am not gona show school spirit toward it.

I: What is your greatest fear about school?

Lui: My greatest fear ehhm, that's a powerful question. I really don't think I have a fear. Well, I do, I think I do. Ehhm, I would say, my greatest fear about my high school or about school [about school]

I: Earlier you talked about not liking to fail. So, have you not feared being held back, repeating a class, failing from school?

Lui: Honestly, just to be honestly, I honestly haven't had a fear of failing or I haven't had a fear of saying that because this school is very ehm, biased or they show favoritism. And so in my mind, am like, I don't care, am not going to fail. They gona treat me like am the monarch here or something or like that. Emm, I don't mean to sound really rude or nothing, but I feel like as if I have this smartest touch that I don't have to fear anything because I know that the school is gona pass us anyway. That is really what this school has been like, like, I forgot what it's called when they have to pass us [social promotion], yeah, like, I really haven't feared because of that, really. Like the *S300*, honestly that was nothing to fear, definitely, because all I have to do is just come up here and do some assignments and that's it. There hasn't been really a fear at all in my opinion. There are so many people are there in *S300* that they really don't care. All they had to do is to do some work and they are done. <Ehm, yes, I really haven't had a fear. I feel this school is just, there is no healthy fear in this school, and what I mean by healthy fear is that when you get in trouble, you gona get a whooping or you get some type of punishment>. A healthy fear is like, wao, if I do this in school, this gona happen to me. So, there is really no type of a healthy fear like that for me to have to fear. <I really don't have a fear.>

I: Why do you think it's like that?

Lui: Ehm, I think it's the, maybe it's the system being scared of what's gona happen, pretty much if you change everything about the system you really will have the statistics in showing that shows that the state or the school itself is really bad. I feel like if we change everything and show them that there are consequences or that something will happen as effect of something else, and they probably will change their mindset for them not to do *S300*, for them not fail. They will probably, like reverse psychology, they will probably have a different thinking and they will feel like, oh! My gosh, this is actually gona happen to me, am not gona pass. Like, I think that probably why because I think they are scared.

I: What do you like most about school?

Lui: I don't know where to start. I love the teachers. I feel like there was, like, at one point when I went to all the teachers and I asked like, what made you come back? What made you come back? And at the bottom line they would say students. Ehm, there are times when I will go ta teacher and I was like, did you really come back because of the students? And they will come with like, ***sure it's not for administration*** it's just, it's true, I think it's the students, it's the teachers, for the, it's just truly odd for them to come back for us. I love the activities that I am involved in, that's one thing that I love to be involved in. I love the pride, like I said, I love the T-shirts, school spirit, all that, I just, teachers, school spirits, of course, friend, I mean, who doesn't love friends. I love that too, just that communication.

I: What do you dislike most?

Lui: Ohhhoom! Ehm, I don't know where to start either. Ehmm, I will say the administration. It is something about the administration not listening to the students. There are times when, I feel like the teachers, I feel bad for the teachers because they go through a lot, like, what they do behind the curtains and like when the show starts it's like, ta du dah daaah! I feel like the administration don't listen to no one and when the teachers give input and the students give input, they still do what they want to do. And they expect for us to follow and they expect for us to be this happy joy of the school we don't really turn out to be. Ehm, I just really don't like the administration I feel like they don't listen at all. I think some of the rules are ridiculous. I think some of the ideas and some of the activities are ridiculous. Advisory and *S300*, am sorry, advisory and enrichment. I went to enrichment and they were talking about the FAFSA. We talked about the FAFSA last time and we should actually do the FAFSA, I mean that is the key point, if you are going to college you should be filling that out in the first place. Ehm, sometimes we don't even be doing anything in enrichment or advisory. And I feel like, when I think of advisory, I think about mentoring and when I think about mentoring, I think about the teachers coming to the students or the students coming to the teachers or some type of like, teen talk. It doesn't, <it doesn't> it's not like that. With enrichment, I kind of see that a little bit, but I mean, that doesn't go the way that it's planned either. Ehh, sometimes they don't even tell us that we have enrichment. Sometimes, I will be staying with a teacher and it's like, "Will we have enrichment today?" I seem like things are sent to the teachers or the communication towards the students and the teachers coming at the last

minute and it just makes us a hot mess (claps). And that's probably why this school is a hot mess is because they send things or they procrastinate about certain things. Ehmm, there are times when am in class, am trying to do work and this huge announcement comes on talking about teachers check your emails. Mmhhum!, that's what you all have teacher meetings for! (Rolls his eyes in bewilderment with a touch of sarcasm)[****] <I don't know what you all talk about in your teachers' meeting> And then there was a teacher that I was talking to [*** places both palms over mouth to mute the laughter] am sorry, there was this teacher that I was talking to and she's talking about "we don't talk about nothing in these teachers' meeting" (mimics teacher's voice and throws hands into the air). And, I don't know, I just feel like, the administration is a hot mess. They need to just do better.

I: Talk to me a little bit about the rules that you think are ridiculous.

Lui: The passing rule (minimum 60, no zero policy; make-up policy) is giving students a handicap on just passing in general. That means they pretty much don't have to do any work and they will still pass and do *S300*. That is the one rule I don't like. Ehmm, the camouflage, I feel like if it ain't broke don't fix it. We haven't had any problems about that I know of. It's not many gay related problems at this school in the past two years or four years I have been here <probably my freshman year and that was my first year> But for the past two years I have been here there was any ehmm, no that many fights. Ehm, that's probably it, no that's not it, am thinking, let me think. (Thinks aloud) Ehm, some of the rules, Ehm, that's probably it for now, I think.

I: I noticed that most students do not care about school. Given the choice, they would prefer to stay at home. What do you think are the reason students do not like going to school?

Lui: The motivation, if I have to get motivation from home. What I mean by that is that, did you your parents go to school? That is the type of motivation that I mean. You look upon your parents. Maybe you can be involved in your school. Ehmm, maybe you don't like the gossips, or the rumors, or the whole environment. I think, the environment is probably a huge reason why people don't come to this school in the first place. I mean, why would I wana learn in a classroom that has cracked ceiling or there dirt on the walls, or the walls are not clean or the school is not clean, ehmm, maybe it's the food that we eat at lunch. Ehmm, some people don't even eat lunch or food at home and they come to the school and the food is even worse than they want. Ehmm, that's probably it (S. Participant Interview, April 9, 2014).

Chapter XIII

FHS Students' Academic Behavior And Culture

In order to better understand the impact of the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures on student academic behavior, school culture and student academic outcome, I analyzed the data generated from the study searching for patterns and concepts that speak to students' academic behaviors. In this chapter, I present my findings as they emerged from the data corpus. First, I present the identified student academic behavior followed by excerpts of data that allude to the behavior. Next, I present my analysis and interpretation of the behavior and its relationship to student learning and academic outcome. Finally, I trace the bidirectional interaction between the behavior and the school culture focusing on how each is both a producer and product of the other. Appendix K is the transcription Key.

Analysis, Findings, and Interpretations

Responding to the questions on their understanding of the meaning of school and schooling; academic achievement, and perception of FHS' policies and practices, students and faculty participants in this study provided insightful information from which emerged nine student academic behaviors. (1) Apathy and lack of inner drive for academic excellence. (2) Beating the system and/or joining the system. (3) Settlement for mediocrity and learned helplessness vs. low aspiration. (4) Laziness and lack of personal accountability for one's own learning (5) Lack of developmentally generative personal

agency and academic self-efficacy. (6) Groupthink and reversed peer pressure vs. peer pressure. (7) Short-term vs. long-term and immediate vs. future-oriented behaviors. (8) Easily influenced vs. will-power. Below, I offer detailed analysis of each of the academic behaviors presenting illustrative excerpts along with my interpretations. The analytic process consists of producing a body of examples for each behavior that speak to varied meanings and performances of school and schooling as it pertains to student learning and academic outcome.

Apathy and Lack of Inner Drive for Academic Excellence

Student apathy and lack of inner drive for academic excellence figure prominently in the data corpus as student participants in this study reveal their academic behaviors and that of their peers through their description of the meaning and purpose of school and schooling, explanation of academic achievement, and discussion of their perception of the school policies and practices along with the attendant probes. Below, I present the analytic process through which I extracted the findings and my interpretations of the findings, as well as the reciprocal interaction between person characteristics and school culture in generating and sustaining students' apathy and lack of internal drive for academic achievement.

In discussing the academic behavior of FHS students, Jaa notes,

> Across the board, there is general apathy here where they don't want to do anything. They don't want to be involved in any type of student activities, no clubs, they don't wana play sports, they don't wana be in bands. When you talk about 10% of our students, let me not say that, more than 10%, because you find the same people in the same clubs. They are in student council, they are in the

> band, they are in national honors society, they are in bata club, and it is the same group of 40 or 50 students and they play sports. And most of the bulk majority of our students are just so apathetic to any type of school activity. We have a fantastic chorus, but only 20 people are in chorus."

Exhibiting this apathy toward learning and academic achievement, one of the 10th grade honor's student submitted the following four-sentence paragraph essay as a self-assessment reflective essay that required her to evaluate her academic behavior in the year 2014 in at least three paragraphs, "My academic behavior in the year 2014 was simple: I did enough to get by, not to excel. This would be categorized as lazy, but I see it as not caring. As long as a 70 or higher showed up on my report card, I was fine. This behavior will never change, and I am not looking to change it" (Student Journal, Nov. 2014).

Frustrated with this feeling of indifference and lack of internal drive for academic excellence she observes in FHS students and the impact of this behavior on the overall school rating on the national report card, Kiesha, one of the student key informants laments,

> If you have the power, if you have the motivation, the belief that you know you can do it, then why sit there and just not do nothing" we are down there, that's how bad it is. And if you think about it, it's not, am not just gona say it just the administration or the teachers, it's the students, the students need to get involved too. (Loudly) It's not the teachers, it's not. (Slaps the table) I would say it is the students. I think they (students) come in with academic behavior (S. participant Interview, Dec. 13, 2013).

Kiesha's first sentence suggests that students' apathy might be a cover up for a lack of confidence in their skills, a performance-avoidance behavior that students use to excuse and attribute academic failure to external agents (Urdan et al., 2002). Confirming Kiesha and Jaa's observation regarding students' apathetic behavior toward learning and academic achievement, Nico recounts,

> A lot of people are lazy. They're just like don't put forth the effort. They will pull up a book; they won't actually read it. They will look at the top or they will be like, (whispering) "hey, where were you last night?" They are like talking while they are reading or while they are supposed to be reading. Like reading is, I guess they don't understand the wonders of how books work. Like, books really set off the imagination and a lot of people are too lazy or like, you know, read out many words. Go through the process of imagination. They are lazy and they just don't want to put forth effort into doing more work than they are already doing. The work, the amount of work am doing now is good enough, you know. They don't wana expand and move on to the next level of education to be ahead of their classmates, to be ahead of, you know, to be ahead of the intelligent group. A lot of people are just too lazy to do it. Laziness! The biggest factor, laziness. They don't want to do it. It's oh, I have better things to do with my time than to study about math or read a book. Facebook and Instagram and whatever interests me more, I guess social media has taken over." Cheating, because when you give assignments, people copy off of each other and when it's test time, people don't know what to do because they copied the work from somebody else's paper. It's too much or they don't just wana do it (S. Participant Interview, April 11, 2014).

Nico's data reveals four self-handicapping behaviors, ***laziness, manipulation of academic time, complacence, and cheating,*** activities Urdan et al, (2002) identify as strategies for rationalizing poor performance. By asserting that students intentionally avoid investing into learning and academic achievement because they have "better things to do with their time" than to study, Nico insinuates that FHS students' apathy toward learning surpasses a lack of ability or skill to achieve, as it involves a lack of love for learning, or education as it is constructed, deployed, and performed at school. Through this insinuation, Nico implicates *person disposition*[35] in activating or hindering the *learning process*[36] through *selective responsiveness*[37]. Both Mai and Jaa provide explanations for how and why FHS students acquire and exhibit this general apathy for school and school related activities as the following excerpts portray:

> **Mai:** Well like I said, kids here don't really value their education. And, if someone don't already value their education and you send them to a school that is not trying to help them value their education, it can be harder and that's what leads to the discipline problems that we have here because everyone, it's all bunch of negative mindsets, so do you think something positive can come from a negative mindset? No! So negative things happen because nobody wants to be here. It's kind of hard to say you go to school for 12 years and you get your diploma. To a child that's like, it's not too easy to say because you need little incentives working your way to the high school diploma. It like, it's important,

[35] Personal dispositions that can set proximal processes in motion in a particular developmental domain and continue to sustain their operation. Premised on the belief that behavioral disposition can actively interfere with, retard, or even prevent" the occurrence of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).
[36] Developmental Processes shaped by the characteristics of the Person, and the Context over Time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).
[37] Selective Responsiveness involves differentiated response to, attraction by, and exploration of aspects of the physical and social environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

> but then it's not important because it takes so long to get a diploma, you know that's what everybody go to school for, but you still need little motivators to help you go to school every day. It can be depressing sometimes.

Furthermore, Mai, in explicating FHS students' apathetic behavior as an offshoot of their lack of value for education complicates the behavior by connecting it to a reciprocal interaction between students *developmentally disruptive disposition*[38], "negative mindset," and a context that is does not also value education, "And, if someone don't already value their education and you send them to a school that is not trying to help them value their education it can be harder." Thus, Mai acknowledges that students' ***apathy and lack of love for education is both a product and a producer of an apathetic school culture that does not value education.*** When asked what she thinks is the reason why students do not value education, she responds,

> Well, at our school, the streets are impounding their minds more than the teachers are, so when you get all these negative thoughts in your mind, school is not gona be one of them. Well, I think, it's because we are already in school for eight hours. And if you play sports, you get home even later, and then the athletic tutoring that's making you do work when just got out of school is even more school. It can just be tedious sometimes people don't wana study or do their school work, but that comes back to self-control; you have to make yourself study if you care about your education no matter how tired you are."

[38] Developmentally disruptive dispositions or characteristics refer to person characteristics that disrupt, retard or hinder its operation of the proximal process. Example: impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, inability to defer gratification, or in a more extreme form, ready resort to aggression and violence, apathy, inattentiveness, unresponsiveness, lack of interest in one's surroundings, "feelings of insecurity, shyness, or a general tendency to avoid or withdraw from activity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Here again, Mai introduces the bidirectional interaction between another level of the environment, the ***mesosystem***[39] and person characteristics in generating and sustaining individual student's academic behavior noting how "tedious" it is to keep up with the complex schedule of eight hours of school, athletic tutoring and practice. However, she asserts, "but that comes back to self-control, you have to make yourself study" thereby reinforcing Bronfenbrenner's (2001) postulation that the power of the *proximal process*[40] to influence development depends greatly on person characteristics. Responding to additional probe on how the street impounds the minds of FHS students, Mai restates,

> Because, like I said, the high school, the big price is your diploma. It takes 12 years of school to get your diploma. Then after you are done, you have to take another whole 4 years to get a degree so you can get a good paying job. When you are in the street, you can just sell weed, crack, whatever you wana sell and you will have almost a $1000 a day, it's fast money vs. long term and yeah. And when they don't sell and make that money as they though, the society feeds them with the money of those who went to college, got a degree and work hard. So a lot of my peers take to the street and don't work hard in school because they believe that school will not give them fast money and when they fail to make that money, they know that the government is there to pick them up (S. Participant Interview, April 6, 2014).

Finally, in the above excerpt, Mai implicates the interaction between person characteristic and historical time period for the change in students' understanding of the meaning and

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[39] Mesosystem is a system of microsystems or the effect of the interaction between the microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1978).

[40] The proximal process is the engine of development. It is the direct interaction between the person and her or his environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For the purpose of this study, the proximal process is direct interaction between student and school.

value in education, which, according to Mai, explains their "negative mindset" and apathetic behavior toward learning and academic achievement as they invest their time into making quick money than in long term projects such as education.

Similarly, explaining how students became so lethargic about learning and academic achievement Jaa notes,

> I think because our climate or the climate that has been established in our school doesn't encourage students to step outside the box or to step-up and be somebody; they just don't because nobody, no, call it reversed peer pressure. It is not that because, here it is because nobody is doing it, so am not doing it vs. in some other school where everybody is doing it, so I want to it. And, I think part of it is teacher attrition. It's revolving door. We may maintain the same staff for two or three years and then there is a high turnover rate, then every two or three years, we get new teachers. I mean when I look at it, look at our department, we started in 2008-2009, I came in after, but think of what has happened since that 2009. Since that 2009, there are only three of us who are still here from those years. We have four brand new teachers to the building, one teacher who is just starting her third year, {that is five teachers who have been here for no extended time to help create some type of continuity, to create some type of standards for the department and it's always changing and adapting as new teacher come in}. That also speaks to administrators, because I think instead of being helps for new teachers and allowing them to make adjustments, allowing them to understand what it means to be a teacher, they do more to hinder their process, their growth and development than to help it. (T. Participant Interview, Dec. 19, 2013).

Once again, Jaa blames students' apathetic academic behavior and lack of drive for academic excellence on a *destructive proximal process*[41], in this case, a schools' climate and culture that is deplete of opportunities that exposes and challenges students to high expectations and academic excellence. Finally, he complicates the understanding of students' academic behavior and subsequent academic achievement as he acknowledges the role of teacher attrition and high turnover, "a revolving door that disrupts continuity and relationship," on the climate and culture of the school, as well as students' academic behavior, thus recognizing the reciprocal interaction between process, person, context, and time in student learning and academic achievement.

Beating the System and/or Joining the System[42]

Another FHS students' academic behavior obtainable within the data corpus is what study participants referred to as beating the system. The Apple Encyclopedic Dictionary defines the phrase "beating the system" as succeeding in finding a means of getting around rules, regulation, or other means of control. Throughout the data corpus, student participants used the phrase "beating the system" to describe the various ways through which they ascribe, circumscribe and circumvent societal and school rules, policies, and procedures that demand, from them, personal accountability for their learning, academic behaviors, and academic outcome; otherwise, the established system of conventional behaviors around school, schooling, student learning, and academic success. Additionally, in this study, beating the system refers to the various ways in

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[41] Within the microsystem, the proximal processes operate to produce and sustain development. However, the power of the proximal processes to do this depends on the content and structure of the microsystem. Hence, there is constructive proximal process and destructive proximal process.

[42] In this document, I use Joining the System first, to refer to school's adoption of policies, practices and procedures that overtly and/or covertly reproduce societal inequality. Second, to capture the instances when students subscribe and/or ascribe these handicapping policies, practices, and procedures to themselves, thereby reproducing their own marginalization and disenfranchisement

which students agentically perform, deploy, and navigate system flaws or weaknesses in soliciting for free and/or easy grades.

Discussing the systemic flaws inherent in FHS and its implication for school functioning and student academic behaviors and achievement, Kayla observes,

> Here, we don't work as cohesively as we should. We have a mixed bag of expectations. We have a mixed bag of teams and the teams do not communicate, you know, with each other, you know; I just don't think that we work very cohesively and I don't think that the set of principles, the set of expectations that we have do really foster into the mission statement. We are trying to get there, but we are not there quiet yet. I think we need to go back and revamp some things. And again, consequences for student's ***actions are not followed through in this school*** because, Ehmm, ***lack of consistency***. We don't do what we said we gona do. No, if we say after 8 unexcused absences you will repeat the course, student attendance will increase. But if we don't do what we said we will do, ***the students, they feel out our weaknesses and they use it against us***. So, when society says you need a good report card because it will make you to look good, then we start loosening up our expectations (T. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

In the above excerpt, Kayla not only reveals the loopholes inherent in FHS' practices, policies, procedures, and expectations, but also the accompanying student disposition toward taking advantage of these weaknesses against administrators and teachers. Following Kayla's lead, I combed the data corpus for instances of students, navigation and deployment of systemic flaws to their advantage. Below are my findings and

interpretations the findings as well as the reciprocal relationship between person characteristics and school culture in the production and maintenance of this academic behavior, beating the system, as well as its implication for students' academic achievement and educational outcome.

Beginning with the focus group data, Quan's observation regarding student, parent, teacher, and administrative behaviors around grade and grading alludes to system flaw and students and parents agentic efforts in taking advantage of the incongruence between administrators' and teachers' practices and belief about grades and grading as a measure or not a measure of academic success,

> Lot of teachers, like I don't want to say they show favoritism, but, I mean a lot of teachers around here are okay, let's say you got an F and you are failing the class, you can go talk to Ms. *Angy* and shed a couple of tears and the next thing you know, you don't got do nothing, you only have to show up in that class and if your parents come here and act like a fool because you are failing a class, the teachers will be like submit to that and say I have to do something about the failure because I will not only have their parents on my back, but also administration is on me and so, then again people are accepting the culture, and I think it is part of the whole the Freedom high culture because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that [things changed?],

As is evident in the excerpt, Quan not only indicts the system for unethical grading practices that shortchanges minority and low SES students' learning and academic outcome through the manipulation and falsification of grade and grading, but he also implicates students and parents for actively soliciting their own shortchanging. Quan's

sensemaking of this event, "again people are accepting the culture, and I think it is part of the whole Freedom High culture because I did not go here all my four years and when I came here I noticed that," depicts the reciprocal interaction between students and their learning environment in creating an academic culture that in turn shapes their academic outcome. Thus, Quan's assertion positions students as proactive and aspiring human beings, who in shaping the self-protective social system that organizes, guides, and regulates the affairs of the society, shapes their own lives (Bandura, 1997).

Consequently, through person characteristic, the disposition toward taking advantage of available opportunities, or beating the system, students navigate the broken system of *grade and grading*[43] drawing from it false grade—unrealistic representation of their learning and academic progress—which momentarily gratifies their need for a passing grade and the system's need for a good report card—on-time graduation. Nevertheless, in the long run, this simultaneous interaction between students' incessant effort in beating the system and systems need to graduate students on time, leads students to more apathetic and self-handicapping academic work-avoidance strategies to which the system responds with more handicapping policies, programs, and procedures that further marginalizes minority and low SES high school inner city students into academically low performing group. It is this vicious cycle that exists between minority and low SES student, which Quan introduces in the above excerpt, that creates and sustains the academic achievement gap between FHS students and their peers outside FHS whose grades and grading practices provide useful feedback on their learning and academic progress as well as challenges them to invest more effort in their learning and academic

[43] In this document, I use grade and grading synonymously to represent a continuous cycle of Plan-Do-Check-Act that prioritizes grade and grading as a critical stage in the analysis and improvement of student learning and academic progress.

achievement. Jay captures this cyclic system of give and take that exists between the students and the school in the following excerpt,

> To me, {*you can't make someone learn if they don't want to. You can't force knowledge upon a person*}, especially if we have all these handouts for these kids and you think about all these new kids in <*this generation we're getting smarter>, but we are getting smarter on ways to get over, we are not getting smarter on ways we can actually help. We are getting smarter on ways to get over on us, how to bit the system not how we can improve the society.* Like these kids, they're playing dumb too. They probably feel insulted. I actually need special education, but are you dumb? You can get this. You're playing dumb, and am actually is that way. And that's how it feels for me. I feel like they are kind of disrespected. I feel like they are kind of smart and are actually are, though. So they are kind of being dumb, they know what they are doing. They know what they are doing" (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

Continuing with his analytical lens on FHS, Quan recounts his experience with FHS' curriculum and in the representation implicates himself in joining his new microsystem in taking advantage of a weak system,

> Oh! Well, I came, well, I came from California at the end of my ninth grade. When, just comparing the two, the curriculum here is very easy. It's not tedious at all. I actually don't feel challenged. And actually when I just came here and after a year or two, I just got really like, honestly I got lazy because I just felt like you don't have to do a lot of work to get an A and to be honest, I haven't even taken

my backpack off my car all year[**] and I still make the honor roll and {I don't know how that is happening, but it is working}. [**]

Thus, Quan activates his own shortchanging and further marginalization through his deployment of the porous FHS curriculum and academic achievement disabling policies, programs and procedures in taking self-imposed relief from academic work in his Advance Placement English class, "Yeah when I was in class with Jaa, I didn't do anything because I know I was gona get a 60 and I know, I was gona pass with those 60s and so am glad they took that off. Still I just feel like Ok. So I felt kinda like, redo policy, if I fail this, I can redo it, slight test, redo it" (Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014).

By so doing, Quan activated a ***mesosystem risk***[44] that worked in consort with the instructional process, his personal characteristics, and the interconnectedness between him, the school and other social networks, as well as direct and indirect communications via a grapevine or social networks, which created a synergistic effect that impacted his learning and academic progress (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; 1993). The reciprocal interaction between the process, in this case beating the system of AP rigorous curriculum, shaped by his personal characteristics, laziness and procrastination, and the context over time, the application of the school's handicapping grading policies and practices of "*minimum 60, and redos*[45]" over four quarter grading periods created his failure of the AP course and subsequent withdrawing from the AP track the year of this study. Invariably, Quan's academic behavior of beating the system was created and sustained by the reciprocal interaction between his personal characteristic of laziness and procrastination and the

[44] Mesosystem risk refers first, to the absence of connections and second, to the conflicts of values between one microsystem and another (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992).
[45] Minimum 60, redo, and no zero grading policies were adopted to reduce grade retention and subsequent drop out and over-time graduation rates that arise from high failure rates.

established system of handicapping policies and procedures, which were in the first place, adopted to reduce high failure rate and student retention.

Settlement for Mediocrity[46] and Learned Helplessness[47] vs. Low Aspiration

As a synergistic effect of the school's culture of settlement for and reinforcement of mediocrity, instances of students' acceptance of mediocre education through learned helplessness pervade the entire data corpus generated from this study. Beginning with Quan's self-revelation of how he succumbed to this synergy to Tee and Ron's story on how each of them play the "good student" in highly disruptive classes in order to get the benefit of passing the course with at least a 'C' average, student participants reveal how the system recycles and reproduces their educational disenfranchisement through academic credentialing (Giroux, 1983). However, in their revelation, they implicate themselves as co-reproducers of their situation (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bandura, 1987). The following is the analytic detail of how I came to this conclusion, the bidirectional interaction between person characteristic and school culture that generate and sustain students' settlement for mediocrity and learned helplessness, and the impact of this interactional effect on student academic achievement and overall educational outcome.

Following Tee's and Ron's postulations, "Yeah, and when students, they be nice to a teacher, it's like if you nice to a teacher, she is not gona fail you or like she is not gona make you a low grade in her class and I see that happen most of the times. Because I can go to a teacher's class and not do anything in there and somehow end up with an A

[46] Settlement for mediocrity refers to minority and low SES students' uncritical acceptance and subscription for minimum passing grade (70 = D), easy grade and/or unearned average to excellent grade (80 – 100 or C – A) through systemic practices that reifies their marginal position in the society.

[47] In this document, Learned Helplessness refers to a feeling of powerlessness and lack of control over ones situation due to constant exposure to negative and inescapable outcomes. It is a disruption in motivation, affect and learning that is caused by uncontrollable outcomes (Fincham, et al., 1986).

or a B and am like okay am gone be real quiet" (Tee, Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014) and "yeah, I really don't, you show them respect, like my grade is straight average and I don't really be doing nothing. And I don't even try and like, if I try my grade would probably be 'As', I don't try, but my grade is just straight" (Ron, Focus Group, Feb. 20, 2014), study participants indulge in insightful conversations about their academic behavior that led to this discussion between them and the focus group moderator:

> **M:** Can I ask a question, all these classes where we fill we don't do anything, do we pass them? Do we get good grades?
>
> **Jane:** Oh! Yeah.
>
> **Shade:** We pass with 'A's too.
>
> **M:** Okay. How many of you have questioned the fact that you go to a teacher's class, sit down for 90 minutes on daily bases and do nothing, but then pass with an A. How many students?
>
> **Ron:** Noop!
>
> **M:** I asked this question as a wrap-up question because if you sit in a class and a teacher gives you grade without teaching you, who actually loses at the end?
>
> **Shade:** The student.
>
> **Jane:** Oh! Yeah definitely.
>
> **M:** And why don't we speak up? Because, if we remember where we started, academic achievement is not about the grades. It's about you being confident enough to apply what you know and can do
>
> **[prolonged silence:** 6 secs]

M: I am asking you this question because you are seniors. How many of you, deep down, feel you have been prepared for college?

Tie: It hasn't.

Jane: The only class I need is my nursing class because the college am going to is a nursing-based college and am really not ready, but am prepared to just start over and take remedial classes when I get to college, I really am.

Yali: Ehmm, some classes that I took, they prepared me and it sucks so, because, some kids who didn't have the opportunity to take some honors classes, didn't have the opportunity to get, you know, better teachers, but see, I don't, I don't think that, that is fair, but I have been in honors classes for the longest and at least, I say 75% of the teachers that I have had were really good teachers versus, I know some students who were like in CP classes, they were always stuck in class with teachers who can't control their class, and the teacher who, you know, let students just run over and stuff like that and it's, you know it's kind of like not fair. And it's like, I don't know. I'll say the one thing FHS did prepare me for college was to be more responsible and to take more initiative, that's all I feel like I did my four years here. Well, you know, I have to tell the teacher, this is what I feel like my grade is supposed to be this and not that because I made this and not what you all gave me.

These and other honest stories about FHS students' learning and college and/or career readiness within the data set speak back to students' complacence with mediocre education, a kind of education that Shay describes as "on the surface where you just learned enough, just enough because you need to see or just wana be" (F. Participant

Interview, April 25, 2014). Although it is disturbing that educators have, in place, policies and procedures that students stunt learning, motivation, and aspiration for higher education, it is more disturbing that students buy-in to these handicaps even though they understand these policies and practices implication for their learning, academic achievement and overall integration into adulthood.

Kayla and Kelly complicate this issue of student's complacence and settlement for mediocre education and handicapping policies and practices as they discuss students' overbearing focus on grade as opposed to learning and academic excellence:

> **Kayla:** Our students have gotten so comfortable with a 70 that they grade watch and as long as they can get a 70 or a 75, they are fine with that because they actually pay attention to the first second, and third nine weeks grades and if teachers have given them Cs out of pressure, then they realize that I can get a 60 at the end of a quarter and am okay with that just as long as I have a 70 for the year. Trying to move them up the ladder of academic success, they don't bother because as far as they are concerned, they have passed the class in quotation even though they were given the grade. There's no need to work anymore and as long as they can complain to get the D, instead of work for at least the D, then they are fine with that, complacence has taken effect (F. Participants Interview, May 27, 2014).
>
> **Kelly:** They also don't want the challenge because their mindset is in honors. I wana be an academic All Star. I wana be high school scholar, but they don't want to do the work. But as soon as the work becomes challenging or the work becomes demanding, they don't wana do it because they don't wana think. They

> don't wana reason. They want it to be one plus one equal to two. They want it here, today, tomorrow and in the future. They are not willing to go beyond and until we as educators force them to apply what they have learned, the world is in a bi----g problem, exactly, there's a big problem here in the world. There's going to be (F. Participant Interview, May)

While Kayla's data reveals a subtle deskilling of both teacher and students that arises from the grade watch and teacher bullying for given grades, Kelly's data counters the popular belief that minority and low SES students lack high aspiration. A combination of Kayla and Kelly's data provides the reason for minority and economically disadvantaged students delayed and festered dream as each data exposes the irony between expectations and reality masked under the "smoking mirror" of given vs. earned grade; high aspiration vs. actual academic ability. Hence, students' settlement for mediocrity and learned helplessness create a synergistic effect of persistent academic failure that in turn creates more handicapping policies, curriculum and pedagogy.

Laziness and Lack of Personal Accountability for One's Own Learning

In responding to the interview question on why FHS student refuse to engage in academic work such as studying, completing homework, class work, projects, and even tests and quizzes, almost all the participants pointed to laziness and availability of what they referred to as handouts that entitle students to a passing grade even when they did not participate in any learning activity. Within the confine of this study, I define laziness in three ways. First, I use laziness to refer to a person's willful refusal to carry out an activity s/he is capable of accomplishing but declines to do so because of the effort involved in performing the activity. Second, I use laziness to describe an intentional

replacement of a challenging assignment and/or activity with a less rigorous one or the submission of a haphazard or mediocre version of the assignment when one is capable of doing better.

Third, I use laziness to refer to situation when one's motivation to spare oneself the rigors of learning and academic achievement trumps his or her motivation to achieve. Similarly, I define personal accountability for learning as individual students' willingness to assume responsibility for his or her learning and academic achievement and a lack thereof. Below are excerpts of data that allude to this students' academic behavior, my interpretation and connection of the behavior to the simultaneous interaction between person characteristics and school culture as well as my explanation of how student laziness and lack of personal accountability create and sustain student mediocrity and lack of academic success.

Lui, the student body president, opened the conversation on FHS students' academic behavior with the following excerpt,

> "They don't like to take responsibility for their actions, for our actions. They are like sometimes, you will get into trouble, but you will try to make excuses to say that you didn't do what you did. Ehm, they don't take responsibilities for doing better. Ehm, for example, like just waking up in the morning and being on time to school, or I couldn't get up, I couldn't get up on time, things like that. Ehm, just the motivation, this is the motivation behind it, with sometimes in our meetings all we do is talking. Who wants to be at a meeting where sometimes all you do is just talk, especially when you are a student, I mean you want to do something? Laziness. Ehmm, this generation is very lazy. Ahmm, it wasn't like the other

> generations when they actually didn't have cell phones, they didn't have laptops, computers, they didn't have this, I just think it's just being lazy. There's so much $10?? You can get, you can deal with, you pretty much don't have to move. It pretty much happens. Our generation or myself, sometimes I just feel like we haven't been really challenged or we haven't been really put to the test. Ehm,< a small prime example, a remote control to a TV<all you do is to flip a channel> that can do your??? And close your TV and touch, I mean it's just, it's sometimes that simple and they are just being lazy. Being lazy. Some people don't wana just study. Some people don't wana put effort into trying to do their best. Just being lazy. It's a great mix."

In this excerpt, Lui provides detailed description of FHS students' academic behavior "They don't like to take responsibility for their actions, for our actions. . . .They don't take responsibilities for doing better." Upfront, Lui indicts individual students for not taking personal responsibility for their respective actions, especially for "doing better," a phrase that might imply doing better academically as well as behaviorally as he proceeds to describe the visionlessness that characterize their student council meetings where "sometimes all they do is just talking." He attributes the visionlessness to laziness, which explains as a generational trait associated with advancement in technology. He concludes positing that this generational laziness prevents students from studying and from wanting to "put effort into trying to do their best."

However, he also describes the entire situation, students' lack of responsibility for their action and for doing better, their visionlessness and their laziness, as a great mix. By identifying the situation a great mix, Lui acknowledges the complexity inherent in human

behavior, particularly students' learning and academic achievement. Theoretically, Lui alludes to the complex interaction between process, person, context, and time that produces human development, otherwise learning and academic achievement. Even though he indicts student for their lack of responsibility and laziness in applying themselves to excellence, he blames the chronosystem (sociohistorical change in time) and the techno subsystem for students' failure to utilize ***developmentally generative dispositions***[48] to activate and sustain constructive proximal process, the direct positive healthy interaction between a person and her/his environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Lack of Developmentally Generative Personal Agency and Academic Self-efficacy

Whereas personal agency refers to a person's ability to influence his or her action through intentionality,[49] forethought,[50] self-regulation,[51] and self-awareness and/or self-examination[52] (Bandura, 1997), personal or self-efficacy refers to one's belief in his or her ability to organize and execute courses of action required to achieve a given goal

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[48] Developmentally generative dispositions or characteristics are behavioral disposition that set in motion and sustain the operation of the proximal processes. Example: epistemological curiosity, tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone, responsiveness to initiatives by others, and readiness to defer immediate gratifications to pursue long-term goals.

[49] Intentionality is the first element of personal agency. It derives from the notion that people form intentions that include action plans and strategies for realizing

[50] Forethought derives from the idea that people set goals and anticipates likely outcomes or prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts. Bandura (2005) referred to this proclivity as future-directed plans and asserted, "the future cannot be the cause of current behavior because it has no material existence" (p. 3), but by being represented cognitively in the present, visualized futures serve as current guides and motivators of behavior.

[51] Self-regulation is the third element of personal agency is self-regulation. It derives from the notion that "Agents are not only planner and forethinkers, they are also self-regulators. They adopt personal standards and monitor and regulate their actions by self-reactive influence. They do things that give them satisfaction and a sense of worth, and refrain from actions that bring self-censure" (Bandura, 2005, p. 3).

[52] Self-examination and self-awareness are the fourth and important construct of personal agency. Individuals are not only agents of action, but also agents of self (Bandura, 1987). Individuals are self-examiners of their own functioning and through self-awareness they reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits. Through self-reflection, agentic individuals make corrective adjustment, if necessary. Forethought and self-influence are important parts of a causal structure in adolescents development (Bandura, 2005).

(Bandura, 1997). It involves an increasing capacity to conceptualize experience as well as ones beliefs about oneself as an active agent both in relation to the self and to the environment. As Bandura (2005) posits, personal agency operates through self-efficacy belief. Implicitly then, academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in her or his ability to successfully accomplish an academic task as well as to achieve at a designated level of academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Consistent within the data corpus, participants' words, actions and inactions allude to FHS students' lack of developmentally generative personal agency and academic self-efficacy. Beginning with the excerpt from Jalisha's interview transcript, I provide example of the analytic process through which I extracted this findings from the data corpus, my analysis and interpretation of the findings and the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school culture that produces and maintains this behavior. Speaking about the academic achievement gap between minority (African Americans) and low SES student and their affluent mainstream students, Jalisha contends that African American students perform poorly academically because of low self-esteem about who they are. In her words,

> I think African Americans students are probably the most influenced. They fall into the statistics. They don't try. >The---ey let what people say define them or get in their head. They forget to strive or look over and above what people are talking about and thinking and they fall into the trap of yes, am a statistics. Ehmm, they let people's words define them. Cause we are, I won't say, but I think we feel as though African Americans are at the bottom. We have the least of

> chances for everything. We, Ehmm, don't have much of a say so or opinion. We think that we, we feel as though we are at the bottom of the food chain. Yes, because we feel as though other races are smarter than us. Other races come to our country and they get scholarships and stuff like that, but it is really hard for African Americans to stay in college without a scholarship paying tuition and that causes, you know, dropping out of college and on into a job."

Evident in her response is the fact that African American students "do not try" of avoid academic task because of a lack of belief in their ability to prove the "statistics" wrong, "Cause we are, I won't say, but I think, we feel as though African Americans are at the bottom of the food chain." Throughout the excerpt, Jalisha suggests that African American inner city high school students lack the personal agency required to cultivate capabilities for exercising self-directedness in surmounting environmental stereotypes and deficit thinking that hinders them from achieving academically. These self-directedness capabilities include development of competencies, self-beliefs of efficacy to exercise control, and self-regulatory capabilities for influencing one's own motivation and actions (Bandura, 2005).

Similarly, in discussing FHS students' definition of academic achievement, Jay observes,

> I feel like our students define academic achievement as any point where they are happy with it. I feel like they, today if they, how our grading scaling is, a 100 is an A, I feel like if they made somewhere with a D or C, if they feel that is good, that's where they gona stop. They are not gona strive because they don't have that extra push or they don't feel like they need to get that A. I feel like they get

> blinded or they get caught up because that happened to me in middle school. It's like once you get around a lot of friends and then you start experiencing growing up, I think they just lose themselves, losing the academics they are gaining more in their social life and that's where they are stock in (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

Here again, Jay points to the students' lack of personal agency and academic self-efficacy steeped in complacence. However, unlike in Jalisha's data where the lack of the self-directedness capabilities is the students low self-esteem and acceptance of deficitness, Jay attributes the lack to students inability to resist social traps that lead down detrimental paths, and to disengage themselves from such predicaments should they become enmeshed in them (Bandura, 1989; 2005), hence he concludes, "I think they just lose themselves, losing the academics they are gaining more in their social life and that's where they are stock in."

Since agency operates through a loop of triadic reciprocal causation between behavior; internal personal factors in the forms of cognitive, affective, and biological events, as well as the external environment, human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies are, then, developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modeling, instruction and social persuasion (Bandura, 1986; 1989). Applying this theoretical belief in the examination of the reciprocal interaction between person characteristics, in this case students' behavior and internal personal factors and the external environment, FHS culture, reveals that students lack of personal agency and academic self-efficacy is a synergistic effect of the bidirectional interaction between individual student's personality

trait, the macrosystem—societal expectation and stereotypes, exosystem—state and school district's rules and expectations, and the microsystem's handicapping policies, practices, and procedure that predisposes students to learned helplessness and academic failure.

Groupthink and Reverse Peer Pressure vs. Peer Pressure

Additionally, pervading the data corpus are various instances of students' collective or group actions, and inactions; invulnerability, irrationality, stereotyping, and pressure. I choose to describe these behaviors as groupthink and reverse peer pressure instead of peer pressure. Borrowing from Irving Janis (1982), I define groupthink as collective behaviors that portray poor judgment, poor testing of reality, carelessness or insensitivity, and mob actions that occurs in cohesive (sports teams) and noncohesive groups (classrooms) in which group members' desire for consensus is more important than a realistic evaluation of problems and solutions. It is a mechanism through which a group of highly unfocused students collectively usurps teacher authority in the classroom and uses that authority to disrupt or hinder rich direct instruction and student learning. Similarly, I define reverse peer pressure as a feeling of general ineptitude that pervades a cultural group, whereby individually, members of the group choose to do nothing because nobody is doing something, and before long, a culture of everybody doing nothing because nobody is doing anything develops. Put succinctly, reverse peer pressure is a culture whereby everybody is doing nothing because nobody is doing anything.

One of the evidences of groupthink that suffused the data corpus is this focus group members' discussion of students' behavior in one of their Spanish classes:

M: Okay. What else do we want to tell the school as an advice?

Quan: Motivate the students[**Tee:** I was about to say motivate the teachers, you need to know how to at least try to motivate the students because motivation comes within. So they can like try their best to motivate the students, like, really actually try, not to say, oh! I tried to motivate the students and they, like actually try. And then, they should like, help the students out, if it does, it does, like hey you can't help everyone am sorry to say that, but you can't help everyone get a motive, so the teachers need to try more to get the students try more.

Quan: And then from the teacher perspective like ??[because nobody knows their students more than the teacher knows the.

Ron: It really is also on the student though[**Quan:** yeah, like, if I was a teacher I come to school every day, my bad][**Quan:** I was saying, if I was a teacher, you know I come to school every day, you know am trying my hardest, you know a lot of teachers they come to school and they really try to show you everything and the students they are kind of like bit the teacher down[**Tee:** then she writes them up and send them away[**Quan:** You know, am not talking about verbally bit them down, am saying like you try to push, and push something and everybody is not accepting it. It does, like, you know, as a teacher, you know, it does get tired and just let go and not even a teacher, as a person though.

Ron: Like Mr. C, the Spanish teacher? He is a good teacher, [**Tee:** that's what she is getting paid for] but our class is a combination of kids that is in that class is ridiculous[he gets paid for it]yeah that is true they get paid to help students learn and really, I think, our class is like, ridiculous, he can't get a word out or none that.

Tee: I think you can't make someone do something if they don't wana do it.

Jane: Well, I can't say students are not doing something, you are a teacher you gona be okay with that, yes, you all do nothing, who else is gona make them do it. Like you said Mr. C, he gona say something one time and if you don't do it he's just go sit down. His not gona make you do it.[**Quan:** He always tries[**Tee:** Nooo[he don't[???[you can't talk, you can't learn, you can't sit there and tell somebody they can't talk.

M: Why do you think a teacher gives up on a group of students [**Tee:** because[who wouldn't allow them to teach?

Tee: Because she don't have like, a strong backbone from the administration because a teacher can sit here and write a student up all day long, they go to the hearing board, they gona be right back. So, she don't have no type of backbone from the administration. So it like[????

Andy: especially that's like, that's like a teacher says she can't control her class and what she do in there[**Ron:** you can control your class[**Andy:** Like, like, take Ms. J, she don't got no problem because she knows she can control her class. Well, like say for instance, like the Spanish dude, he can't control his class that's why he does the stuff he do. [that's right[???]that's why, she's always there in her class.[**Jane:** I don't know[**Janet:** Oh! What's that lady that is at the back of then?

In order to make clear what I mean by groupthink as it relates to this study and FHS cultural group and to enable the reader to make sense of this piece of data, I choose to unpack this piece of data line-by-line, providing background information that might explain the tension inherent in the data, whenever necessary. Quan's response to the

question, what advice would you give the school is not a surprise because FHS is notorious for the endemic apathy and lack of motivation toward learning and academic related activities among its students, a problem that Jaa captures very well in the following excerpt:

> They won't apply themselves to do the things they need . . .? Ahmm, you can take them to the lab, assign them projects, and again, it is something that is creative, it is something that is you have chosen to help them achieve the standard and objectives without being, I call it, it is, you know, you have to trick them to get them to learn because anything that you say straight out is related to learning and to them being able to do something else, they want no part of it. *But, if you tell them, or we are going to do this fun thing and oh blah, blahh, blahhhh!!{ And you mask it, then they will do it. And it is sad that you have to mask learning in order to get them to be engaged}. Ehmm, the idea that sometimes there are some things that you have to do in order to be better is lost. They refuse to part take in that idea, but if you dress it up as <oh yeah!! Let's go create our own short stories to get them to figure out whether they understand the narrative structure or not>. You know, you can't say we gona create short stories to see whether you understand the narrative structure or not, you have to mask it behind this idea of, this other verbiage when you know; you are trying to achieve the same goal. But really, if you tell them really what you real goal was, a lot of them will say, am not doing this because it is connected to something academic (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

It is this search for incentives to motivate students toward academic achievement that generated the handicapping policies and practices that have deepened students' apathy and lack of academic performance because they provided shortcuts, "handouts that automatically convert failure into success without the individual student doing anything.

Additionally, in this space teachers bear full responsibility for student learning and academic success. Students are never held accountable for their social or academic behaviors as they relate to the classroom, a fact that is very clear in the entire data set. Hence, most students always exhibit a sense of entitlement and invincibility in dealing with teachers, hall monitors and even administrators, a fact that is also obvious in the data corpus. This "obnoxious behavior," as Mai describes it, causes tension between the few learning oriented students who feel that the school is not doing enough to crackdown the mediocrity; rather the school is energizing it through selective enforcement and differential implementation of discipline policies as well as an overbearing focus on nonacademic trivialities (Confer sections on School Policies and School Culture in this document).

Consequently, Tee's advice to motivate teachers, which in itself, is an extension of the pervading metaphor of FHS teachers as a "punch bag" for students and administrators, becomes another way of continuing the indictment and teacher bullying for students' lack of accountability for their own learning, as well as for responsible social behavior. The metaphor of the teacher as a punch bag manifests in students verbal, emotional, and even physical abuse of some teachers in the classroom without receiving any consequence for their actions, a constant occurrence in FHS and one of the major reasons for the high teacher attrition that FHS experiences within the first nine weeks of

each school year. The scenario these participants present in this data is a typical classroom for most foreign Language teachers and new teachers, where a group of highly unfocused, forced to be at school and rather be at school students override the teacher and never allow her/him to "get a word out."

As the data portrays, these students who refuse to cooperate with the teacher in building a learning conducive classroom always believe that the teacher is being paid to control students' irrationality, accept their verbal, emotional and physical abuse, and as Kelly would say, "suck up to student mediocrity." The irony of the groupthink is that individually, none of these students would attempt to disrupt instructional activities or disrespect teacher authority in the classroom. Also, like a mob action, it is difficult to pinpoint the ringleader of the group as the disruption suffuses the entire setting. When groupthink fails, forced to be at school and rather be at school students revert to reverse peer pressure, where by the entire classroom shuts down from participating in any activity. Either way, dealing with groupthink and/or reverse peer pressure is very stressful, especially in a school like FHS where students are always right.

Again, Jaa vividly captures this self-handicapping mechanism in this explanation of why students avoid challenging activities, "I think students choose to avoid challenging activities because our climate or the climate that has been established in our school doesn't encourage students to step outside the box or to step-up and be somebody. They just don't because nobody, no call it reversed peer pressure. It is not because everybody is doing it, here it is because nobody is doing it, so am not doing it. (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014). Finally, Jay explains this obvious lack of critical assessment of problem and solution; action and inaction students exhibit through

groupthink and reverse peer pressure stating, “They don’t think pass go” (S. Participant Interview, April 1, 2014).

When analyzed from a reciprocal interactional standpoint, students’ groupthink and reverse peer pressure behavior becomes both a producer and a product of the culture of mixed back of expectations and lack of holding students accountable for their academic and social behavior. Also these behaviors energize and are energized by the school’s culture of settlement for and reinforcement of mediocrity as well as the heightened focus on teacher accountability for student learning that overlooks students’ accountability for their own learning and academic achievement. Alluding to the negative impact of groupthink and reverse peer pressure, interactional effect of person characteristics and school culture, on students’ academic outcome, Jane concludes, “I don’t even think it has to go as far as the government. I think it is the school itself. We can’t do anything at all and am not saying the school should send people away at the end of the day, some of the things that go on here is ridiculous” (Focus Group Interview, Feb. 20, 2014).

Short-Term vs. Long-Term/ Immediate vs. Future-Oriented Behaviors

Also resonate within the data corpus is students focus on immediate instead of deferred gratification of needs, short-term as opposed to long-term benefits of education, and immediate; rather than future oriented focus on life, a characteristic key informants explain in various ways. In an attempt to explain why most students do not like school and schooling, Jerry notes,

> A lot of them think like school, they cannot really see like, how it would help them. They don’t really see how it can help them right now. They just look at

> short-term benefit instead of long-term goals like how it will help them in the future. A lot of black kids drop out or don't go to school because they feel they need money right now, some of them are struggling at home so they need to get a job to get money. Like I know a lot of kids their mom aren't making enough money so they feel like school won't help them make money. They just think about the short-term goal that they need money now, so that they have a place to live, so they just go and get a job and it's kind of hard to have a job and go to school at the same. It's not impossible, but it's pretty hard" (S. Participant Interview, April 10, 2014)

Mai elaborates on these short-term and long-term benefits and how the structure of school makes it difficult for minority and low SES students to see the benefit because of the heightened need for money positing,

> The high school, the big price is your diploma. It takes 12 years of school to get your diploma. Then after you are done, you have to take another whole 4 years to get a degree so you can get a good paying job. When you are in the street, you can just sell weed, crack, whatever you wana sell and you will have almost a $1000 a day, it's fast money vs. long term and yeah. And when they don't sell and make that money as they thought, the society feeds them with the money of those who went to college, got a degree and work hard. So a lot of my peers take to the street and don't work hard in school because they believe that school will not give them fast money and when they fail to make that money, they know that the government is there to pick them up (S. participant Interview, April 6, 2014).

Connecting this need for fast or quick money to students' perception of the meaning of school and academic behaviors, Keni blames students' academic complacence on the immediate gratification and the feeling of "making it" they get from street life every now and then. According to her, "They don't see the big picture in life. They don't really care" about school because "they only see what is in the here and now, they are looking at it as at right now and not in the future." Hence, Matt concludes, "we want to get good, like good clothes, good everything, but I guess nobody wants the long term. Nobody wants to set goals long term. Everything, everybody wants it now and quick, a lot of quicks."

Suggesting how this instant gratification and failure to see the pig picture impacts student academic outcome, Shon muses, "I don't think they even think about what's gona, happen after high school. They think its just gona happen whether they do the work or not. Like I said before, they don't think, they see it as difficult. Like they get taught one way and the questions on the test and exams look a different way. So they think it's hard and won't try it. They just need a little more discipline. You just can't give them a movie and expect them to be quiet because, you might as well not put the movie in. you might as well tell them to just talk" (S. participant Interview, April 7, 2014).

Implicitly, Shon posits that focus on quick money, the here and now, instant gratifications and goals that precludes a thought about the future, about life after high school affects student cognitive development and academic success, even as they are in school. He blames these self-handicapping behaviors, quick fix, instant gratification and failure to see the big picture for students' inability to internalize and to transfer information learned from one content area to another. Also, this quick fix and instant

gratification mentality robs students of protective factors, persistence, industry, personal agency and self-efficacy needed to achieve academic success. Thus, if students "get taught one way and the questions on the test and exams look a different way, they think it's hard and won't try it."

The greatest danger of quick fix, instant gratification mentality, and lack of future-oriented behaviors is that it stunts the development of forethought, the fourth element of personal agency, which enables individuals to become proactive agents capable of setting goals and anticipating possible outcomes or prospective actions to guide and motivate the realization of those goals, a behavior that highly correlates with learning and academic success (Bandura, 2005).

Easily Influenced vs. Lack of Will-Power (Hi-pop Culture/Techno Subsystem/Macrosystem)

Finally, the notion of FHS minority and low SES students being easily influence by environmental messages, especially the hi-pop culture and technology versus their lack of will-power to filter through and/or resist these messages figured prominently in the data set as both students and faculty participants connected the students' poor academic behaviors and subsequent low academic outcome to the popular or what most of the participants referred to as urban culture. Because of the emotional intensity of the data corpus that speak to this finding, I choose to present excerpts that are representation of the data on this section as I ask my readers to create their own meaning from these excerpts as "THEY" decide who should be held accountable for school and schooling as it plays out in FHS?

Kayla, one of the faculty key informants, in an effort to help me to understand this hi-pop culture and why it is important in understanding FHS student has this to say:

> It's a lot of things, from gang culture, hi-pop culture, the culture of complaisance, and very strong hip-pop/urban culture. A lot of our children watch videos where, you know, drugs dominate. It's a very hypersexual world or where you are seen as someone who, "stays true" (in quotation) to the neighborhood. So therefore a lot of our students, because this is their environment, you stand or you tend to stick to the rules of your environment with regards to dreads, mannerism, language, so that urban society and our academic society usually don't overlap in their minds, even though they do because if you listen to hip-pops, you know, many of the rappers brag a lot about their success. They talk about how street savvy or street smart they really are. They talk about how they stay up twenty-four hours to get it, how they work hard. Our students hear that in rap music, but they do not let that translate into their everyday lives. So rapper can tell you to hit the street corner and hustle, "I got to hit the block and it's forty degrees outside," but yet you walked to school in a forty degrees weather, but you won't work hard when you get here knowing that this can translate into dollars for you later. So, I think a lot of our children don't just have the maturity to see that this individual is very smart after all may not be doing something inappropriate, may just be using that music to make money. But a lot of our kids, they can't, they don't understand how to make that transition and do the same thing at school, do the same thing when you graduate from school, do the same thing even when you parent. You know, so, in urban culture because the message is so strong, it has the tendency to

overpower logic for many of our teenagers. It's what they believe. It's what they breathe and a rapper has greater influence on a child, sometime, than the parents* nowadays. So, they want to live that life and I think that is one of the things that schools have to reckon with. We gona have to recognize that, that urban life trumps a lot of things as far as a lot of our teenagers are concerned. Even though we can get them to understand that there is a connection between the two. There is an overlap, you know, I think we will see, we will find greater success with them in the schools (F. Participant Interview, May 27, 2014).

Before this enlightenment on urban culture, below are some of the excerpts of data that got me curious about this culture.

I: How do you feel about the stereotype of African American teenagers as crack heads and loser? (This is a probe question that emanated from the responses of five out of the first seven interviews I conducted with students' explanation that African American boys do not do well in school because of societal stereotype against them and the presented crack heads and loser as examples)

Kayla: I just think that the media feeds off of it and it's because of part of what many of our kids believe so the dress the port, they look the port because when they leave us, that's what they see. But it's not who we are, it's not who we all are. In reality, not even a lot of them. It's just survival. When I go home, I have to look the port, I have to dress port.

I: What is port?

Kayla: A lot of our children go to very, very, very urban neighborhoods when they leave us. But if you listen to them, just yesterday I had about[sic] ask me

about Georgia Tech. He's done the research. He's a gang member, but he's done the research about Georgia Tech. So when I walk out of here, I got to look lie blood. I got to act like blood. [blood like blood?] yes, that's a gang. Okay, yes, so he's got to look the port when he opens his mouth, that's not what he is. So, a lot of us, so the media, has given us this image and a lot of children here think I have look that image. You know, even when you watch shows, I don't have cable, but I have an episode of, I have seen two episodes of "Real House Wives of Atlanta" where the girls are, you know, they are arguing with each other, they are feisty, that's not who we are because the friends of the other show, the woman, the women in that show, the educated business woman, one is an attorney, that's not who we are. But the young minds see the negativity because that is what is purported in American society. But that's not who they are. Get them behind doors they want to be cosmetologists, the want to be entrepreneurs, the want to be nurses. Those aren't crack heads, those are contributing members of the society and that's what our children, that's what they see, that's what they want to be. It's just that society says that is who you are and sometimes, that image is easier to believe than the image of a nerd or the military member who gives his or her life daily and I just think that we have to in education, you know, constantly say to the child that is not who you are. This is not who you are and sometimes I tell them to stop fronting, that's not really who you are and you and I both know it. Who are you really. That's why I went to that project, who are you really. At the end of the day, behind closed doors, who are you really? Not that person that you bring to FHS. When you close your eyes and you are lying on your bed and it's dark. Who

do you really want to be? Who are you really? And that project has actually brought kids to tears because it's the reality that this brother that am living right not is not who am I. You know the people with whom I associate, that's not really who I wana be with. I wana be this person and, I think that schools are just gona have to, we need more organizations like, one hundred black men of America to just come in and identify with kids who don't have the support system to be who they want to be and just nurture that, let's do that.

Jalisha: I think African Americans students are probably the most influenced. They fall into the statistics. They don't try. >The---ey let what people say define them or get in their head. They forget to strive or look over and above what people are talking about and thinking and they fall into the trap of yes, am a statistics. Ehmm, they let people's words define them. Cause we are, I won't say, but I think we feel as though African Americans are at the bottom.

Jay: I feel like they get most of the confusion from these music. Because rather than all the singers say okay I will, I went to school. I finished school. Am actually gaining success from school. It will be easy for them to go down to "my mom will need kem am sleeping on the floor. Tugging, am trapping, and selling drugs." They are not actually helping kids they just telling kids a quick way to get money and they are not giving them, they not actually putting in their brain that school is important. I feel like most of those music, kids aren't able to see past the music. They aren't able to see the person they just see the persona that the person is giving off, but they failing to realize that this mugger he's doing what he needs to do to sell his music. So, he is gona tell you, he's gona tell people that's in the

street what they wana hear. They wana hear something about the streets. He's gona tell the classy what they want to hear, he's gona tell them the elegant stuff. He's gona tell the girls what they wana hear. He's gona tell them oh, she going through all the hard time working am gona tell you something about hard time. {*They gona tell all these kids what they want so that they can sell their music and the kids are buying them. They were not looking past it*} I feel like they don't care and I say it again they take it for granted. Some kids are gona let the stereotype roll off. Some kids are not gona care, but for some of us who do care, we are gona have to really work hard to disprove it. We gona show this is not who we are, but for some other, they just gona say, this is another one and we don't care, we are still gona do what we do."

Mai: "Well, at our school, the streets are impounding their minds more than the teachers are, so when you get all these negative thoughts in your mind, school is not gona be one of them." Matt: "I hate to say it, but I think that's, I agree. Maybe not the crack head part, but loser and jocks because everybody wants to play sports, everybody wants to be that man, everybody wants to be popular. Everybody sees like on TV, everybody looks on TV now and says, ooh, that's the cool guy, I want to be like him. Everybody loves him, everybody wants to be friends with him, and who doesn't wana have friends? Maybe not crack head. {I guess some, some, teenagers do do drugs and their parents have done drugs, so just drugs}"

Raul: "Selling drugs"

Shade: "Mostly because people expect lower of them and they don't really get it that you can prove that you are something different."

Yani: "Ghetto! That's the biggest thing. The music they listen to is not great music at all. And I feel they know it's not great, but they do it anyways because it satisfies them for the momentary.

Yan: "What people, they black teenagers here do drugs, of course, you all know that. Once who don't, they probably play sports if not doing it together, so they're jocks and the ones who wana go to college they want to go from sports not from academics. They want to go to school from scholarships from football so they are worried about sports and not their education." Noo! Because when we say, if you say you are going to school for football, you think that football is all that matters. That's that. I think they don't care pretty much after that. They go to school they have a scholarship, that's pretty more neat and then if they are good enough, that is quick money, I guess. Yeah, but here they don't. It's stupid. That's all they wana do. Play football"

I: So are you saying that African Americans tend to live up to these stereotypes/expectations?

Zack: Yes. [so expectations affect what people do with their lives?] yes."

These pieces of data strongly portray the role of ***habitus***[53] on student academic outcome. In explaining the differential educational outcome between minority and mainstream students Bourdieu (1977) posits that social background mediated through a

[53] Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as a system of lasting fungible disposition, which integrates past experiences; and functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions (p. 82-83). Habitus is subjective, but at the same time a collective system of internalized structures, schemes of perceptions, conceptions, and actions common to all members of the same group or class.

complex set of factors that interact in different ways at different levels of schooling impacts students' educational outcomes. Hence, children's educational performance is more related to their parents' educational history than occupational status. Bourdieu describes this complex interactive system of factors as "habitus"—a system of lasting fungible disposition, which integrates past experiences; and functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (p. 82-83)—and posits that minority and working class students' habitus predisposes them for academic failure. According to him, habitus is subjective and at the same time a collective system of internalized structures, schemes of perceptions, conceptions, and actions common to all members of the same group or class. In other words, habitus comprises of beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of those inhabiting one's social world. It is the conglomeration of deeply internalized values that define an individual's attitude toward events and institutions such as school and schooling.

Drawing from this concept of habitus, Bourdieu explains that minority and economically disadvantage students fail academically because they live in neighborhoods where success is rare and effort and academic achievement are hardly rewarded. Their habitus disposes them to see failure as success, while believing that they have no chance in the professional job market. Thus, this group of students accepts failure and low ambition as normal, an attitude that is shunned by their middle class peers who grow up around people who have 'made it' socially and economically in the society. Consequently, habitus not only engenders attitude and conducts that promotes lack of academic achievement among minority and working class students—as is evident in the

above excerpts of data—it also enables the reproduction of objective social structure, societal inequality between minority and low SES students and their affluent peers.

Chapter XIV

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore how academic achievement is performed as an interactional event between minority and low SES students and their inner city high school(s), the mechanisms through which academic achievement is deployed and navigated and the effect of this performance on students' sensemaking of school and schooling, academic behavior and academic outcome. Because student learning, academic development and achievement are complex phenomena that involve the individual and her/his school environment, examining how students negotiate learning and achievement in a naturalistic setting provides a holistic understanding of the achievement gap within and between minority and economically disadvantaged students and their mainstream and affluent peers. In order to attend to how process, person, context, and time shape student learning and educational outcome and vice versa, I employed a humanistic approach to human development that is informed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (2005), Bandura's sociocognitive theory of human development (1996), and Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977).

Summary of the Study

In chapter I, introduced the reader to the statement of the problem, purpose and intellectual goal of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations and considerations, and limitations of the study. Then in chapter II, I made explicit my

positionality, pointing out ways in which I both wrote and was written into all that I shared (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2002). Next, in chapter III, I presented the literature review focusing on the history of American public education, the achievement gap, and theories that explain the gap. Chapter IV deals the theoretical framework that guides the study including an explanation for the need for an integrated framework, the varied components of the wholistic humanistic framework and how they interact to explain the puzzle of academic achievement. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study and the need for an integrated theory in evaluating high school students' learning and academic outcome. Within chapter V, I focus on the study's methodological framework, delineating the underlying epistemic and ontological assumptions, methods of data collection, and data analysis. I specifically discussed the research approach I utilized to explore the interaction between student and context creating academic behaviors and school culture and the role of this interaction in reproducing the status quo of minority and low SES students' academic failure. In chapter VI, I present a thick description of the research setting and participants.

Focusing on students' and faculty interviews, focus group and class discussions, all observational field notes, school documents on policies, processes and procedures and researcher's journals and diaries, Section one—chapters VII through XI—centers on the analysis, findings and interpretations that are primarily related to the first research question: How do minority and low SES high school students perceive and make sense of school and schooling: What mechanisms undergird their perception of school and schooling? Specifically, chapter VII focuses on students' definition and/or description of school and schooling. Chapter VIII presents students' explanation of academic

achievement. Chapter IX discusses students' view of school policies and practices, their assessment of the implications of school policies, practices, and procedures for student learning and academic achievement, as well as the policies and practices' relationship to students' understanding and interpretation of the meaning and purpose of school and schooling, while chapter X focuses on faculty and staff perception of the policies and practices along with their implications for student academic behaviors and academic achievement.

Chapter XI explains students' perception and sensemaking of school and schooling and the mechanisms that undergird their sensemaking of school and schooling. Drawing upon the entire data corpus, chapter XII: School climate and culture, and chapter XIII: Student academic behaviors answer the second research question: How does the bidirectional interaction between person characteristics and school processes and procedures impact student academic behavior, school culture, and student's academic outcome: How does each of these components (person characteristics and school characteristics) influence student learning and academic outcome? Finally, chapter XIV provides the discussion, implications, and conclusion of the study.

Discussion: Rethinking the Achievement Gap

I set out to explore minority and low SES inner city high school students' perception and sense-making of school, learning, academic behaviors and academic achievement. I sought an understanding of the reason behind the persistent academic failure of inner city minority and low SES high school students, as well as the academic achievement gap within and between this subgroup of students and in so

doing, indulged in my own sensemaking of school and schooling in the United States, as it relates to minority and economically disadvantaged groups.

Given that throughout the findings chapters, I provided detailed discussion and interpretation of FHS students' sensemaking of school and schooling, the mechanisms through which they make sense of school and schooling and the impact of the bidirectional interaction between process, person, context, and time on students' academic behaviors and academic achievement. In this section of the study, I turn to my own sensemaking of school, schooling, and the achievement gap through FHS students' sensemaking of school and schooling. Hence, in this chapter, I present my understanding of academic achievement and/or lack of achievement of minority and economically disadvantaged (African American) students made relevant through my interaction with FHS students.

Throughout the findings, analysis, and interpretations chapters, I refrained from using themes to describe insights about participants understanding and interpretation of the meaning and purpose of school and schooling; instead I used emergent concepts. In this chapter, as I discuss my sensemaking of the findings situated in the social, cultural, historical, political, and philosophical perspective of school and schooling in the United States, I use themes to connect the local findings of this study to broader educational issues that overtly and covertly orchestrate the educational outcome of minority and economically disadvantage students. First, I present my sensemaking of the study's findings situated in the foundations of education perspective of school and schooling in the United States. Second, I present the general and specific implications of the findings of this study as it relates to

school and schooling in both local and global levels of education. I close the chapter with my recommendation for future studies, a call for the rethinking of the achievement Gap.

Summary of Study Findings

Predominantly, FHS students view school as an enforced institution and posit that the compulsory nature of school distorts its effectiveness. Thus, they describe "school as a joke," "something to do," or at the extreme, "a place not to be" because of the incongruence between what school is purported to be and what it actually is based on their experiences with school and schooling. They believe that, like school, academic achievement measured by grade and grading is not a true reflection of what a student knows and is able to do because grade and grading is a manipulation of students' academic outcome by students, parents, school administrators, teachers and the entire society through differential policies, practices, and procedures that produces differential educational outcomes in the era of equal educational opportunity and heightened school accountability.

Resonate within these findings are broader cultural, historical, political, and social educational issues that border along the enduring debates over (1) the meaning and purpose of education, (2) equal educational opportunity versus unequal educational outcomes, (3) educational debt versus academic achievement gap, (4) disparity between grade and mastery of skills, (5) academic achievement gap as an offshoot of deficit ideology, (6) courageous and caring teacher trapped in uncaring systems, (7) the illusion of teacher work versus teacher inventive work, (8) lack of high expectations, rigor, and academic excellence vs. student centered education, and

(9) smart leadership vs. moral leadership. In what follows, I take up each of these themes as it relates to the findings of this study and to broader literature on education production and school improvement literature.

Meaning and Purpose of School and Schooling

Replete within this study and across educational literature is the contested meaning and purpose of school and schooling. From its birth to date, schools have been conceived as agents of social mobility, cultural assimilation, development and nurturance of the mind of children, antidotes for ignorance and prejudices and solutions to various societal problems not excluding the Puritan crusade against ignorance and the Jeffersonian meritocracy or racking of the rubbish (Mondala, 2011; Sadovnik et al., 2013; Spring 2012). On the other hand, various scholars define education differently depending on the school of thought that informs their understanding of school and schooling. Whereas some scholars view education as a process of awakeness, empowerment, and humanization of the individual (Greene, 1978; Dewey, 1897; Kohn, 2003), other see it as a means of creating and sustaining a democratic society or "a process of socialization that allows one to take active place in the specific society in which she or he lives" (McMannon, 2008, p. 5). Like these scholars, FHS students view education as a process of enlightenment, empowerment, socialization and humanization. However, unlike them, these students see education as a preparation for adulthood, learning that enables a high school student "to see what gona happen in the real world. What *one* gona actually have to go through as she or he gets out of school, like as adult, parent, and everything" (Keni, Participant Interview, Mar. 31, 2014).

Each of these definitions of education and the purposes of school has its implications for school leadership, theories, policies, and practices. As Sadovnik et al (2013) observe, the steady expansion of the educational system as well as the complexity of the society has led to the diversification if not diffusion of schools' roles. Although useful in themselves and within the context in which they existed, when taken together, these goals' theories, policies and practices become contradictory and counterproductive even to the point of hindering the wholistic development students, which they purport to serve, a point that I made relevant through the findings of this study. Correspondingly, the lack of agreement among stakeholders on the purpose of school and meaning of education have generated conflicting reform agendas (David & Cuban, 2013) that have reduced U.S public schools into ideological laboratories, with students, especially the poor and marginalized, as guinea pigs and teachers categorized as either pawns, intransigent, or outrightly stupid.

Finally, Sadovnik et al. (2013) insinuated the idea of schools as the battleground of ideologies in their description of the conglomeration of conflicting ideologies and theories that play out in school. Drawing from conflict theory, Sadovnik and colleagues used the metaphor of schools as social battlegrounds where students struggle against teachers and teachers against administrators to denote the conflict of interest inherent in schools as the various stakeholders' fight to institutionalize their individual agendas—a fight that is evident in the current school reform agendas. This metaphor of schools as battlegrounds of ideologies is enacted and re-enacted daily in FHS as teachers, administrators, and students struggle against NCBL counterproductive requirements and district bureaucratic red tapes that

promote the recycling and pushing out without educating minority and economically disadvantaged students in the name of on time graduation.

Nevertheless, Sadovnik et al's (2013) description of these controversies as quality control measures through which the U.S public reinvigorate their belief and expectations from their school forces the reader to begin seeing these theories, policies, and program as well-intentioned initiatives and the negative educational outcomes of these program as a synergistic effect of the interaction between process, person, context and time. At the same time, it this awareness that challenges us as educator to reflect on our individual and collective roles in generating these confounding feedbacks that arises from program implementation, school and schooling.

Equal Educational Opportunity vs. Unequal Educational Outcome

Also permeating the data and findings of this study is the theme of equal educational opportunity vs. unequal educational outcome, in other words, opportunity vs. access to equitable education, replete in student academic literature. As Carter and Welner (2013) observe, "Obstacles to providing all students with high-quality educational opportunities are multifaceted and widespread" (p. 169). Thus, believing that a one-size-fits all program would close the academic achievement gap is both brazen and preposterous because obstacles to equitable educational access and opportunities exist at various levels of the U.S. society and different degrees for particular individuals and groups. Although these obstacles are not insurmountable, the first step toward eliminating them would not be investment into unattainable goals and reformation strategies; rather it would be "in recognizing and understanding both

the historical barriers to inequality and unequitable educational access and opportunities (Carter & Welner, 2013; Sadovnik et al, 2013).

In this study, I define equity as making sure that every student has access to the necessary resources, opportunities, power, and responsibilities they need to lead productive meaningful lives, as well as creating the opportunities that reveal, question, and challenge unfair and/or unjust differences. Hence, I contest educational policies, practices, and procedures that withhold from students, the opportunities, power, and responsibilities to engage in productive and meaningful academic endeavors as inequitable as it reduces students' chances for a fair and just competition in the academic world. Thus, in this document, equitable access to quality education refers the provision of quality education to student through innovative pedagogy that is driven by a cyclic model of continuous improvement, which begins with assessing students' competencies, analyzing and identifying needs, effectively planning and setting goal for addressing the needs through rigorous and relevant instructional programs and opportunities that focus on teaching, assessing, providing feedback to students, modifying instruction and programs based on assessment data, re-teaching, re-assessing (Deming, 1986). It also implies holding students accountable for a standard of academic excellence and working with them to achieve this standard.

This model of instruction focuses on meeting each student where s/he is and working with her/him to achieve the set academic goal. It prioritizes students' mastery of skills over grades. It is student centered. It develops and enhances student accountability for learning and mastery of skills and teacher responsibility for students' development and mastery of the right skill through continuous assessment, provision of truthful, but

useful feedback about development and mastery of skill, as well as readiness to take student to the next level of mastery through rigorous, but relevant instruction, scaffolding, and gradual release. Hence, Jaa in responding to the question on FHS' capability to educate its students for the 21st century global community stated,

> What is so interesting is that you can provide all the technology in the world to somebody, to a teacher to teach, ehmm, but that doesn't guarantee any type of success be it locally or globally. Part of what it is, is that, do we have enough teaching materials, sure we do. We have computer labs, we have Smart Boards, students have access to various programs, but while we have the materials, the students lack the knowledge of the skills, and we can take them to the lab, and we can do research and introduce them to understanding bias in different websites, but yet, it doesn't prepare them. There is nothing here that actually says, this is what the world is going to be like, {you know, it's great, we get a few people here and there to take excel or few people to do Finance or courses like that, but by and large, majority of our students don't have access because they choose not to have access, it is not that the teachers are not willing to grant it, but they don't have access because they don't want access and because they don't want access, it becomes a moot point with materials and again, you can have everything in the world that can help them technologically, but, if they are not willing to be active participants, then , it doesn't matter (F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

Invariably, for the most part, it is not that the school is ill equipped to provide these skills; rather it is that the client the school serves is not willing to apply themselves to an effective and efficient use of the resources that are in place for them. They don't

apply themselves because the larger system does not expect them to do so. Hence, there exists in this space differential educational expectations, practices, policies, and procedures that are masked by the ethos of equal educational opportunities. These differential educational practices become smoking mirrors that produce and sustain unequal educational outcomes. However, these learning disabling practices are both systemic and contextual. As the bidirectional interaction that exists between these policies and practices and self-protective students, teachers, administrators, and parents crystallize over time, they create the culture of academic failure, lack of student motivation toward excellence and a sense of entitlement; low teacher morale and high turnover, and the visionlessness that character most predominantly minority and low SES inner city high schools.

Finally, equitable access to quality education implies exposing students to a wide variety of educational and practical life experiences as well as challenging them to explore these opportunities through curricular and extracurricular activities that involve them in their communities, states, nation, and the global community. Nonetheless, the challenges of equitable access to quality education have implications for differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001) and student centered education (Dewey, 1902) as they are utilized in FHS.

Educational Debt vs. Academic Achievement Gap

In Carter and Welner (2013), Gloria Ladson-Billings asserts that the achievement gap is an outcome of educational debt and contends, “The only way to truly understand achievement disparities is to understand the larger context in which they developed” (p. 14). In her argument, Ladson-billing introduced the notions of educational debt and

opportunity gap and their implications for the educational outcome of minority and economically disadvantaged (ED) students. Similarly, Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu (1977), Giroux (1983), and MacLeod (2009) advocated the understanding of the educational outcome of minority and low SES students from the standpoint of schools as a legitimized social reproducer of inequality. The participants of this research, through their sensemaking of school and schooling made relevant these scholars' beliefs about the role of the society, schools, and minority and low SES students in the permanentization of their wage laborer position.

Haveman (2006) defines the educational debt as "the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing [sic] in (primarily) low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g. crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment" (In Ladson-Billing, 2006, p. 5). It is the overhang of "historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies" that excluded and continues to exclude minority and ED students from equitable access to quality education (Ladson-Billing, 2006; 2013, in Carter and Welner, 2013; Baker, 2006). Metaphorically, education debt corresponds to a national debt that accrues from budget deficit or imbalance in government spending overtime (Ladson-billing, 2013).

In like manner, educational debt results from the legacy of educational inequities in the United States, otherwise opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013; Baker, 2006). Put succinctly, the notion of education debt refers to accumulation of deferential educational policies, programs, and practices between minority and ED students and their affluent white peers over time. Such practices began early in the history of United States

educational policies such as the de facto and de jure exclusion of African Americans, Native American, and Mexican Americans (Conf: Baker, 2006; Spring, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010) from access to quality education, rigorous programs and practices that educate the whole child, and differential policies that target minority groups for incarceration (Fine, 1991). However, this exclusion continues in the 21st century through the deskilling and divesting educational policies, practices, and procedures that rob minority and ED students of developmentally generative personal agency, self-efficacy, academic self-discipline and self-worth, responsibility, and integrity.

Implicit in the educational debt metaphor is the idea of repayment because debts are owed with the intention of paying them back sometime in the future. However, instead of witnessing a repayment of the education debt, the debt ceiling has geometrically risen to date through the over celebrated high expectations of national and state policies, especially NCBL, without matching materials and human resources to facilitate the actualization of the said expectations among minority and ED students who occupy inner city schools. Conversely, as the findings of this study portray, if this notion of educational debt is not carefully deconstructed, it's repayment yields a confounding feedback of sense of entitlement, apathy, and consequent widening of the debt ceiling because the creditor does not feel any type of responsibility toward the repayment of what is owed.

Similarly, opportunity gap refers to the inequitable access to crucial resources and opportunities inside and outside schools that students need to reach their individuals potentials as human beings and contributing members of the society. Although opportunity gap and achievement gap are intertwined, they are quite different in their

definition and focus (Carter & Welner, 2011). Whereas achievement and achievement gap focus on individual or groups' ability and inability to achieve given goals, opportunity and opportunity gap emphasizes the availability and/or lack of resources to achieve given goals (Carter & Welner, 2013). Within current educational context, opportunity gap exists through the narrow prescribed curriculum that is replete within minority and ED inner city schools, which excludes the Arts, humanities and advanced technology courses such as IBM from the curriculum; heightened focus on high school and college sports at the expense of service and project-based learning—enriched curriculum that is obtainable in predominantly white/Asian and affluent schools, and counterintuitive policies that dispose minority and ED students toward long-term academic failure. As Ladson-Billings asserts, unless concerted effort is expended towards equalizing the opportunities available to all students, the achievement gap will continue to widen (Carter & Welner, 2013). Invariably, since the achievement gap is not closing, the education debt is not being paid. Why is this so, even in the 21st century?

Instead of seeing the differential access to equitable education as a happenstance, a debt to be paid, Bowles and Gintis (1976) and other social reproduction theorists argued that schools are created to sustain the U.S. capitalistic economy through the reproduction inequalities. Hence, the achievement gap exists to serve the economic needs of the society. In other words, both the opportunity gap and the achievement gap are intentionally orchestrated and played out through "school." Thus, the education debt is no debt after all; it is a mechanism of subordination (Sadovnik, 2013). Schooling, then, becomes a process of legitimizing inequality through differential education and socialization of the haves and have-nots, while schools become the reproducers of social

and economic inequalities through tracking, differential curriculum, expectations, practices, and policies that sort and categorize students into "capitalist and wage laborers" (Bowles & Gintis 1976). As is evident in Baker's (2006) *Paradoxes*, the southern states used school to stifle the economic growth and social mobility of African Americans, thus keeping them in their place as handy laborers, as they are socialized to accept their lowly status in the class structure through cooption, and manipulation of educational curriculum, policies, and practices (Sadovnik et al., 2013).

Disparity Between Grade and Mastery of Skills

James Carifio and Theodore Carey (2010) described grade manipulation as effective low-cost options school districts use to reduce the pressure of student dropout rate, as well as to minimize the added cost of student retention and attrition, especially in current political and economic environment of increased educational cost and reduced budgets. According to them, since most school districts can no longer afford the funding for high-cost intervention programs designed to keep "at-risk" of academic failure students in school, district and schools resort to "experimenting with modified grading practices" irrespective of the consequences of assigned grades on student confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation (p.219). These grading practices include but are not limited to minimum grades, no zeros or zeros are not permitted, open door make-up work, and redo policies (Carifio & Carey, 2010; Friess 2008a). Described as a strategy to address problems associated with students who post catastrophically low grades in the first six to eight weeks of the school year (Carifio & Carey, 2010; Dunhan, 2008a; Guskey, 2002), proponents of modified grading assert that such practices do more that pass a few students who would have otherwise failed. They contend that modified grading

contributes to student motivation through maintaining a healthy locus of control within the student. However, critics argue that modified grades and grading is an unearned assistance to low-performing students and contributes to grade inflation as well as the social promotion of minority and "at-risk" of academic failure students without educating them (Friess, 2008b; Montgomery, 2009; Carifio & Carey, 2010).

Although grade and grading modification have been an acceptable teacher strategy for mediating harsher effect of catastrophically low grades, implementing a district or schoolwide modified grading scheme, especially in schools that cater to predominantly minority and low SES (African American) students—who carry with them the historical and cultural background of marginalization, and educational and economic disenfranchisement as well as generational poverty that prevents them from getting extra help toward their education outside the education provided by the schools—is disposing them toward unfair competition and future academic failure, since their academic credentials would not have the same purchasing power as those of the students who got their credential through rigorous and challenging academic work.

As this study reveals, grade modification is a legitimatized practice in FHS and students, parents, and administrators hound and bully teachers who refuse to play the game. As is suggested in the entire data corpus, letter grades from FHS do not have the same purchasing power as grades from other schools. Thus, majority of the students including honors and AP students settle for the minimum (70-D) since the difference between an 'A' and a 'D' ends in FHS, especially as these grades are more often than not, symbol of class attendance, controlled behavior, and teacher compliance to smart

leadership as opposed to student's learning and level of mastery of a given concept. Jaa speaks of this aversion to learning in the following expert,

> "you have to trick them to get them to learn because anything that you say straight out is related to learning and to them being able to do something else, they want no part of it. But, if you tell them, or we are going to do this fun thing and oh blah, blahh, blahhhh!!{And you mask it, then they will do it. And it is sad that you have to mask learning in order to get them to be engaged. The idea that sometimes there are some things that you have to do in order to be better is lost. They refuse to partake in that idea, but if you dress it up as, oh yeah!! Let's go create our own short stories to get them to figure out whether they understand the narrative structure or not>. You know, you can't say we gona create short stories to see whether you understand the narrative structure or not, you have to mask it behind this idea of, this other verbiage when you know, you are trying to achieve the same goal" (Jaa, F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

This huge discrepancy is created by the culture of given grades instead of earned grades as evidence of mastery of skills, which permeates FHS. Although this is the lived reality of graduates of this institution, this culture of social promotion continues to exist without being challenged by students or parents; rather they endorse it, use it and work for it. Therefore, even though the research site has educational resources that are comparable to those in other schools, the educational outcome of these students are still not comparable to those of their counterparts in other schools because of the differential educational practices that disable the students from developing the academic discipline, resilience, and desire for true academic excellence by not holding them accountable for

their own learning. Thus, these handicapping practices subtly promote that deficit[54] ideology that propagates the superiority of one race over other races.

Although unintended, these deficit driven policies and practices create in this group of students a sense of entitlement to grades, which under normal circumstances should be formative evidence of student's ability in the mastery of content area skills aimed at challenging students toward excellence, but has become a smoking mirror that masks the reality of systemic differential education of the rich and the poor; the historically minority and the mainstream. However, in this era, it is not just mainstream politicians and educators divesting and sorting minority and less privileged of the society to menial jobs through differential education.

> "And it just becomes this vicious cycle every year of coming back believing things are gona be different and yet you just realize they are not. And it doesn't matter how you shuffle things around or how you shuffle people around, the bigger system doesn't care and since the bigger system doesn't care, the students don't care because they know the bigger system doesn't care. And you just kina get through osmosis sucked into the same apathy and nobody cares and because they know they gona be passed, and you as a teacher know they gona be passed, and you have two options, it's either you just go ahead and give them the extra point as a 70 or because again, it's, you gona have to explain the 69 and

[54] Deficit ideology discounts sociopolitical context, such as the systemic conditions of racism, economic injustice, differential educational opportunities and expectations, that grant some people greater social, political and economic access. Gorski (2010) described deficit ideology as "blame the victim mentality" that is systemically applied based on a single dimension of identity. At its core, deficit ideology is the belief that inequalities result "not from unjust social conditions such as systemic racism or economic injustice," segregated housing e.t.c, but from "intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral deficiencies assumed to be inherent in disenfranchised individuals and communities" (p. 4).

everything else, and you end up on trial for kids lack of performance" (Jaa, F. Participant Interview, Jan. 3, 2014).

To avoid being on trial for student lack of performance and for truthfully representing each students' level of mastery of the taught and assessed concepts and skills as evidenced in students' guided and independent class works, as well as formative and summative assessments on the grading scale, most teachers resort to giving failing students passing grades (70 -75 = D) whether there is evidence that the respective student knows and can performs the targeted skills and concepts or not. The irony of the situation is that even students who barely attended classes were also expected to receive a passing grade even though their attendance record shows their numerous absences from class. Nevertheless, the more teachers comply to this false grades and deceitful representation of students' learning and academic skills, the more the given grade bar is raised for teachers from D to C and currently (the last quarter at the time of this study), teachers were being called-in to explain and justify why majority of their students' grades were not 'As' and 'Bs', "If majority of your grades are Cs and Ds, then you are not able to motivate students to learn and master the skills, and if you cannot do that, you don't deserve to be a teacher" (Justy's conference with Assistant principal Oct. 23, 2014), and again, "do you think of the impart of this failure (grade of 70-75) on the students psyche? If a student fails you two quarters, what do you think they would do? Research shows that a student fails two quarters, that student would give-up and dropout."

However, in this whole conversation, there was no mention of why the student is failing and whether the said repeated failure (an official passing grade of 70) is an effect of the previous quarter's given passing grade of 70 to a student who knew that s/he

truthfully earned a minimum grade, 60 from two or three days class attendance, but because failure is not possible in this culture, they would always pass whether they showed that they have learned or not. As a student rightly said, “why should I work for it, if I can get it free? (Fieldnotes, Jan. 16, 2014), and another student to his teacher while she was redirecting him to participate in the lesson that was going on, “What can you do? You can’t fail me whether I do the work or not, so stop disturbing me and mind your business” (Fieldnotes, Feb. 8, 2014).

Hence, teachers cannot push students to be their best because if they push for mastery of skills, they would not only have to explain and justify why the student does not deserve an A, but also have to indict themselves for not being able to motivate the student to apply her/himself to the mastery level, so the teachers “throw the towel, because it is easier to throw the towel” (Kayla, F. Participants Interview, May 27, 2014). This study, then implicates teachers, students, and uncaring systemic practices that in consort with person characteristics create and sustain student and teacher apathy as well as their acceptance of mediocre education.

The Illusion of Teacher Work vs. Teacher Inventive Work

Additionally, pervading the data set generated from this study is the heightened focus on teachers and administrators’ paper work, meetings, and professional development workshops that leave no time for actual planning, doing, checking, and acting on student learning and academic progress data. I describe this practice as the illusion of teacher work vs. teacher inventive work and define it as the belief that copious paper works, heightened teacher accountability and incessant policies would improve

student learning and academic achievement without equal accountability demands from students.

With this mindset, administrators of inner city high schools devote their time to meetings, planning and implementing prescriptive professional development for teachers, data collection and analysis that excludes program and policy evaluation and student accountability; instead of being visible in the classrooms observing student and teacher academic behaviors and critically analyzing, evaluating, and calibrating programs and policies to improve observed student and teacher instructional and classroom behaviors. Overworked, mentally and emotionally bitten, and lacking the support of administration and parents to inculcate in students the self-discipline, responsibility, and epistemological curiosity (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Freire, 1985) needed for academic achievement, teachers "throw the towel" and join the status quo, as the culture of mediocrity, visionlessness, and indolence becomes the glorified symbol of efficiency and effectiveness in the on time graduation of majority of minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Drawing from the culture of handouts and entitlements, students in this space do not see the need to apply themselves to their learning. However, they feel entitled to a passing grade whether they earned it or not. When that does not happen, "they run to administration" who in an effort to encourage students to remain in school bullies teachers into giving students grades through heightened teacher accountability (lesson plan, parent contact, after school tutorials, evidences of team meeting, planning, and analysis of assessment; verbal threats of getting the same students in the subsequent year, evidences of implementing prescribed curriculum, and constant meeting to defend ones

instructional practices, classroom management decisions, and grading rationale). The constant battle between teachers and administration over students' accountability for their learning, which teachers always loose diminishes teacher respect and authority in the classroom and creates trust issues between administrators and teachers.

Over time, this distrust leads to a feeling of teacher worthlessness and students' sense of entitlement, which pervades the study's setting. Again, the confusion of student centeredness with lack of student accountability for their learning becomes evident as administrators, in an effort to improve graduation rate, pushes teachers authority and expertise to the backdrop in decision making regarding instructional policies and practices. They emphasize teacher accountability over student accountability for learning; and hold numerous meetings and workshops for themselves and teachers, meetings that amount to nothing as they leave off the radar student accountability.

Hence, high school graduation, which should epitomize graduates' readiness for life in the workforce, colleges and universities becomes for this group of students a thing of regret, and wasted years of schooling as they suddenly discover that they have been ill-prepared to compete with their peers for jobs, college and university admissions, and even the armed forces. This regret for lost years pervades snippets of the data from sixteen (seven boys and nine girls) graduating seniors who participated in this study as each described her/his future plan. Lamenting this priority of teacher multifarious work over student learning and academic achievement Jaa noted,

> And, again, am all for accountability on some levels, but if a student can't tell you what I have done in my classroom and yet there are pieces of paper that are thorough sketches of what am doing, if the student can't come back and tell you

what I have done, the piece of paper is moot, it means nothing and I will rather have teachers, who, you know what, so what, you don't feel out that piece of paper, but, if a student can't tell you what is going on in your classroom, then, what value are you to the kid, what value are you to the school.

Lack of High Expectations, Rigor, and Academic Excellence vs. Student Centered Education

Also resonate within the data is the theme of high expectation, rigor, relevance, and relationship as it relates to student centered education. For the purpose of this study, I interpreted high expectation directly from the Merriam Webster Dictionary (2014) to mean expecting more from life than just the fulfillment of the basic needs for food, shelter, and sex. Drawing from this basic definition of high expectation, expecting more from life, teaching high expectation would imply teaching human beings to expect more from life than just the basic needs—food, shelter, and sex. If this definition is lifted into the educational system, high expectation in schools would mean teaching students to expect from school more than just the basic literacy skills of letter recognition, word construction, and addition and subtraction of numbers as this has become the reality for most inner city high school graduates who cannot go beyond basic 4th grade reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.

Nevertheless, in the educational system, high expectation has become one of those catch phrases that mean different things to different stakeholders without an agreement on what it actually means and how it should look in practice. Deriving from Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) Pygmalion effect, high expectation in education became synonymous with holding all students accountable to the same standards irrespective of

their individual capability and background. Although, surfacely, a noble idea that seem to promote the notion of equality and social justice for all, high expectation as premised in NCBL and practiced in schools and other educational establishments confounds the social-justice idea of equality by undermining equity.

When morally deconstructed, high expectations that focus on the illusion of teacher work—teacher accountability accessed through the amount of paper work, documentation of student behavior, and teacher professional development on prescribed curriculum and pedagogy implemented within a school and/or school district—adds nothing to student learning and academic achievement, instead it takes away from it because more time is spent on multifarious teacher work than on inventive teacher work; teacher accountability for students' grade instead of teacher accountability for students' learning and development, student accountability for school attendance; rather than student accountability for their learning and development.

Invariably, high expectation that emphasizes the illusion of teacher work over student accountability for quality work; social promotion over seasoned development and mastery of skills, paper work and meetings over rigorous instruction and assessment of learning is an antipode to educational equality, equity, and social-justice. It widens the intellectual, social, and economic divide between the haves and have-nots of the society by further shortchanging and marginalizing those who are most in need of the promise of free and public school education. Since education begins at home and continues all through life, institutionalized education such as free public school education is then, an extension of the schooling that began in the homes (Shay, F. Participant Interview, April 6, 2014). However, it becomes a privilege not only to the poor who otherwise could not

afford it, but also to the rich and privileged of the society because education at it's best curbs the excesses of life. It engenders reflection on past experiences and a drawing from those experiences to improve the future. Education comprises not "only of learning and having experiences and growing because of the knowledge you have learned in a school setting, but it's also in the world, the great world, the whole scheme of things outside of the four walls of school" (Shay, F. Participant Interview, April 6, 2015).

A good educational experience, then, is one that challenges the learner through rigor and excellence, an education that challenges students to actively construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, problem solving in addressing enduring and emerging issues and problems in real life contexts. This is the hub of learner-centered education, the empowerment of learners to develop epistemological curiosity through which they analyze, evaluate and question environmental information (speeches, signs, symbols and written text) to extract explicit and implicit knowledge (Dewey, 1902; 2011; Freire, 1985). This type of education is not acquired through social promotion, prescribed curriculum, lack of student accountability for learning and phony educational policies that looks so good on paper, but confounds the problems they are meant to solve.

Criticizing the mediocre education that characterize majority of predominantly minority and economically disadvantaged inner city high schools, Shay, a participant in the study stated, "I think, sometimes we get an education and in my opinion, it's just may be on the surface where you just learned just enough. Just enough because I need to see, or I just wana be. I think a good education and a good school experience is when our

children want more than just enough to get by" (F. Participant Interview, April 6, 2014). It is an education that pushes students to want to rise above their natural tendencies of apathy, lassitude, mediocrity, and instinctual existence to physical, spiritual, and intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm, self-discipline, and desire for excellence and human dignity needed for self and societal improvement (Butler, 2000; Aloni, 1999; Freire, 1985; Hook, 1994).

Smart Leadership vs. Moral Leadership[55]

Although majority of faculty participants in the study described the site school administrators, as "neglectful" of the big picture as it relates to students' future after high school, I would not, really characterize these school administrators as neglectful; rather as the students pointed out, they are consumed by irrelevant matters or what I technically refer to as selective or smart leadership caused by the dilemma of school accountability. As the theory of personal agency purports, individuals, when caught in a dilemma, agentically resort to self-protective mechanisms (Bandura, 1997). The irony of NCBL is that it punishes schools (teachers and administrators) for what is beyond their human powers to achieve. Since students' performance on the standardized test, which is one of the measures of school effectiveness, cannot be determined by the school alone, smart administrators choose to invest their time and money into markers of school effectiveness that they can control, otherwise, the on time graduation of students.

Hence, like all bogus initiatives that suffers from selective enforcement and differential implementation, the mantra of NCBL for administrators and teachers who are

[55] A leadership process that focuses on felt needs, obligations, and duties that are derived from widely shared community values, ideas and ideals (Thomas Sergiovanni, 1992; Michael Fullan, 2001; 2007). Moral Leadership involves moral purpose—acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of the people leadership affects (Fullan, 2007).

charged with the education of a group of students who carry with them, the history of educational debt, deficit thinking, and urban hi-pop culture becomes on-time graduation through any possible means, regardless of the implication. Although I do not indict these administrators for their students' educational outcome, for this involves a lot of factors, as this study portrays, I also do not exonerate from their leadership decisions and choices in handling this ethical dilemma that might have further marginalized the students these policies were meant to save from academic failure.

Hence, choosing smart leadership over moral leadership, these school administrator exacerbate the situation of minority and economically disenfranchised students through deficit laced policies, practices, and procedures that subtly reinforce the institutionalized belief that minority groups and people in poverty lack the mental ability to rise above their situation (Gorski, 2010; Olivos, 2006). Thus, they compromise ethical and moral leadership for smart leadership that focuses on the easy way out and what is in it for me syndrome. By so doing, they overlook both their own professional ethics, and the well-being of the individual students whose future, like a script, is being subtly written by the reciprocal interaction between their leadership decisions and the student's personal characteristics.

Academic Achievement Gap as an Offshoot of Deficit Ideology

Drawing this study's findings and my own processes of sensemaking from my experiences, readings, epistemological and ontological beliefs, I have come to the conclusion that academic achievement is a socially constructed reality and the academic achievement gap is an inclusion and/or exclusion mechanism that still exists in the 21st century because of the deficit mentality that drives instructional practices, policies, and

procedures within schools that cater to predominantly minority and economically disadvantaged students. Gorski (2010) described deficit ideology as "blame the victim mentality" that is systemically applied based on a single dimension of identity. At its core, deficit ideology is the belief that inequalities result "not from unjust social conditions such as systemic racism or economic injustice," segregated housing e.t.c, but from "intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral deficiencies assumed to be inherent in disenfranchised individuals and communities" (Gorski, 2010, p. 4). Deficit thinking discounts the sociopolitical contexts that grant some members of the society access to high quality schooling, social and cultural capitals as privilege, while justifying existing social conditions, such as inequality, as problem located within the poor and disenfranchised members of the society and not pressed upon by the societal structures.

Hence, efforts aimed at redressing inequalities within the society are directed toward "fixing" the disenfranchised; rather than the conditions that disenfranchises them (Gorski, 2010). Because they are black and poor, they, supposedly, have fragile ego and must be handled with care. Consequently, most school administrators and teachers belief that this group of students should be pitied for their condition—sympathy that implies low expectation for academic performance, lack of discipline and accountability for their own learning and academic achievement, lack of instructional rigor and standard of academic excellence, given grades, and social promotion; practices that are antipode of what is obtainable in predominantly white and affluent schools.

Hence, even though the research site has educational resources that are comparable to some of the affluent schools in the school district, the educational outcome of these students are still not comparable to that of their counterparts in those schools

because of the differential educational practices that disable the students from applying their personal agency and self-efficacy in pursuing quality education. Thus, these handicapping practices subtly promote the deficit ideology that propagates the superiority of one race or group of people over other races. Although unintended, these deficit driven policies and practices create in this group of students a sense of entitlement to given grades, which from my perspective is worse than social promotion because it gives students false information about their academic progress.

Additionally, given grade or modified grades and grading practices prevent both teacher and student from critically analyzing student learning and academic progress with the intent of improving teaching, learning, and academic success by applying a quick fix. This quick fix stops student and teacher from analyzing their individual and collective role in the teaching and learning processes that created the disconnect between knowledge and application within the student. Under normal circumstances, grade, which should be evidence of student's ability in the mastery of content area skills, under given grade becomes a smoking mirror that masks the reality of systemic discriminatory education of the rich and the poor; the historically minority and the mainstream. However, in this era, it is not just mainstream politician and educators divesting and sorting minority and less privileged of the society to menial jobs through differential education.

The irony of school and schooling; grade and mastering of skills; student accountability for learning and teacher accountability for student learning begins to unfold the last two quarters of twelfth grade when students who have above 3.5 GPA and have been on 'A' and 'B' honor rolls all through their high school years suddenly realize

that their high GPA along with their 'As' and 'Bs' are worthless because they "honestly do not have the skills to pass the required college admission tests" (Focus Group Interview, Mar. 4, 2014). But, then, it is too late as most of them settle the score by concluding that "school is a joke, a thing to do and a waste of twelve years of ones' life," while a few plan on alternative routes of acquiring the required skills for career and college that their high schools divesting policies denied them.

Hence, when asked, "what is your plan for the future," the senior participants were quick to say, "I don't know." I will just go to the military and from their figure out how I can get to college." "I know I want to be a nurse, but since I can't get into college now, I will just go to community college for remedial studies," "I plan on getting a job" or I already have a job at so and so and hope to get a second job so that I can take care of my family" e.t.c. These are mere wishes, hopes that each of the participants knows deep down in their hearts, might not be realized because their twelve years of schooling did not to help them to develop the skills needed for self-improvement such as self-motivation, developmentally generative personal agency and accountability, will-power, and perseverance.

Study Implications and Recommendations

A major implication of this work is system restructuring. Fortunately, I am not the first education scholar to call for a systemic reform in how formal education: student learning and academic outcome is constructed, deployed, and performed not only in the United States of America, but in the global society. However, my work differs from its forebears in that, instead of asking for a systemic reform that focuses on the illusion of teacher work, I call for an overhauling of the entire education system to include a focus

on the process, person, context, and time in the construction, deployment, and performance of education through the use of the tenets of integral humanism, a perspective that prioritizes human dignity[56] and integrity, in creating and implementing educational policies, practices, and procedures.

A major question that arises from this study to all educators, especially educational leaders is what do we foster as educators and educational leaders? As one of the student participants noted, "The street is impounding the minds of FHS student," a statement that begs the question of why is the street so effective in "impounding their mind" and the school could not? An answer to this question that derives from the study's findings could be that the street is able to impact the students' mindset because people who run the street are able to tell them what we as educators are afraid to tell them—that one's success or failure is, for the most part, one's own making especially in the 21st century when there are variety of option and choices for self-improvement. Whereas the street recognizes the challenges of life and encourages FHS students to face the challenges of life with courage and to pursue success with deliberate sacrifices, we educators dispose them toward the acceptance of defeat, complacence, and resignation to the status quo.

Again, while the street recognizes failure as part of life, but not the end of life; and shows minority and low SES youths how to turn failure into success through personal agency and self-efficacy constructs, such as persistence, self-confidence, personal responsibility, and self-discipline; we tell them that failure is not just an option, but also

[56] Human Dignity refers to the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, the Supreme Being (Genesis, 1: 26 -27), and by their very essence have an inherent value, worth, distinction. As such all human beings are worthy of respect and must be free from slavery, manipulation, and exploitation (The New Code of Cannon Law; 747 ξ 2).

not a possibility. Thus, through the things we foster as educators and educational leaders we teach minority and economically disenfranchised students that they do not have to do anything to avoid failure, or even to change failure to success when it does occur because it is beyond their making. Some other person is responsible for their failure and would have to fix. Although unintended, this synergistic effect of counterintuitive educational policies, programs, and practices lead students into taking school for granted, a joke, and something to do for the law.

Finally, the findings of this study question the assumptions behind the policies that we educators adopt for minority and economically disadvantaged students. Are these policies that subtly dehumanize this group of students or are they policies that acknowledge and build on their personhood? As the participants in this study point out, educational policies that are imbued with low expectations and acceptance of mediocrity reinforce deficit thinking and racial supremacy. It subtly says to minority and low SES students we do not believe that you can strive for excellence. You cannot attend to the rigors of quality and equitable education. Given that I included nuanced implication for policy and practice in each of the themes in the discussion section, I now turn to present my recommendations in following section.

Rethinking the Achievement Gap: A Call for Change in Evaluation Perspective

Given the failure of past and present school outcome theoretical models' in adequately explaining students' achievement behaviors and these accountability measures' focus on the behaviorists' view of students as inert organisms awaiting external conditioning, it has become necessary to re-examine the meaning of academic achievement and its lack of a relationship to humanistic view of development and

achievement. These processes of school accountability and improvement continue to favor the already privileged groups of students who understand how to climb the socio-economic and political ladder as well as to proffer solutions that promote the patronizing use of education by the dominant groups to enhance the situation of the marginalized groups (Abdi & Richardson, 2008; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1997).

As many scholars have noted, deconstructing student achievement through a standardized comparative measure of advantaged and disadvantaged groups not only creates a torn social fabric that arrays one group over another, but also sells short what teachers and students can do and achieve, and hinders education as democracy and as the development of the self (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Abdi & Richardson, 2008). These current achievement evaluation methodologies promote reductionism and cultural deficitness, and suggest a limited understanding of human development and achievement as a product of complex reciprocal interaction between mental, bioecological, and environmental systems in which individuals are both products and producers of their own outcome (Arzubiaga et al., 2008; Bandura, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Marion, 2002; Magnusson, 1995).

By removing person factors (student, teacher, and administrator attitudes that enable or disable student academic achievement due to their cognitive, affective, biological, and behavioral idiosyncrasies) and sociocognitive effects from the outcome equation, these education productivity scholars provide a defective diagnosis of students' achievement or lack of achievement. The past and current research methodologies and paradigms that evaluates students' academic achievement through either only the sociological or psychological processes of human growth and development implicitly

contribute to the formulation of ineffective policies that have failed and continues to fail in appropriately measuring educational outcome and in providing effective programs for improving student achievement (Arzubiaga et al., 2008; Bandura, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Magnusson, 1995).

A change in perspective in the interpretation and analysis of students' achievement and the factors that influence individual achievement will create a better understanding of the intergroup and intragroup achievement disparity among high school students. Hence, instead of the bickering over standardized test scores, the emphasis on student achievement should be directed to how effective our social and educational policies and pedagogies have been in promoting education for democracy, education as democracy, and education as the upliftment of the personhood to an individuated yet interconnected beings capable of effecting personal and societal change through internalized personal characteristics of agency, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept.

As the findings of this study portray, analyzing students' academic achievement through the lens of humanistic theory of human development, learning and achievement would not only address the personal needs of individual students, but also the collective needs of the world as a global village, while providing a holistic view of the complexities inherent in students' academic outcome and its determinants. Additionally, evaluating students' academic outcome through integral humanistic paradigms and methodologies and planning educational programs, policies, and practices from such research would integrate into the educational outcome equation the reciprocal role of individual students and their respective environments in controlling and determining academic outcome, and

reinstate students as proactive individuals capable of influencing their developmental outcomes.

In explaining the irony of academic achievement and subsequent student outcome, Pine and Boy (1977) assert, "human existence is filled with situations in which people know what they should do, but because of certain affective components within themselves, their behavior goes against the grain of rationality and logical sequence" (p.45). Teachers and parents of adolescents (high school students) would attest to the reality of this statement as they constantly deal with the incongruence between these teenagers' actions and intentionality and the ease with which they manipulate well-intentioned policies to produce a compensating feedback syndrome.[57] According to Pine and Boy (1977), we may know that intellectually, people can determine right from wrong, but lives are often shattered because someone did not feel like doing something that they knew to be correct. Correspondingly, they contend, "Children are engaged in the same struggle between intellect and emotions. They may sit in a schoolroom because they know it is important to learn how to read, but become nonreaders because they are not emotionally involved in the process" (p. 45-46). Hence, educating students to develop their inner strengths through self-awareness, discipline, responsibility and integrity would them empower through will-power not only to acknowledge their emotional upsurge, but also enable them to regulate the impact of the emotion on them.

As is evident in the current accountability agendas, the assumption behind education and schooling seems to be that if teachers follow a well-ordered procedure in presenting knowledge then that knowledge will be absorbed; however, experience in the

[57] Peter Senge (2006) describes compensating feedback as when well-intentioned interventions call forth responses from the system that offset the benefits of the intervention—the harder you push the harder the system pushes; the more effort you expend trying to improve matter, the more effort seems to be required.

classroom proves the contrary. Many teachers may present realty packed lessons that they believe will increase the storehouse of knowledge for each child in the classroom, but as Pine and Boy (1977) note, some students would not learn anything because they are not emotionally disposed to learn. Perhaps, the knowledge will be absorbed if students are emotionally ready to learn whatever is being presented, or if students are taught how to self-regulate their emotion. Nevertheless, for a typical child in a typical classroom, the degree of learning will be proportionate to the degree to which the child is emotionally free to learn and to engage in learning activities (Pine & Boy, 1977).

For instance, if a child is emotionally involved in parental conflicts at home, peer aggressiveness, sexual identification, and other strong feelings, that child blocks out whatever knowledge that is being facilitated in the classroom. The child's mental disposition prevents his/her intellectual structure (brain) from processing and storing the new information (Pine & Boy, 1977). Thus, a student's mental disposition mediates the student's learning (Pine & Boy, 1977). Pine & Boy's (1977) scenario is typical of FHS and by extension, most inner city high school classrooms where majority of the students are engrossed in family problems, sexual identity, peer pressure and acceptance, low self-esteem, and other strong feeling that they block out every form of knowledge no matter how it is presented. Hence, the complexity inner city of high school students' lives outside school and their ability to manage these complexities along with school complexities through educational programs, policies, and practices that enable them to activate and sustain their respective personal agency, self-efficacy and self-regulation would predispose them for success not only in the classroom, but also outside the classroom as they participate in global citizenship. Thus, making the best education that,

which empowers students to develop the self-systems that would enable them to exercise control over their mental, emotional, and physical dispositions and to self-regulate their academic outcome through self-discipline and mastery goal setting.

Johnson (2008) alludes to the complexity of human behavior as she explains students' achievement as a composite of complex interactions. She criticized the overly simplistic linear models of measuring students' achievement and proposed an alternative model that patterns school after Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems that analyzes student outcome using the complexity theory. She asserts, "Student achievement is instead best understood as a developmental outcome that emerges as a result of interactions among layers within a complex system" (p.1). Joining force with Johnson, I call for a restructuring of schools to into an integrative institution where the education of children becomes an incumbent role of all systems involved in child formation (family, school, churches, media) to prepare children for an evolving society by helping them to develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem and by equipping them with the skills they need to function effectively by the time they become adults (Pine & Boy, 1977). This will involve reducing the time high school students spend in school.

Although Valenzuela (1999) made a good case of how schools divests Mexican immigrants and U.S. born Mexicans of social capital and educational mobility, her assumption of educational success and failure as "products of schooling rather than something that young people do" (p. 30) is flawed. Embedded within this assumption and other critical theorists' assumptions that blame minority high school students' failure solely on schools and teachers is the dominant ideology that sees these youths as inert objects incapable of impacting their fate and as empty vessels waiting to be filled. Above

all, these theorists reinforce the age long belief of humans being as inherently evil, who left without guidance, will always choose evil over good (Marion, 2002). In this case, minority high school students' choice of academic achievement disabling behaviors in opposition to mainstream culture, school policies and practices that divests them of their cultural and ethnic identities (Valenzuela, 1999: Ogbu, 1974; 1978; 1987; 19991; 1994; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Giroux, 1992).

Strong as these scholars' logic behind this line of thought may be, it is contrary to human nature, which tends to be more self-protective than destructive (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bandura, 1986), unless these theorists' are subtly reinstating cultural deficitness. Additionally, these theories undermine the fact that achievement and lack of achievement is a socially constructed variable and as such means different things to different people, a belief that this study's participant also espouse. Through personal agency, self-awareness, self-concept, and self-efficacy, individual students define their understanding and meaning of academic achievement—that is, each student determines what she or he intends to get out of school, a futuristic goal that focuses on self-fulfillment and actualization—and through self-regulation and mastery goal setting, create incremental goal at each level of schooling that will enable her or him to achieve the overarching goal—only the humanistic theory of development and learning with its focus on the agentic and good naturedness of the personhood will grant disadvantaged and marginalized high school students the leverage to do this. Hence, this study also recommends a rethinking of age-based grading and schooling in the 21st century.

Finally, the fact that minority and low SES youths choose anti-school behaviors and academic failure in reaction to racism and inequitable school policies and practices

portrays their inability to see the bigger picture and calls for a change from "blame advocacy" to "empowerment advocacy" and from divesting and disabling school policies and practices to self-empowerment and self-enabling ones. This new line of thought will promote academic success or failure as products of both the self (student) and the environment, with high school students being more in-charge of their academic outcome through self-regulation, self-efficacy, and thoughtful choices. This new direction will empower students to become proactive consumers of information and thoughtful strategiziers, instead of reactive consumers (Stiglitz, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Friedman; 2007).

As Freire (1985) notes, students would become conscious learners in quest of new knowledge. It will empower minority students to begin seeing themselves as active individuals who have the ability to shape and reshape their outcome, thus reshaping the system through which they are shaped. This new direction also has implications for schools and policy makers. Instead of the current schools' "defense games" which deskill teachers and promote tokenism and negative sense of entitlement among minority students, the humanistic theory of achievement challenge schools to invest time, money and energy into empowering students to become active participants who shape their academic outcome and their future.

Epilogue

In the prologue to this dissertation, I presented this study as my journey, my sensemaking of things that I have seen and experienced as an inner city high school teacher for nine years as well as the challenges these experiences have posed to my personality, beliefs, values, and understanding of education and the purposes of education. As I wrote and was written into all that I chose to share in this dissertation (Walkerdine, Lacey, & Melody, 2002, p. 181), I strictly guarded my positionality and subjectivity as I consistently questioned my role in the making of minority and economically disenfranchised inner city high school students' academic self. I engaged in recursive reflection on how my words and actions as researcher and teacher serve to reify potentially deficit and dehumanizing practices within inner city schools. Now, as I complete the study and seek an exit for this journey, I return to myself as the researcher, the researched, and the research instrument for the study and what I have learned from this journey about academic achievement gap as it plays out in FHS.

First, part of what this study has done for me is to explicate the role of educational debt, opportunity gap, and school as a social reproducer of inequality as these three assumptions play out in FHS. Second this study has reinforced my beliefs in FHS students as intelligent human beings—young adults—who have high aspirations and dreams for better life. Like every human being as well as all teenagers, minority and economically disadvantaged students are also self-protective, want the best from life, and would take advantage of opportunities given to them, especially if these opportunities

have no defining parameters. Hence, instead of seeing this group of students as deficit and stifling their intellectual growth through deficit laced policies, programs, practices, and expectations, educators, especially school leaders should develop and nurture this group of students' epistemological curiosity through rigorous educational curriculum, and high-order-thinking assessments, otherwise equitable educational opportunities that prepare them for fair and just competition in the global economy.

Finally, through this dissertation journey, I have come to the realization that the problem of education in the 21st United States as well as the global community is not academic achievement and the achievement gap as these are socially constructed phenomenon used for exclusion and inclusion purposes; rather the education problem of the 21st century is the assumption that guards the packing, dissemination, reception and exchange of information and knowledge between minority and economically disadvantaged members of the society and their mainstream and affluent peers. Hence, the challenges of predominantly minority and economically disadvantages schools of the 21st century would be how to calibrate educational programs, policies, and research-based practices that are differentially packaged for minority students to ensure access to equitable educational opportunities.

As this study depicts, whereas mainstream and affluent high schools focus on enriching curriculum, policies, and procedures, the research site focuses on impoverishing and handicapping curriculum, policies, and procedures. Thus, instead of focusing on the academic achievement gap and using it to reify deficit ideology, I propose a redefinition of academic achievement to include integral humanistic education that focuses on human development, well-being, and dignity of all students through

humanizing curriculum, pedagogy, and policies that liberate students from shackles of ignorance, caprice, prejudice, alienation, and false consciousness as well as empower them toward critical consciousness and assertive viewpoints a kind of education that would allow them to utilize their human and natural inclination to self-regulated development, spontaneous exercise of personal agency and self-efficacy, personal authenticity, and responsible citizenship (Dewey, 1911; Alder, 1982; Maslow, 1954; Butler, 2000; Aloni, 1999). It is my hope that, through its utilization of the holistic humanistic paradigm, this study would enable both students and educational practitioners to begin thinking of education as the development of the personhood and of academic or educational failure as a failure in providing an education that promotes the human development, well-being, and dignity of all students. For, it is only in this sense that education becomes emancipatory and self-liberating.

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Appendix A

Defining Properties of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model[58]

Current version of the Bioecological Model comprises a series of nine propositions pertinent to using the model to frame and integrate existing research, to design new research, and to devise applications for public policy and social programs. Several of these propositions are of relatively recent origin, while others date back to the model's earliest formal beginnings (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The following is an abridged version of the nine propositions that attempts to specify the essence the Bioecological model.

Proposition I: The scientifically relevant features of any environment for human development include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are subjectively experienced by the persons living in that environment. In the bioecological model, both objective and subjective elements are posited as driving the course of human development; neither alone is presumed sufficient. Moreover, these elements do not operate in the same direction. Both the objective and subjective elements are important in understanding human development because, while related to each other, they are typically applied to somewhat different spheres. The objective element is more often used tin relation to how the environment is perceived and changed by human beings at successive stages of the life course, beginning with early infancy and proceeding through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and ultimately old age. By contrast,

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[58] From Bronfenbrenner, U. (2001). Bioecological Theory of Human Development. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspective on Human Development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

experience or the subjective element "pertains to the realm of subjective feelings for example, anticipations, forebodings, hopes, doubts, or personal beliefs. These, too, emerge in early childhood, and continue through life, and are characterized by both stability and change. They can relate to self or to others. They can also apply to activities in which one engages. But the most distinctive feature of such experiential qualities is that they are emotionally and motivationally loaded.

Proposition II: Over the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes.

Proposition III: The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes producing human development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person (including genetic inheritance), the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place, the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration, and the continuities and changes occurring in the environment over time, through the life course, and during the historical period in which the person has lived.

Proposition I, II, and III are interdependent. They constitute the ***Process-Person-Context-Time*** (PPCT) model of the bioecological theory, which is the overarching paradigm for the current study. Appendix II presents the distinctive feature of the proximal process, the primary engine of development in the bioecological theory.

Proposition IV: In order to develop—intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally—a child requires, for all these, the same thing: participation in progressively more complex activities on a regular basis over an extended period of time in the child's life, with one or more persons with whom the child develops a strong mutual emotional attachment and who are committed to the child's well-being and development, preferably for life.

Proposition V: The establishment of a strong mutual emotional attachment leads to internalization of the parent's activities and expressed feelings of affection. Such mutual ties, in turn, motivate the child's interest and engagement in related activities in the immediate physical, social, and—in due course—symbolic environment that invite exploration, manipulation, elaboration, and imagination.

Proposition VI: The establishment and maintenance of patterns of progressively more complex interaction and emotional attachment between parent and child depend to a substantial degree on the availability and involvement of another adult, a third party, who assists, encourages, spells off, gives status to, and expresses admiration and affection for the person caring for and engaging in joint activity with the child. It also helps, but is not absolutely essential, that the third party be of the opposite sex from that of the other person caring for the child, because this is likely to expose and involve the child in a greater variety of developmentally instigative activities and experiences.

Proposition VII: The psychological development of parents is powerfully influenced by the behavior and development of their children. This phenomenon occurs through the life course, is more evident during the formative years when most children are living at home in the care of their parents, and often becomes especially pronounced during adolescence when the young begin to strive for independence both as individuals and as members of

peer groups.

Proposition VIII: Over the life course, the process of attachment exhibits a turnaround. In the beginning, it is the children who are the beneficiaries of the parents' irrational commitment, whereas toward the end the roles are reversed. Then it is elderly parents who receive the love and care of their now middle-aged children. If, however, there was no attachment at the beginning, there may be no attachment at the end.

Proposition IX: If an investigation conducted in the past has met the requirements of the bioecological model, including assessment of developmental outcomes "over an extended period of tome," then replication of the study at a later point in time would reveal whether the processes under investigation were still valid or had been nullified superseded by subsequent historical changes.

Appendix B

Distinctive Features of Proximal Processes[59]

Proximal processes refer to particular forms of interaction between organism and environment that operate over time. They are the primary mechanisms producing human development. In the bioecological model, the concept of proximal process has a specific meaning. Proximal processes differ from the environment (context) in which the processes occur. The unique features of proximal processes as stipulated in proposition I are as follows:

1. For development to occur, the person must engage in an activity.
2. To be effective, the activity must take place on a fairly regular basis, over an extended period of time.
3. To be developmentally effective, activities must continue long enough to become increasingly more complex. Mere repetition does not work.
4. Developmentally effective proximal processes are not unidirectional; there must be influence in both directions. For interpersonal interaction, this means that initiatives do not come from one side only; there must be some degree of reciprocity in the exchange.

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[59] From Bronfenbrenner, U. & Morris, P. A. (2006). The biological model of human development. In W. Demon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology*, Vol. 1: *Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793-828). New York: John Wiley

5. Proximal processes are not limited to interactions with people; they also can involve interaction with objects and symbols. In the latter circumstance, for reciprocal interaction to occur, the objects and symbols in the immediate environment must be of a kind that invites attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration, and imagination.
6. The powerful moderating factors specified in proposition II produce substantial changes in the content, timing, and effectiveness of proximal processes. In particular:
    a. As children grow older, their developmental capacities increase both in level and range; therefore, to continue to be effective, the corresponding proximal processes must also become more extensive and complex to provide for the future realization of evolving potentials. At the same time, in view of the ongoing developmental advance, the intervals between periods of "progressively more complex" activity can be increasingly longer, although they must still occur on a "fairly regular basis." Otherwise, the pace of development slows, or its course may even reverse direction.
    b. The principal persons with whom young children interact "on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time" are parents, but especially as children get older, other persons—such as care- givers, relatives, siblings, and peers—also function in this role. These are soon followed by teachers or mentors in other activities, and then by close friends of the same or opposite sex, spouses or their equivalents, and coworkers, superiors and

subordinates at work. As the examples indicate, the involvement of persons functioning in this role is not limited to the formative years. Borrowing a term from G. H. Mead (1934), we refer to such persons as *significant others*.

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Questions and Their Relationship with the Research Questions

#s	Questions	Purpose
1	How do you define school?	Provides a general sense of students' understanding of school and schooling. **RQ 1**
2	How do you explain academic achievement?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1**
3	What do you think of school policies and practices?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It also targets student's belief and sense making of school. Overall, this question should reveal school practices, if any that turn students off from school and school academic success. **RQ1**
4	How do these relate to students' academic achievement?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's belief and sense making of school. **RQ1 & RQ2**
5	What do you think are the reason for the consistent academic failure of African American high school students	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and bidirectional interaction between students and school in student academic outcome. **RQ1 & RQ2**
6	Why do you think most students take school as a joke?	Seeks to expose the student's sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact

		of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**

Appendix D

Direct Informants' Interview Protocol and Their Relationship with the Research Questions

#s	Question	Purpose
1	Generally, what does success/achievement mean to you? Who do you consider as a person who has achieved or who has succeeded in life?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**
2	When do you think that somebody is doing well in school? What do you consider as academic achievement?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**
3	How do you think other African American girls/boys would define success/achievement?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**
4	How do you think other African American girls/boys define academic success?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**
5	How important is academic success to you?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**
6	How important do you think academic success is to other African American girls/boys?	It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**
7	How would you define school? How do you think other African American boys/girls would define school?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior as well as sense making of school and schooling. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control and impact of external influences on student's understanding of school and schooling.
8	Tell me about your experiences with school and schooling.	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**

9	Every child has a dream about what she/he will become when she/he grows up. Tell me about your dream career when you were in elementary, middle and now that you are in high school.	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Also targets school's impact on students through the dream/goal trajectory. **RQ1 & RQ2**
10	What is your goal in life? What extra efforts are you making to achieve those goals?	Seeks to expose the student's academic behavior. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**
11	Have you heard about the academic achievement gap between African American students and white students?	Just a lead in to the next question.
12	What do you think might be the reason why whites and Asian students do better in school than blacks students?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ2**
13	What do your think of your high school when you think of your academic ability?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's belief and sense making of school. **RQ1 & RQ2**
14	Which aspect of the school gives you the most support in achieving your goals?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**
15	What is your greatest fear about school?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's belief and sense making of school. **RQ1**
16	What do you like most about school?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's belief and sense making of school. **RQ1**
17	What do you dislike most?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's belief and sense making of school. **RQ1**
18	I noticed that most students do not care about school. Given the choice, they would prefer to stay at home. What do you think are the reason students do not like going to school?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's belief and sense making of school. **RQ1 & RQ2**
19	I also noticed that most students do not like to do any assignment that challenges them to think and apply what they have learned in the past to the present. Could you describe other school related things that students do not like to do?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**
20	In your opinion, what do you think are the reasons students choose to avoid challenging class assignments and activities?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**

21	What do you think are the reasons most African American high school students fail examinations, tests, and quizzes?	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**
22	Tell me some of the things you think make students not to do their schoolwork and not to study.	Seeks to expose the bidirectional interaction between student and school in student's academic achievement. It should also targets student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ1 & RQ2**
23	Based on statistics, very few African American males and females graduate from high school get college degree and become CEOs of companies and institutions. What do you think is the reason for the lack of achievement in these three areas among African Americans? How do you personally feel about this lack?	This question targets respondent's ability to connect the limited/lack of representation in these three major areas to the same source (high dropout of African American students from high school and college or inadequate preparation in high school). Interpretively, it should reveal respondent's belief about school and schooling. **RQ2**
24	How does the larger society encourage or discourage black students from graduating from high school and going to college?	This question evaluates the relationship between student's academic behaviors and academic outcome and external correlates. Theoretically, this question assesses the bidirectional interaction between student's academic outcome and his/her environment. It also assesses student's personal agency, self-efficacy, and locus of control. **RQ2**
26	How have you remained focus in school?	This question aims at revealing student academic behavior and factors that influence respondents' academic behavior.
27	Can you give me an example of a school year you will never forget? Why is that year very important to you?	It is presumed that participant's response to this question would reveal his/her perception of school and schooling. **RQ1 & RQ2**
28	What do you think the school can do to help African American students to succeed academically? Or if it were in your power to turn this school around, what will you do?	The aim of this question is to provide insight into what participant's think should be done if our school is to become effective in educating our students to achieve academically and to function successfully in the 21st century global community. By implication, participants' responses to this questions reveals what is not happening currently in the school and could be their justification for why the school is failing in effectively educating its students). **RQ1 & RQ2**

Appendix E

Sample of Observational Notes

Site: FHS English Department Hallway.

Date: December 2, 2013

Time: 7: 50-8 p.m.

Purpose: Student Behavior Outside the classroom

Preamble:

At FHS, students, both bus riders and non-bus riders are expected to wait in the cafeteria as they arrive to school. Those who get breakfast from the school go straight to the cafeteria, get their food and eat, while those who don't eat at school have the option of going to the library to read or wait in the cafeteria and the surrounding hallway until the bell rings at 7:50 a.m. Following the bell, students are expected to report to their various first block classes and to be in their sits by the time the tardy bell rings at 8:00 a.m. In this school, tardy is defined as *not being inside the classroom* at the time the tardy bell rings. Students have ten minutes to get their materials out of their lockers, use the restroom, if needed, and get to their respective classrooms before the tardy bell rings. Loitering, congregating at the hallways or at the classroom doors is prohibited. Teachers in this school are expected to stand at their classroom doors to welcome their students to class and to clear the hallway should students decide to block the passage. FHS' tardy policy reads: "It is the responsibility of each student to be on time for school and to class. A tardy is defined as not being in the classroom when the tardy bell rings." The statement

continue, “First block tardies only: Students should report to the attendance office to receive a pass to class. Second through fourth block tardies: Students should report to the ISS room to receive a pass to class.” The tardy policy statement enumerated the consequences that will apply to students who are tardy to class and school as follows:

1. 1st tardy—after school detention/parent conference
2. 2nd tardy—after school detention/parent contact
3. 3rd tardy—after school detention/parent contact
4. 4th tardy—parent contact/ISS
5. 5th tardy—parent contact/ISS
6. 6th tardy—OSS/parent conference required before return/tardy contract.
7. 7th tardy—OSS
8. 8th tardy—OSS
9. 9th tardy—OSS
10. 10th tardy—OSS
11. 11th tardy—OSS
12. 12th tardy—student may be referred to the hearing board for habitual disregard.

Additionally, the school dress code prohibits sagging, camouflage, headgear and durak, and the use of cell phones and electronic of any kind. These policy statements are posted in strategic positions outside and inside every classroom and hallway in the school.

The English Department Hallway: Dec 2, 2013; 7: 00-9:35 A.M

The English Department is located on the third floor of FHS' gigantic building. Although the last of the floors of this colossal building, third floor seems to be the most centralized and easiest to access part of the school. It is surrounded by flights of steep concrete stairs entering and exiting from almost every corner of the building: the cafeteria, the two gyms, the auditorium, the library, the basement, the dark tunnel, the main office. Various single, double and quadruple doors open from directly into it from both outside and inside the building. FHS' Third Floor houses the English, Mathematics, Foreign Language, Special Education, and Science Departments. It is also, the seat of the school's in school suspension and detention (ISS) halls and its supervisor, the office of the school police favorably known as the school resource officer (SRO), and the office of the dean of students. From the English Department, a single door and a quadruple door connects the third floor to the northeast parking lot, the tennis court, and the track and football fields outside the building.

The English Department replaced what was formerly the school cafeteria before it was renovated and expanded in 2007-2009 academic years. Situated in the north end of the third floor, the English Department houses seven unevenly sized classrooms, which are divided by a long hallway, a diagonal line that basically connects the department to every other part of the school. On the morning of this observation, between 7:00 A. M. and 7: 30 A. M. there were at least 10 people (teachers and students) on this hallway each minute. The thoroughfare increased after 7: 32 A.M. Within 7:35-40, I counted ninety-eight students and fifteen teachers passing through this particular hallway and its adjoining hallways. Standing in the middle of this hallway and facing the parking lot, on

the right hand side, the English hallway transforms into a medium length hallway, with quadruple doors on both ends. Chains of students' brown metal lockers layered along the wall of the last two English classrooms on the anterior sides of this hallway formed an umbrellalike arch with deep curvature at both the sides. Viewed from the Westside (posterior end) of the hallway, the entire picture looks like a big portabella mushroom with long legs except that this portabella has a closed-in aperture, an alley, as an intersecting hallway. One has to be inside the canopy as to see all its sides. Even at that, there will still be some sections of it one cannot quickly scan. Students like to convene at this spot in the mornings, before and after lunch, and after school. Most of the fights that occur on the third floor begin in this canopy as well as the selling and buying among students. Although a very notorious spot in the school, it often lacks administrative and teacher presence. About twenty students were scattered in all directions in this canopic hallway at the time of this observation. Some were entering or exiting the English hallway through here, some were going outside, going to the second or first floors through the steep concrete stairs, or just standing in the loop not going outside or going downstairs; some were entering the building from either outside or from downstairs through the canopy. Groups of two or three students huddled here and there exchanging something between the lockers, while the rest were opening or closing their lockers, going to the interdepartmental hallway through the intersecting hallway, or just standing or leaning on the walls with each other. The traffic was high.

The narrow intersecting hallway connecting the English Department and the interdepartmental hallway houses the female and male teachers' bathrooms, and contains another intersection that diverges into the interdepartmental hallway and ends with a

thick wooden dark brown double doors that are rarely opened. At the north end of the interdepartmental hallway, left of the intersecting hallway is a light blue metal single door that opens into the loop that leads to downstairs through the spiral staircases, opens to the outside through the quadruple grayish metal doors, and leads back into the English hallway through another set of grayish quadruple metal doors, one of the sets of quadruple doors at the end of the medium size hallway that formed a canopy with the English hallway. Entering the interdepartmental hallway through the intersecting hallway, various departments are represented in the following order: turning in and keeping to the left hand side of hallway, the first classroom is a science class followed by English, French, and a Spanish classroom. On the right hand side is a self-contained special education (SPED) classroom, the teacher copy room, another self-contained SPED classroom, and a Spanish classroom. This hallway feeds into a major hallway. A left turn into that hallway leads to the library, gym, and cafeteria through a dark, gory tunnel, while a right turn sends one back either to the English, Math, interdepartmental, Sped Departments, ISS, or to the SRO's office depending on whether one makes a right or keeps straight after the quadruple doors. This faithful morning, I decided to make a right into the major hallway and a right after the secluding black quadruple metal doors and through another set of quadruple metal doors into the medium size hallway and to the English hallway. Once in, I turned right into the intersecting hallway to use the restroom.

There are two water fountains and about ten students' lockers along the wall of the teacher's bathroom on this intersecting hallway. Of the two water fountains, the one closest to the double doors is higher and has darkish rusty marks on the edges. Seven students were beside the lockers by the female bathroom; two were looking into one

locker, while the rest were just standing and talking. Also, two students were by the short water fountain. They were not drinking, just talking. As I walked past them, a couple joined them, and announced, “Ms. Felton and Ms. Davenport” (pseudonyms) “are not here today” and began chanting “We have subs, and we have subs.” One of the two, who were at the short fountain responded, “really,” and joined the “we have subs” chanting as all four students began gyrating at the news and before I knew it, the seven students, four boys and three girls, by the locker joined the dance. It was a harmless dance, but so loud that it attracted other students to the scene, by the time I got out of the bathroom, the crowd has moved into canopic hallway and the adjoining English classrooms. I tried to disperse the crowd, but the more I tried, the more students joined the dance. The noise was deafening, I held my ears, and meandered through the crowd to the English hallway, where I got help from a male teacher to disperse the crowd. Before I returned with help, the four students who started the dance by the water fountain had disappeared through one of the doors, but the crowd was still there singing and dancing various versions of the “We have subs” music and the name calling that has arisen from it. As I approached with the other teacher, the students begrudgingly left the scene, but congregated at the various doors of the English classes and the secluded arrears by the lockers.

Except the teacher who helped me to clear the medium sized hallway and I, no teacher was on the hallway. Students were chattering, laughing, yelling, dancing, and eating on the hallway. The teacher and I tried in vain to decongest the hallway. Most students refused to move from where they stood muttering, “The tardy bell has not gone,” “we/I am not going into any class.” Some walked back and forth into the medium sized hallway facing different direction each time they see any of us, while some fiddled with

their lockers. Only few students heeded our calls and entered their classroom. I positioned myself at the door of room G404, the closest room to the scene of the raucous noise. It was 7:56: 49 a.m. and almost all the teachers were standing at their doors. The hallway was considerably decongested to the point that one can, without much effort and straining of the eyes, see from end to end. Most students were in the classroom by now, some were running down the hallway into their respective classes, while a few were leisurely walking down the hallway or halted at their classroom doors listening to music from their cell phone, chatting, or eating.

The entrance wall and the door of room G404 were decorated with posters. At the top of the door within eye level is a poster that reads "Quiet Zone, Learning in Progress." On the sidewall on the left of the door were posted the tardy and dress code policies written in maroon and gold, the school's color, on white background. Also in front of this class, directly on your face as you look at the entrance wall are two read posters. One has the words; "Cell Phones and Other Electronics Are Prohibited" written in bold, black ink with a no cell phone symbol drawn on it. The other has a "No Food, No Drink in the Classroom" written also in bold black ink. Three students stood beside the two posters. Two had headphones on. I could hear the music playing from their cell phones. Their paints were way below the waistline. One student was drinking soda from a two litters coke bottle and also with his paint sagging below the waistline. I asked them several times to pull up their paints. Each time they pulled it up it slid back down. We did this so many times, until I figured that they were having fun with that and threatened to write them up. One of them, the one drinking soda, quickly pulled his paints up and readjusted his belts to hold the paints above the waistline. The two with the headphones did not care.

I also asked them several times to remove the headphones and put off the cell phones, but the refused. After the third time, I asked for the cell phones, but they refused to give them to me. I stepped into the classroom and came out with two referrals. The two boys were still there; however, the boy and girl who announced Ms. Felton and Devonport's absence earlier and their cohort have resumed their dance and were dancing through the English hallway. They stopped momentarily by Mr. Johnson's door to gyrate for two students strolling down the hallway. The two students stopped and gyrated and twirled. The entire group applauded. I quickly turned to go to the scene, but the teacher by whose door it was happening yelled from inside "Go to your classes before I come out there," sending them to their heels with them their deafening noise. I peeped into my classroom to check on my students. Before I could turn back, the tardy bell rang. I looked up and it was exactly 8:00 A.M.

I stopped half way into the classroom as the student announcer began the National Pledge over the public addressing system (PA). Out of 26 students in the class, three stood up for the pledge, five were sitting with their heads down on the seat, and the rest were sitting upright, but chattering. At the end of the pledge, I stepped back out and drew the door to a close it, one of the two students with the headphones on rushed between the door and the frame, I would have smashed him between the door and the frame, if I had pulled the door with force. I left the door, the three of them walked into the classroom. I stopped them and asked them to go and get the tardy slip from the front office. They left, but never came back to class.

Appendix F

Sample of Reflexive Journal

February 21, 2014; 8:30 PM: Jacky, Jones (pseudonym) SOAR Director

Ms. Jones comes in every Friday to get my signature for my after school tutorial payment. But today, Friday, February 21, 2014 2PM, she did not come for that. She just came to talk to me. She was very frustrated and near tears. It is the day she found out that her teaching certificate has expired without renewal and because of that, she would not be paid at the level of a certified teacher program director; rather she would be paid at the level of a classified worker, which is $10 dollars below what is paid to a teachers or certified worker. The subject of her discussion was admin and the way SOAR is being managed. According to her, "SOAR is the way it is not because she doesn't know what, but because admin supports neither her vision nor her plans for achieving the goals of SOAR." She showed me her blueprint for SOAR, which was submitted to the district and the state department of education for the grant that funds SOAR. Rather, admin wants her to "cater to the students."

In her words, "they see after school tutorial as a reward and reinforcement of students' mediocrity and not a place for learning; however, they force her make it so strict and stringent to the point that students have to act like they are in the regular school hour's classroom. I stated that I have not seen that rigor, if that is what she meant, from my observations of OSAR and interaction with students in SOAR. From my observation, it seems like there is no vision, no purpose. Students use it as an excuse to indulge in

unwarranted behaviors after school such as roaming round the building, hiding in the basement and tunnels with their friends, and come to SOAR only when they are tired of roaming the school without consequences, to continue make noise, listen to free music and pono, and roam the internet.

I told her that am not the only one who has noticed this change in SOAR management this year. Almost all the teachers are complaining of the lack of purpose and waste of the time and money that SOAR has become. I said these to her as a constructive criticism to enable her to have a realistic view of what SOAR this year really is, instead of the SOAR that is in her head. My comments triggered her to open up about her daily encounters with admin regarding the management and leadership of the after school program.

According to her, admin in this school is very unstructured, power drunk and lacks planning, vision, and mission for either the school or the students. Above all, they don't know what they want. I don't think they actually love and care about these students neither do they understand the principles of learning and teaching or both because their focus is on the wrong direction. Everything is done the last minutes, they are not ready to support teachers' ideas or initiatives unless those ideas come from them and whatever come from them does not make sense. I did not know it would be like this, I would not have accepted the job. I do not know any better, I would I believed that they are doing the best for these students. They don't like these students. They don't care about their future. They are just pushing the students out, carting to the system and not to the students' academic and career needs to the point that makes one wonder if they know that these are their own children and their future. Anyway, am not surprised. Shenequa was my

classmate and I know her level when we were in school. I wonder how she got the principalship job." I was struck by what I heard coming from her. I really do not know whether this is an attack on the principal's character, a legitimate rendering of her views, or a simple bias.

However, more and more in my field notes and interviews, admins lack of purpose, vision, planning and knowledge regarding school leadership and characteristics of high school students have become a dominant concern of teachers and students. School leadership is not the direction I want to go in this study, so as I keep interacting with the dataset, the more confused I become about my phenomena and the entire study. Nonetheless, I know that theoretically, the bidirectional interaction between process, person, context and time in student learning and academic achievement. If the context is so unstructured, so volatile and so handicapping, then how do we expect students to be structured and focused enough to learn and grow. Apples do not fall from oranges. Plants have to be fertilized in order to grow (see Mel's data). If admin who runs the school has no vision, no purpose, and lacks orientation toward learning and academic achievement, how then do we expect student to have a vision or purpose for the future? This is disheartening. I don't know. The more I think of it, the more sorrowful I become. My God!

Appendix G

Sample of Research Diary

April 2, 2014: Diary, **8PM Second Day of HSAP Testing**

Today is seems more organized than yesterday. Students were able to follow the direction to get their lunch in the cafeteria, although there was still a lot of loitering in the hallways. Senior did not want to go where they were asked to go and the juniors who should be preparing for EOC testing did not want to go to the auditorium. I spent most of the time clearing the hallways and persuading students to go to their designated locations to participate in their assigned activity, so as to clear the testing areas. When I was convinced that the number of loitering students and the resultant distraction has been reduced upstairs (testing area), I went to the cafeteria to assist with serving breakfast to the testing students and taking them to the testing area. I still cannot understand FHS.

The testing schedule was changed again this morning making it the 10th time in three days that the testing schedule and locations were changed. I was so confused about the schedule that I didn't even know how to direct my students, so after testing, I just gathered them in my room to curtail the loitering, roaming, and fighting that occurred yesterday. I instead of continuing with bell-to-bell instruction as we were asked to do, I decided to show the movie version of the book, "To kill a mockingbird.' However, of all days, my smartboard decide to breakdown today. The environment continued to be chaotic as most teachers gave-up trying to patch-up the dysfunctional lunch schedule of

yesterday that was adopted for today, even when testing time and locations were changed early this morning.

One question that continued nagging my brain as we deal with the dysfuctionality of the new testing schedule introduced is, "Why did we change what we have that was working well if we have nothing better to replace it? Evidently, the testing schedule we used in the previous years was more effective and efficient in creating and maintaining a peaceful testing atmosphere before and after testing. The principal had to abruptly change the schedule for after test again today. So instead of students going to their first and second periods of the day after testing and from there to lunch as was published early this morning, students were to follow their third period bell schedule. Those whose third block is on the first and second floors will go to first lunch, while those third block is on third floor will go to class. Again, that created some chaos because from yesterday incident, students now understand that they are supposed to go to their first block after testing, so today they are faced with the problem of which period to go to, first block or third block, and who gets to go to which lunch. However, I think the teachers did a better job today we know they are supposed to go to third block after testing, the communication was clear and uncomplicated and so teachers were out in the hallway directing students to either third block class upstairs or to lunch if their third block is downstairs. Also, today seemed a little better than yesterday because the principal was visible and I believe her influence kind of created some order and some sense of direction for students and teachers because she was out in the testing hallways directing student to either go to third block upstairs or to lunch if their class is downstairs. Overall, I am still trying to understand FHS and the interest of all those who work there because, evidently,

the admin don’t really seem to understand what they are doing or what they want. They seemed more confused than the teachers and the students.

Appendix H

Comprehensive List of Curricular and Extra-curricular Programs Available in FHS

Curricular Programs	Extra-curricular Programs
The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEMs)	Fine Arts programs in music, dance, art, and theatre.
College Preparatory (CP), Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors programs in English, Science, Algebra, Calculus, and Spanish.	Comprehensive athletic programs
Fine Arts	SOAR after school tutorial
Air Force Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps (AFJROTC)	AFJROTC expeditions
Career and Technology Education (CATE)	Teacher Cadet
Special Education and Limited English Proficiency programs	Yearbook publication
Worked-based apprenticeship program	Student Council
	PBIS
	21st Century Community Learning Center

Appendix I

List of Instructional Programs, Policies, and Procedures Available at FHS

Instructional Programs	Grade and Grading Related Policies	Instructional Procedures
Enrichment and Advisory Programs	Open door make-up work	Two School-wide after school tutorials,
Credit recovery programs	Credit enhancement (teacher and/or administrator initiated credit-based incentives for targeted behaviors)	Credit enhancement (teacher and/or administrator initiated credit-based incentives for targeted behaviors)
School-wide Drop Everything and Read	Redo policies	Virtual school
Numeracy Friday.	Minimum 60	Online academic support and test preparatory programs.
Professional learning communities and learning teams.	No zero grading policies	Weekly evaluation of lesson plans
Learning Teams	S300 Quarterly Credit Recovery	Classroom observations
Data notebook and data wall		

Appendix J

Study Participants' Profile

	Name	Gender	Status	Grade	Track	Data Type
1	Yali	M	Student	10	CP	Interview
2	John	M	Student	10	CP	Interview
3	Jay	M	Student	10	CP	Interview
4	Nico	M	Student	10	H	Interview
5	Jerry	M	Student	10	H	Interview
6	Shon	M	Student	11	CP	Interview
7	Zack	M	Student	11	CP	Interview
8	Matt	M	Student	11	AP	Interview
9	Demonte	M	Student	11	AP	Interview
10	Nick	M	Student	12	CP	Interview
11	Raul	M	Student	12	CP	Interview
12	Levu	M	Student	12	CP	Interview
13	Lui	M	Student	12	CP	Interview
14	Ron	M	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
15	Andy	M	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
16	Quan	M	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
17	Yade	F	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
18	Keni	F	Student	12	CP	Interview
19	Zani	F	Student	12	CP	Interview
20	Mai	F	Student	12	CP	Interview
21	Tee	F	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
22	Janet	F	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
23	Yani	F	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
24	Jane	F	Student	12	CP	Focus Group
25	Jose	F	Student	11	AP	Interview
26	Janny	F	Student	11	AP	Interview
27	Yan	F	Student	11	AP	Interview
28	Glory	F	Student	11	CP	Interview
29	Pep	F	Student	10	H	Interview
30	Shade	F	Student	10	H	Interview
31	Jalisha	F	Student	10	CP	Interview
32	Zaine	F	Student	10	CP	Interview
33	Kiesha	F	Student	10	CP	Interview
34	Dean	M	Dean of students	n/a	n/a	Interview

35	Angy	F	Principal	n/a	n/a	Interview
36	Jaa	M	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
37	Kayla	F	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
38	Loyld	M	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
39	Tasha	F	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
40	Meg	F	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
41	Kelly	F	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
42	Justy	F	Teacher	n/a	n/a	Interview
43	Shay	F	ISS Coordinator	n/a	n/a	Interview
44	Barry	M	Hall Monitor	n/a	n/a	Interview
45	Jason	M	Hall monitor/teacher asst.	n/a	n/a	Interview

Appendix K

Transcription Key

Transcription Key
??? = inaudible
--- = Pause
(word?) = not sure about word(s)
@ = pondering while looking up
[] = interruption or talk at the same time
[XXX] = words spoken during []
{} = becomes passionate
\XX\ = filter words
Italic = emphasis
< > drawl and rapid speech
** (laughs)